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INDIA TODAY

JANUARY 15, 1986 Rs 6.00

THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

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P & I

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COMING OF AGE

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ALSO

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INVESTIGATION: THE RAIDERS AND THE RAIDED

THE ARTS: THE LEGEND OF [illegible]

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Coming of Age

The victory of the Asom Gana Parishad, formed a mere 67 days before the elections, has ushered in a new era of hope and change in Assam, but with the polarisation of vote along communal lines the future of the Assam accord is uncertain.

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Congress(I) Woes

Last fortnight's by-elections to seven Lok Sabha and nine assembly seats left the Congress(I) badly bruised. With its margins being slashed in all but two contests, the party's humiliation has raised the Opposition's hopes.

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Raiders of the Lost Tax

The spate of income tax raids across the country has angered the business community as some of the biggest industrialists have found themselves in the net. A report on the raids, the mechanics of a raid and the rights of the raided.

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Centenary Celebrations

The Congress' centenary celebrations in Bombay were a curious mixture of glitter, sycophancy and confusion with over one lakh delegates attending. But behind the facade, the party was confronting disturbing questions about its future.

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Surprise Ruling

In a dramatic reversal of a Bombay High Court verdict, the Supreme Court cleared the Government, the LIC and the Reserve Bank of wrongdoing in the Escorts case. But the case is still open and corporate raider Swraj Paul has a long way to go.

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Legend of Bharata Natyam

Celebrating its golden jubilee, the Kalakshetra Academy established by Rukmini Devi Arundale has been largely responsible for giving Bharata Natyam its status as a leading dance form. A report and an interview with Arundale.

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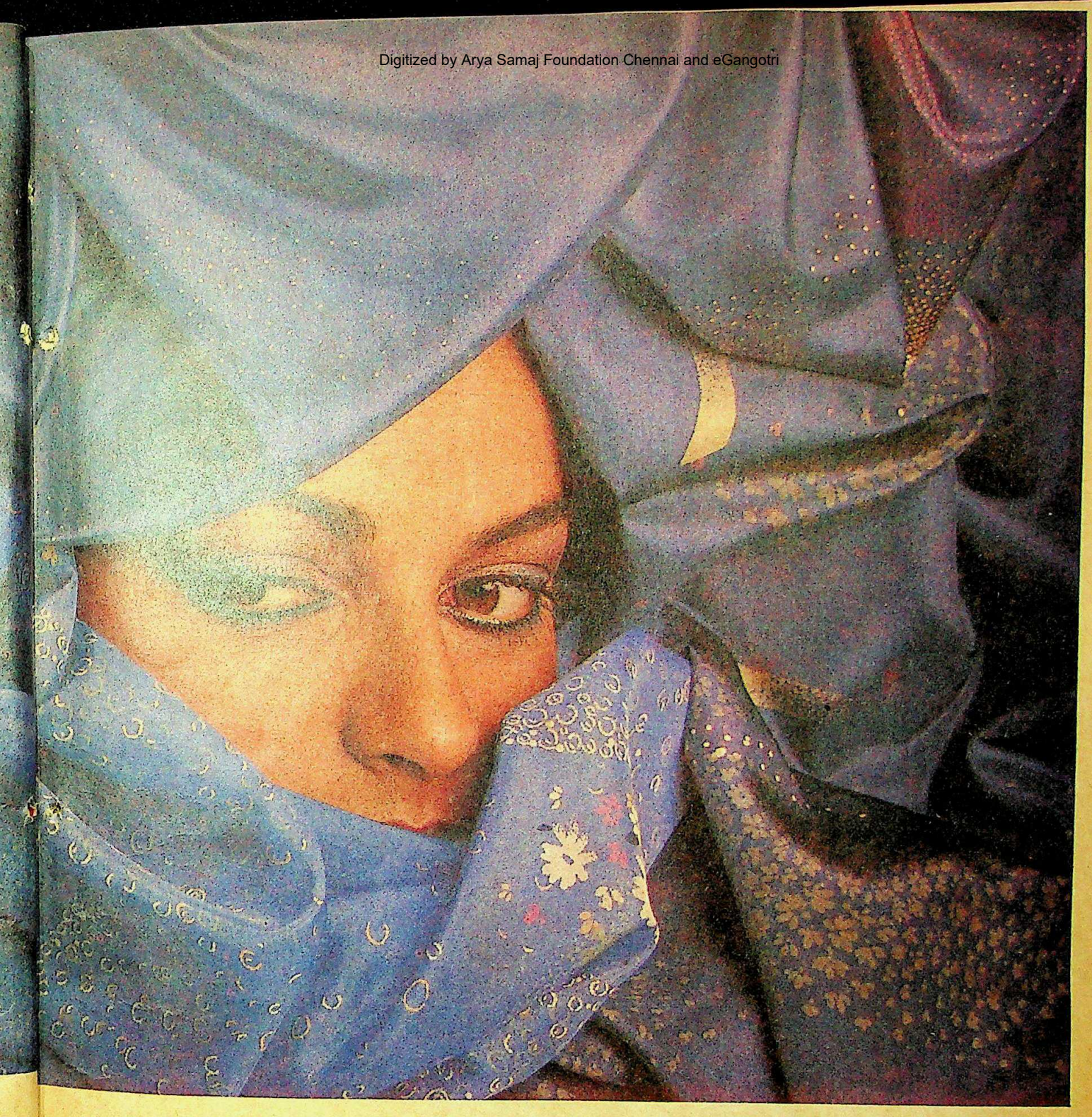

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THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

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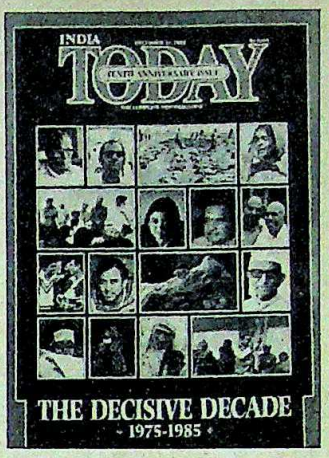

DECISIVE ISSUE

Simply a superb issue (December 31). No words can express how good it was. Will look forward to more such good issues in the years to come.

Secunderabad — E.S. BADRINARAYAN

■ It was fun going through your tenth anniversary issue on sale as the "The Decisive Decade, 1975-85". But decisive for whom—yourself? To those who have a sense of history, all years, decades and centuries of recorded history have somehow been decisive if not lack-lustre. INDIA TODAY is certainly the best magazine on the stands today, but for you to say so for yourself, reminds me of France's Louis XIV, the Sun King, who is supposed to have said, "The state? Well, I am the state." No autocracy please, we are democratic.

Bombay — K.N. NINAN

OVERBLOWN ANALYSIS

Your analysis of the trend of films ("The Fading Glitter", December 31) and the response of viewers to them seems to have over-emphasised the Amitabh and other contemporary doyen phenomenon, discarding the impact of the 'art movies' following the sensational release of *Ardh Satya*, a landmark in the history of art movies. This film not only gave a new dimension, it evoked much needed interest in the public towards art movies by registering an unprecedented success for an art movie to do so at the box-office.

Satna — JAIDEEP MITTRA

MISSED OUT

Though the article "Where are they now?"(December 31) featuring prominent men and women was very interesting and well-written, it had people like Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, Siddhartha Shankar Ray and Milkha Singh missing. One looks forward to reading about these people who were at the peak at one time or another.

Jamshedpur — BHUPEN BOSE

DOUBLE STANDARDS

It is very obturating to learn that the Bhagwan still condemns and gibes at Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa, not to mention Jesus Christ and Gautam Buddha ("Paradise Lost", December 15). Has anyone reverberated his own qualities to Rajneesh? He is a deceiving sex maniac and a man having double standards. He used to extol America when he was sheltered there and now he eulogises India which he used to mock when everything was well in America. The Indian Government should not allow him to start a commune here.

Bangalore — K. CHIDANAND KUMAR

■ Rajneesh ridiculed all religions and called all those who believed in God congenital idiots and imbeciles, but declared himself as "Bhagwan" who lived the most luxurious life in the world and made no sacrifice for any cause. For all his incredible crimes, he spent only a few days in the US jail. He ridiculed the institution of marriage and pleaded for free sex life.

Now who are the congenital idiots and imbeciles? Those who believe in God and in religion — Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, or the one million followers of Rajneesh, the fraud, the criminal and the debauchee who has now pleaded guilty to all the charges levelled against him and withdrawn all his civil suits against the US Government to secure leniency in punishment. Has history produced a greater coward than this Rajneesh over which the world press wasted tons of precious newsprint?

Ahmedabad — SMITA BANKESHWAR

■ Your cover story vividly describes the history of the Rajneesh commune and their return to India. But the media does not reveal anything about the customs clearance at the Palam airport. It is unbelievable that he and his crew carried no dutiable items. Did the customs people give special concessions to Rajneesh being a "Bhagwan"?

Baghdad — JAMES MATHEW

■ Your title of the cover story was very appropriate. It is true that Rajneesh has lost his paradise, but not on his return

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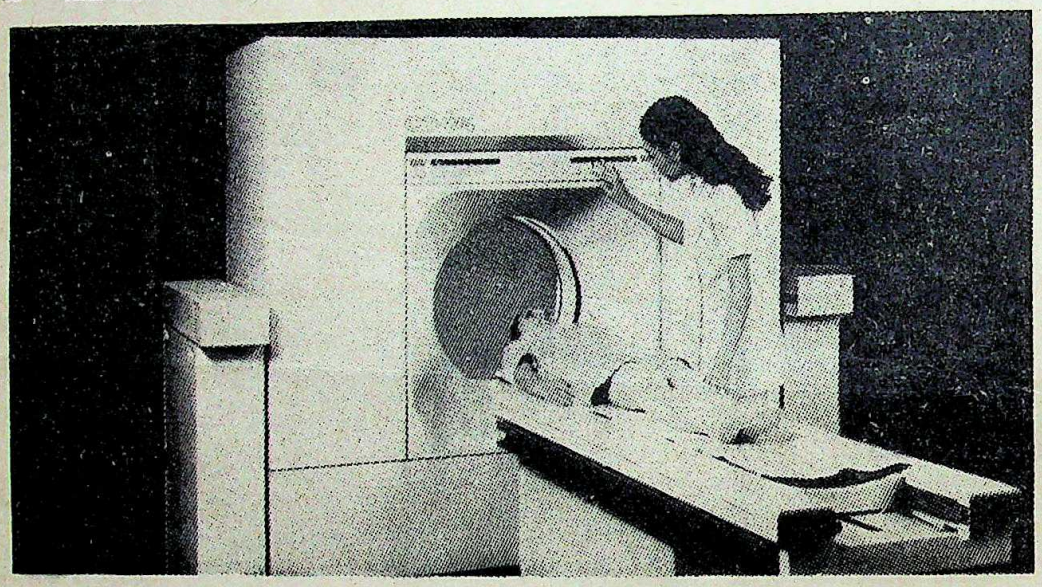

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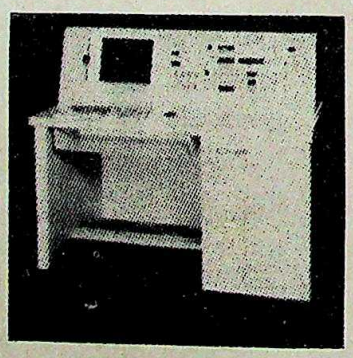

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from the US, he lost it on the day he started the cult—Rajneeshism, an open invitation to prostitution. The Indian Government should make every effort to stop the spreading of the so-called religion lest India loses its ideals represented by our great ancestors.

Ladnun, Rajasthan — S.R. KAZMI

■ Your cover story contains many interesting facts about Rajneesh and his ashram. However, India has gained a paradise by Rajneesh's home-coming. His decision to stay in India for the rest of his life is a boon to his admirers who have longed to see such a day.

Bhubaneswar — DHANANJAY PATRO

■ I fail to understand how the US Administration could treat the Bhagwan at par with the ordinary criminal? The Americans do not know what they have done, they have committed a mistake that they will regret when they miss the opportunity to go to 'paradise'.

Bombay — AMAL BASU

■ It is surprising how Rajneesh should feel allergic to dust and temperature above 17 degrees C. Any real 'sanyasi' and that too a self-styled 'Bhagwan' according to the shastras, should be above joy and sorrow, pain and desire, likes and dislikes and particularly heat and cold. But anyone who teaches the know-how of Adam-and-Eve technique in the name of "dynamic meditation", where a man and woman are called to copulate, while others are watching can neither be a sanyasi nor a bhagwan.

Instead of renouncing mundane pleasures, such as money-spinning, these synthetic saints with five-star culture, have indeed brought disrepute and disgrace to our ancient religion and Hindu philosophy.

Madras — A. SESHAGIRI RAO

■ In the interview Rajneesh says: "It is good to see a man like Rajiv in power... He has no political background. One can hope that something good may come out of him." Barely four months ago, the very same man had said: "If you see Rajiv Gandhi, tell him that he will be responsible for India's poverty. Half the country is starving—but he wants a nuclear plant. Tell him that this is not a child's game. Tell him: you better go and become a pilot again, that is your place." Juxtaposed, these two contrary statements make only one thing— waste of precious newsprint.

Muzaffarpur — KUMAR VIVEK

PRIME TIME IMAGE

Your Comment ("Overblown Images", December 15) truthfully mirrored the prevalent practice of idolatry through which we presume that we are paying the highest in the way of homage to someone. You have echoed the voice of the general public by saying that "an excessive dose" of the prime minister will prove counterproductive. All India Radio and Doordarshan are competing with each other and the press also seems to be awestruck by him.

Amravati — VASANT HEBBAR

■ The cartoon accompanying the editorial most appropriately depicts the public reaction to the recent programmes and other information now being telecast on the Doordarshan.

Moradabad — V.S. GARG

■ It must be admitted that it is not the prime minister who has created this position for himself. In fact, quite often, he has stated that projection of his image over Doordarshan should be curtailed. It may be that these agencies have to give prominence to important national events and in the process, events connected with the prime minister get priority. Nonetheless, it is true that a certain amount of restraint has to be affected.

Bangalore — T.S. SHANKARAN

SEXUAL IGNORANCE

The erudite assembly at the World Congress on Sexology observed that there has been a cognisable liberation of attitudes in India, on matters of sex and morality ("The Changing Scene", December 15). Victorian prudism has given way to a modern and rationalistic outlook towards the biological and psychological indispensability of sex. It is being widely felt that sex is fundamentally beautiful, made ugly by ignorance.

But tragic is the fact that such realisation is restricted to only a section of so-called educated people. Even the pace of reform is sluggish. As it stands today, the topic of sex abounds with contorted percepts. It brings with it concepts of perversion and obscenity. But what is actually obscene is corruption, hypocrisy, pseudo-culture, war, violence and a repressive society. More than anything else, India needs to smash its taboos on sex, so that a generation of emotionally and ideologically balanced citizens evolves.

Delhi — PRASHANT K. THAKUR

■ Your article quoted a learned American professor as saying that India is only 10 years behind the United States (in sexual liberation). The current sexological scene in that country is one of growing casualness towards sex and almost complete acceptability of unwed teenage motherhood, or 'children's children'. Do we then expect that in 10 years time, we in India shall accept our own daughters and nieces carrying illegitimate babies? Maybe, by then, we won't be able to even call them illegitimate! And with leading luminaries like Sarika and Zeenat Aman around, this movement will not be short of capable leadership at least!

Delhi — ANIL K. MAHESHWARI

■ Your article hardly stresses the fact that the real sexual revolution concerns both sexes—women and men. If sexual attitudes are to be changed, old values—especially those regarding women's submissive and passive role—have to be eroded. The sexual revolution is not so much concerned with kissing, petting and making love, but and most important, with the mutual understanding men and women have for each other, that men and women are equal and women are able to lead a life of their own. Sexual permissiveness causes a lot of problems. The Americans and the Europeans are desperately trying to compensate for the consequences of a sexual permissiveness that is based on an assumption of women's subordination.

Essex, England — CHRISTINE KHAKHAR

■ Your special feature on the sexual revolution in India uses just two lines from an hour-long conversation your correspondent had with me. The quote certainly doesn't convey the gist of what I said. I didn't say that the circulation of *Debonair* has increased from 40,000 to 1,02,000 just because of better pictures (I wish it were so easy!). I speculated about several other possibilities: reading material of a kind which differs from other magazines, better lay-outs and printing, certainly a more efficient distribution system. Plus of course the national tendency to buy more magazines, including yours, to push up sales.

Bombay — ANIL DHARKER

USHA'S MEASURE

Apropos "P.T.Usha: My Fair Lady" (December 15), gold purity should now be measured in Ushas instead of carats.

Pune — SHANMUGAM MUDALIAR

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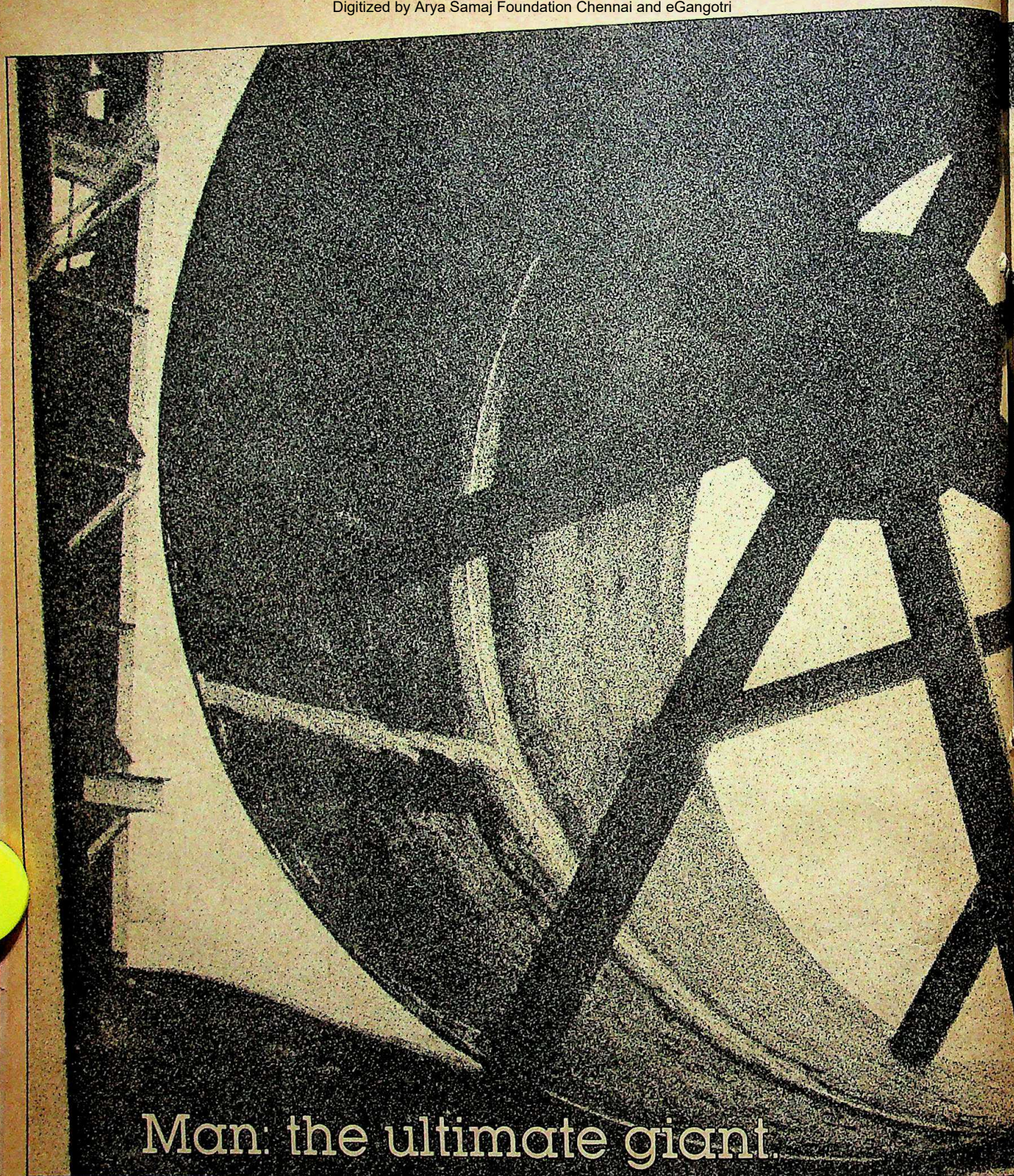

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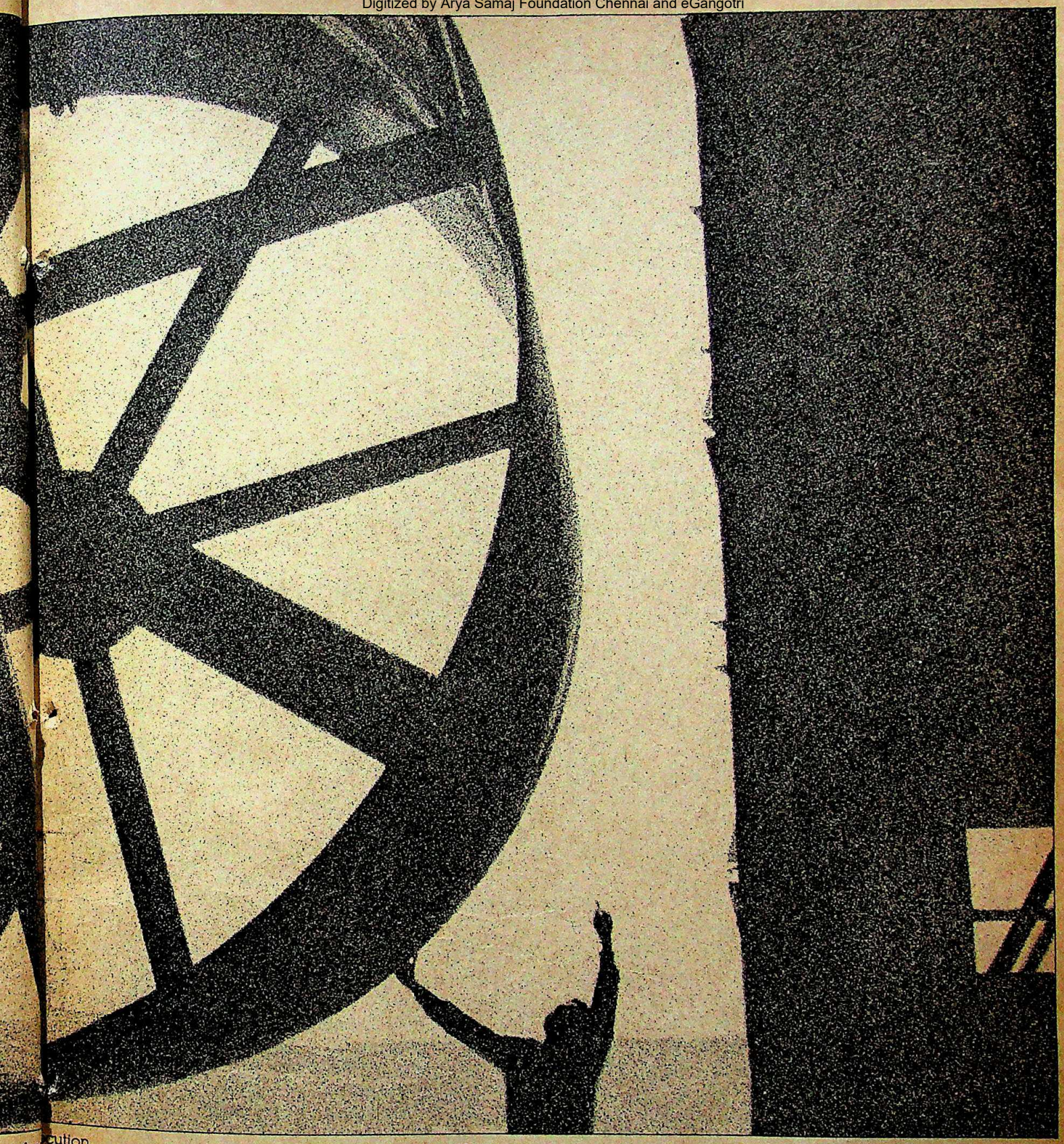

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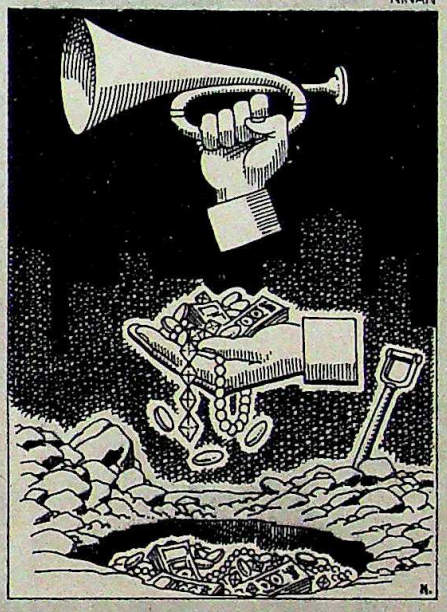
Trial by Publicity

ONE OF the basic tenets of civilised law is that an individual is presumed innocent until he is proved guilty. This principle seems to have been shelved in the explosion of publicity surrounding the wave of income tax raids that have been unleashed by Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh in his quest for a cleaner, above-board business and fiscal environment. Reports of raids on this prominent businessman or that glamorous film star are being beamed at high pitch to a public gleefully lapping up all the sordid details of how much liquor, gold and what not has been recovered from which raid.



Let's make no mistake about it. The Government is duty-bound to unearth illicit wealth. It would be failing in one of its fundamental tasks if it did not vigorously go after tax evasion and didn't come down hard on those who practise it. But it must pursue these goals, as governments must do in all their dealings with the public, with a sense of justice and fair play. What is happening to businessmen is not unlike what over-enthusiastic policemen have for decades been doing to petty criminals: holding them in their thousands as undertrials. Businessmen and others who are the target of raids are being presumed guilty long, long before they have had a fair trial.

One can sympathise with the Government's dilemma. It needs to demonstrate that it means business. It has provided a whole host of much needed incentives to get the economy moving. At the same time, it cannot risk letting its revenues drop. So, it is necessary to wield the stick even as it holds out the carrot, and whether or not the finance minister admits it, the high publicity given to the ongoing raids cannot but be a warning: pay your taxes or suffer the indignity of public humiliation.

There are other compulsions at work. By its pragmatic, liberal, growth-oriented policies, because of the lack of resources with which to launch programmes that would make a direct assault on poverty, the Rajiv Gandhi Government has acquired an unwelcome pro-rich, anti-poor image. And what better way of disproving this than going for the bad boys of big business?

But images don't metamorphose with this kind of tinkering. Just as *Garibi Hatao* boomeranged because poverty couldn't simply be made to vanish, putting a few people in jail is hardly likely to unearth black money in large quantities or prove that the Government is not showing undue consideration to the wealthy. Moreover, it could prove to be counter-productive. When public expectations get aroused, it is necessary to somehow meet them. And if the raids do not lead to swift convictions, their purpose will have been defeated.

If the past is anything to go by, few of the guilty are likely to be brought to book. Petty businessmen apart, there aren't too many instances of the really big fish being netted for tax evasion and business malpractice of the kind the raids are setting out to unearth. Often, it has taken commissions of inquiry—not ordinary courts—to see that justice was done. And, in comparison with the growing list of prominent persons whose offices and homes have been the subject of these searching investigations, the names of those who actually went to jail can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

So if the means are not to become an end in themselves, the Government should think again about the way it is going about doing things. Its cloak-and-dagger agencies need to work away from the glare of publicity. Instead of tossing names about at the time of a raid, which is after all basically a weapon to collect evidence, they would be better served filing cases and earning public acclaim by bringing the guilty to book. Discretion is sometimes the better part of valour: the Government knows it is dealing with people with resources at their disposal, who can bring the best legal brains to side with them. The Government's credibility will take a knock with each businessman, branded a tax evader in the public eye, who gets away in a court of law.

The problem of unaccounted incomes and wealth doesn't end with these tax raids, of course. The Government has taken steps to stem the creation of black money with an impressive range of steps from legalising donations to political parties to arming itself with the right to acquire property and more reasonable tax rates to not penalising individuals who come clean within a specified time. All these are sensible and welcome. But black money is generated not only through property transactions and unconcealed incomes, it emerges from commodity transactions, from commissions and cuts on contracts, from unregistered income-generating units, and most of all when corrupt officials are willing to turn a blind eye to some obvious wrongdoing—for a price.

The unaccounted economy thrives in countries as diverse as the United States and Italy on one side and China and the Soviet Union on the other, so it isn't a problem that will be easily solved. But it is one that will respond to painstaking, thorough and unrelenting effort. If the finance minister changes his emphasis from well-publicised raids to getting and publicising convictions, he will serve the community better. It is when individuals and businessmen know that tax evasion isn't just a matter of public indignity but of the guilty being punished, when they realise that the Government is setting its own house in order, and that the risks associated with wholesale tax evasion are no longer worth the candle, that the black economy will begin to come under control.

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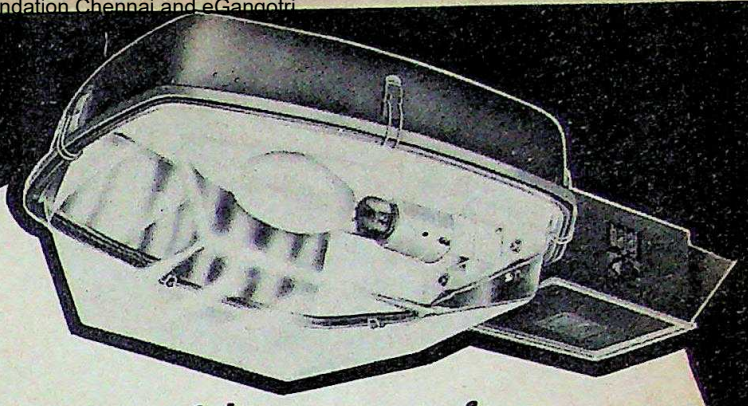

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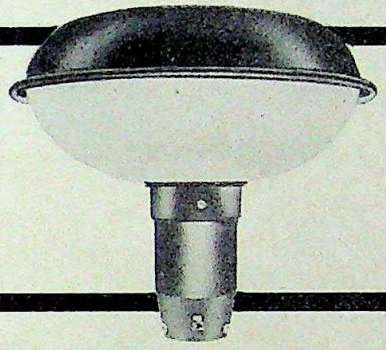

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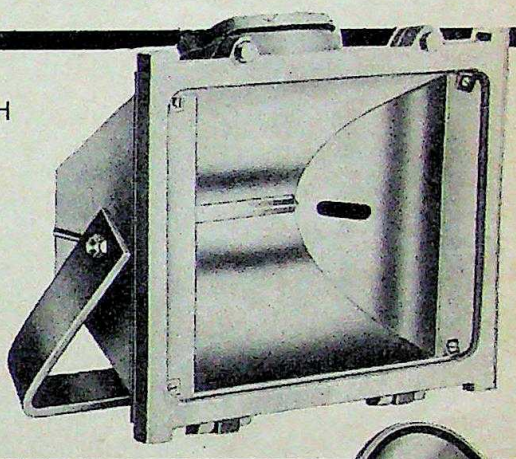

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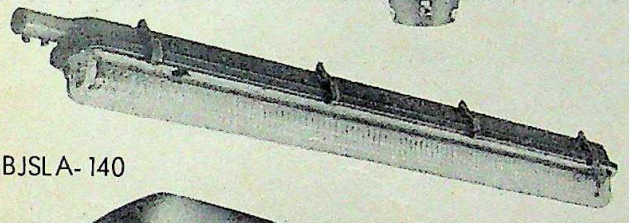

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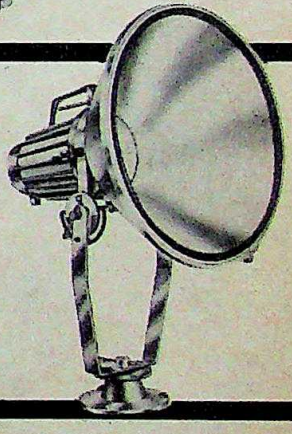

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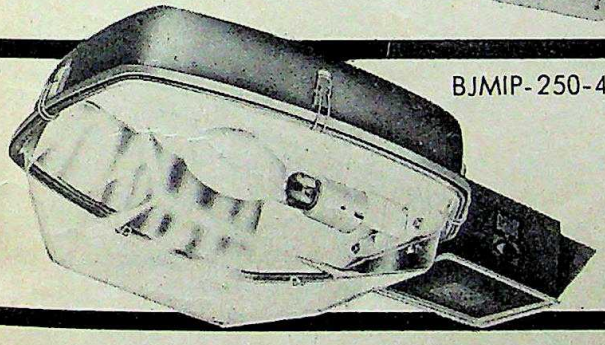

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The Times of India

● *The law of the land must be over everything else, everyone else—no more, no less. Do you think the law should change according to what your residential address is?*

■ V.P. SINGH, Union finance minister, on raids on big businessmen in *The Telegraph*

● *Even if we do rig the elections, we are not going to issue a public statement saying so.*

■ CHANDRASHEKHAR SINGH, former chief minister of Bihar, in *The Telegraph*

● *You must understand the Assamese psyche, Assamese society. It is a society where you keep your mistresses, I keep mine.*

■ D.K. BAROOAH, former Congress president, in *Sunday*

● *The present position is that we are not making a bomb even if Pakistan has it, but this does not bind us in the future.*

■ BALI RAM BHAGAT, external affairs minister, quoted in *Current*

● *I don't think it (the language issue) can bring down my ministry. I feel language is a people's problem. It cannot be settled on the streets in a democracy. It will be solved in the legislature by legal means.*

■ PRATAPSING RANE, Goa chief minister, in *Sunday*

● *Parties like the* AIADMK *can be almost called the 'adopted opposition'.*

■ MADHU DANDAVATE in *The Sunday Observer*

● *We have offered (the victims) care and comfort beyond anything they had known before. Union Carbide would have put them in the Indian middle class for the rest of their lives.*

■ BUD HOLMAN, Union Carbide lawyer, in *Time*

● *I want people to know, through my autobiography, what I have gone through—the setbacks and humiliations. They couldn't digest me going up. Jealousy, you see. But I'm like wine—getting better and better over the years.*

■ SYED KIRMANI in the *Express Magazine*

● *Today's Congress has little in common with the Congress I knew. In the pre-Independence Congress, one gave. In the post-Independence Congress, one took, and not very honourably at that.*

■ MINOO MASANI in *The Sunday Statesman*

● *(I write) because I like to invent, I like to lie.*

■ SALMAN RUSHDIE in *The Times of India Sunday Review*

● *I am certainly not bitchy. In fact, I am very critical of women who use their womanly charms to get things done. This creates a very sexist attitude.*

■ SMITA PATIL in *The Hindustan Times Sunday Magazine*

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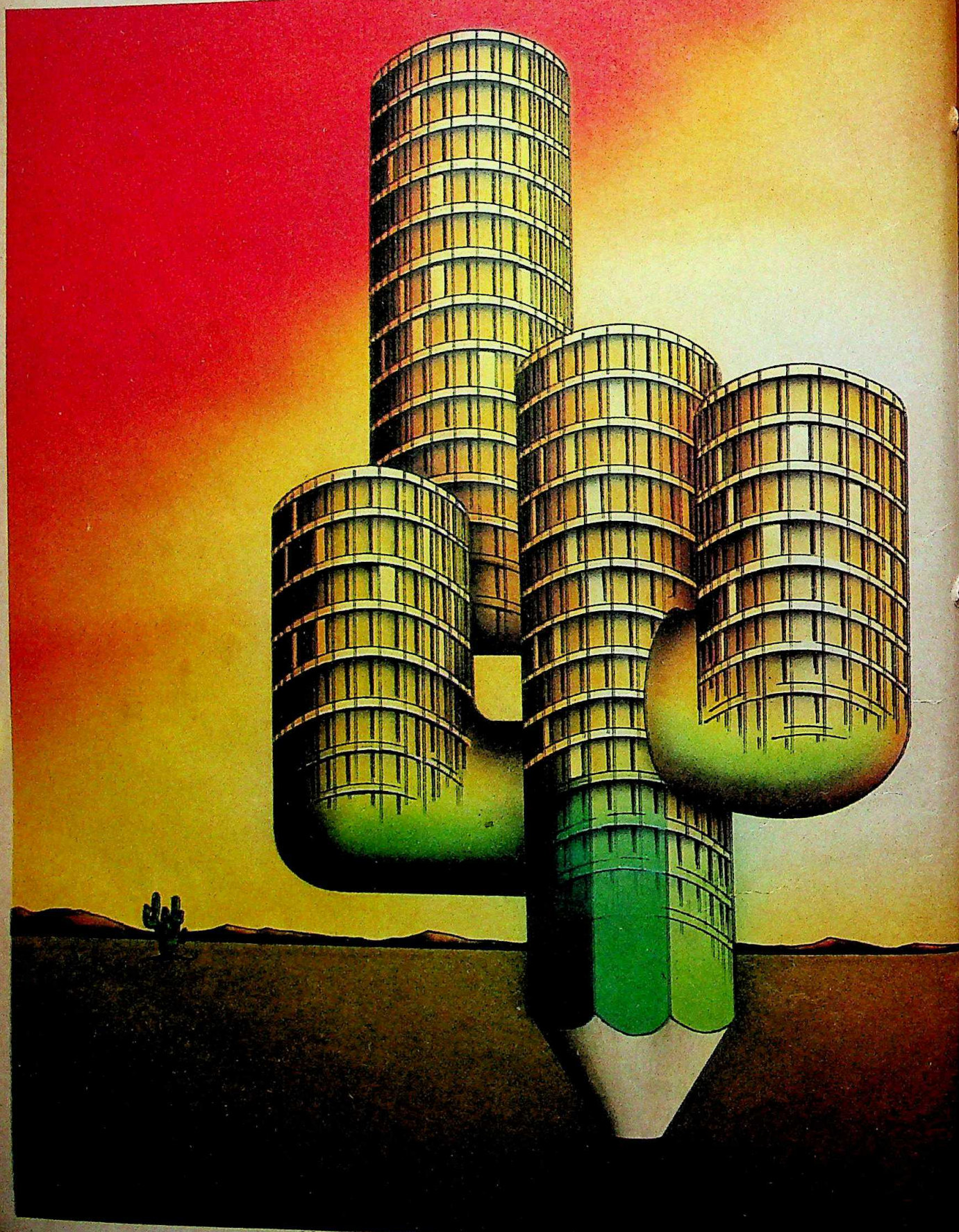
Demanding international clients are turning to an Indian company for the most challenging assignments in construction engineering



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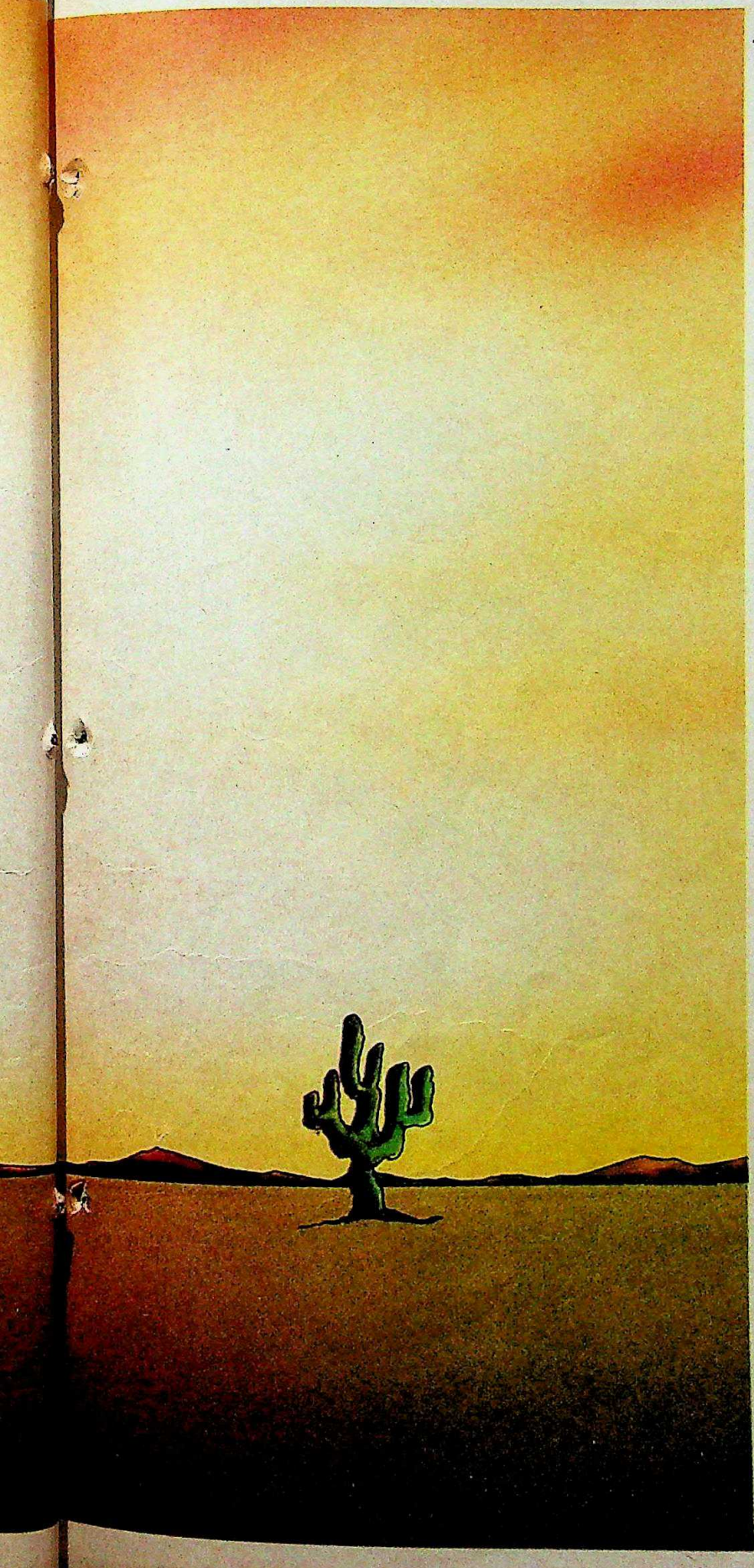
A company called Unitech



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The Unitech group's activity areas include construction engineering and real estate, manufacture of cold formed sections, installation and erection of transmission towers all over the world, and the manufacture of metal bodies for light commercial vehicles like Swaraj-Mazda and DCM-Toyota.

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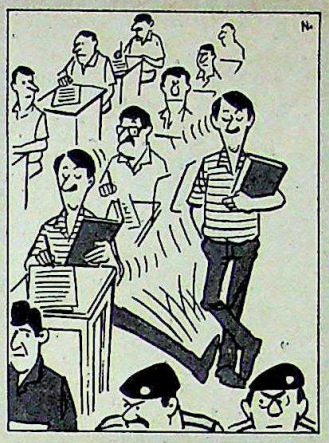
BOLD BROTHER



■ 'Exemplary courage under fire.' That's how most citations given to army officers and men run. But facing a hail of bullets is one form of courage: there could be other dangers which you face, as Ivanhoe would put it, as it behoves a bold brother. Ivanhoe will probably find his soul-mate in a middle-aged gentleman of Lucknow.

This man walked into an examination hall last month—aspiring lawyers were being grilled on their knowledge of torts, among other things—and decorated his desk with various books and 'keys' upon which he read slowly through the question-paper, looked through his books, chose the answers and got to work, transferring the contents on the books to his answer book.

The real test came a few minutes later when the Lucknow University checking squad hove into sight a few rooms away and the examinees frenziedly hid their notes. All except Mr Cool, who gathered his books under his arm and started pacing the floor. That was how the squad found him, to be told that everything was in order. When the eagle-eyed guardians left, the 'invigilator-for-a-minute' went back to his books. Now is that courage or isn't it?

RUM DOINGS

■ Arre Yaar, what to tell? Why am I here in this rotten cell, you ask. What did I do to have that fat lump of a policeman haul me in here last night? Well, I'll tell you yaar...No, I don't want any rum, thanks, no I don't want any rum, d'you hear me...?

Actually, you know that Vaishali Gramin Bank in Rampuhar Mohalla in this our Muzaffarpur. I thought I'd make myself a little money, things aren't too easy nowadays. So I got down there two nights ago, very quickly and easily picked the lock and opened the ... and ... ooh ...all that money? Yaar, it was heaven.

You will understand that a spot of celebration was certainly in order and I had brought along my trusty Triple X with me. So I drank and drank and drank and like that black fellow—yes, I've been to school—drank wisely but not too well, and the result was that when the manager opened the door in the morning, he found me lying on the table, sleeping away, with all that lovely money still in the safe, and Triple X sloshing around in my stomach and brain. Sad, isn't it. And now you know why I've stopped drinking.

SHORT-HANDED

■ Until sometime ago, India was the land of scarcity. Those skimpy days are over, but in one commodity at least, the pinch is still felt, although in a localised fashion: bridegrooms. The small Kashmiri Brahmin community is particularly hard hit in this respect and many a girl's father is wringing his hand in despair at the shortage. In such circumstances it is only to be expected that they should resort to tactics which are not exactly *comme il fault*.

A young widower in Delhi was conducting the tenth-day rites of his wife by the river, with the family priest droning on. The man was lost in contemplation, and few near him cared to intrude upon his thoughts. However, he had to come back to reality when a relative hailed him, and motioned toward two elderly gentlemen standing nearby. He said that the two had an important issue to discuss with the young man.

The widower hurried up to the two gentlemen. They looked him over, and without so much as batting an eyelid one of them offered him his daughter's hand in marriage. Needless to say it was refused, but the young man was doubtless the sadder and wiser for the experience.

CUT DOWN

■ Politicians like two things: cutting throats and cutting inaugural ribbons. Stop them doing any of these two things and they will sulk for hours. That is what P.C. George, MLA, did when a link road for four panchayats in Kottayam was opened.

The reason why P.C. George, MLA, was sitting all by himself in a corner muttering to himself is that his ego had received a severe blow. He wanted so badly to inaugurate the road, that he had commissioned a local stone carver to fashion a suitable monument with his name graphically inscribed on it. Somebody else had thoughtfully got invitation cards printed and distributed.

But Kurumba, 105, yes 105, beat him to it. It appears that a few hundred spoilsports, not particularly inclined to George, persuaded Kurumba to cut the ribbon. She did it not with the usual pair of scissors, but with the classical rural person's tool, the scythe. A slash with practised 105-year-old fingers and the ribbon was down. And over the cheers of the crowd, one could hear sobs! Somebody, for once, had made P.C. George, MLA, cry.

—compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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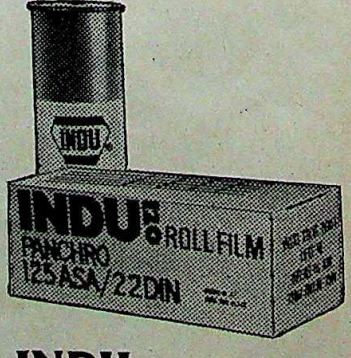

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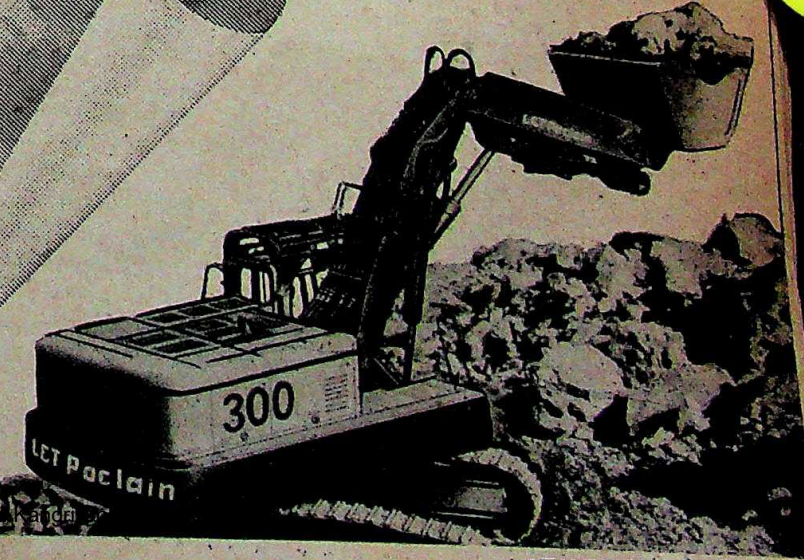

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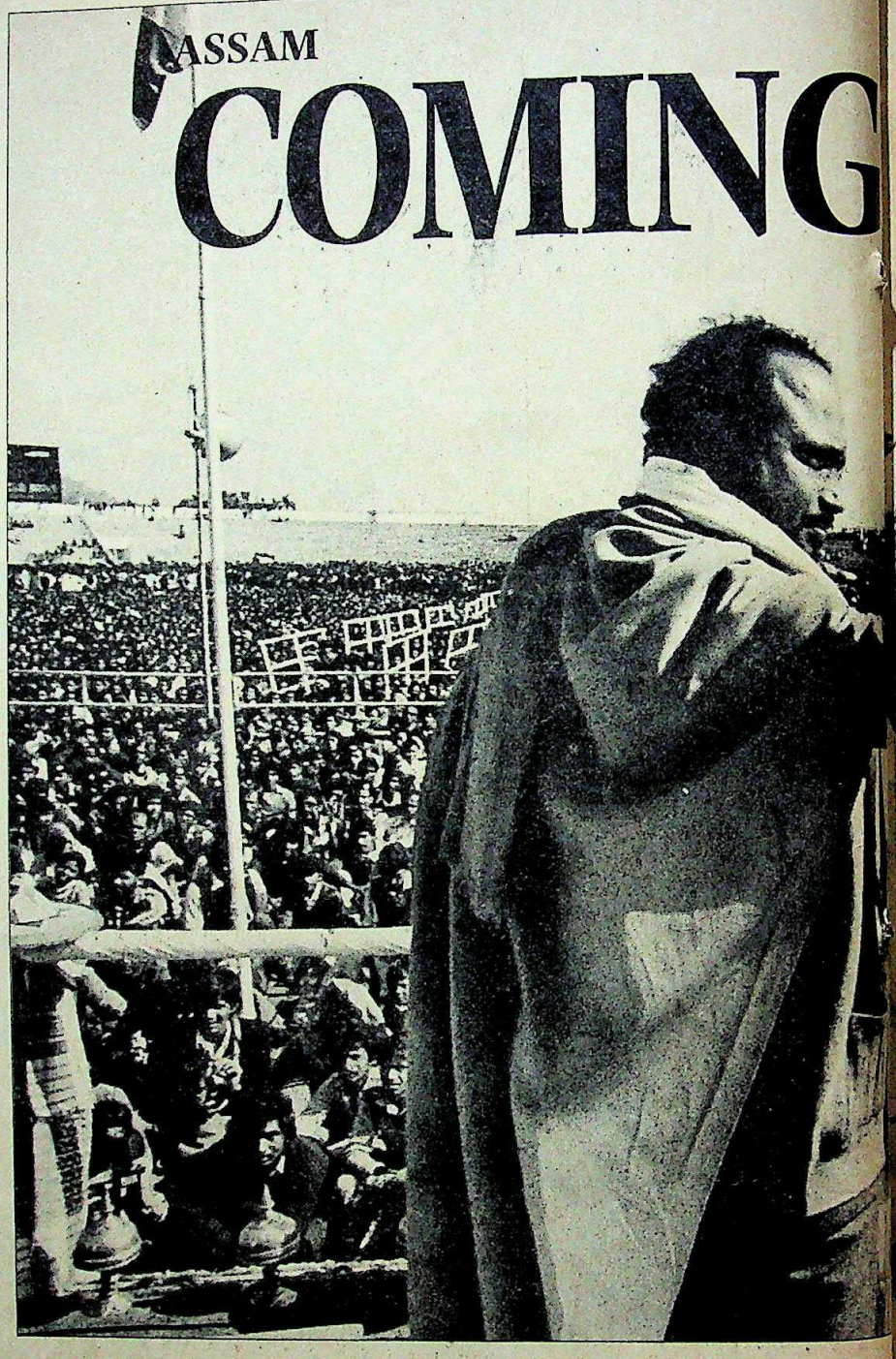
ASSAM COMING



Prafulla Mahanta at swearing-in rally: mass euphoria

"To tame a wild elephant you have to ride an elephant yourselves first."

WHEN Prafulla Kumar Mahanta said this in Jorhat in January 1983 he could hardly have imagined how prophetic he was to prove. Last fortnight he finally rode that metaphorical pachyderm into the chief minister's chamber at Janata Bhawan, the one-time tea warehouse that serves as the Assam Secretariat at Dispur. The elephant was the election symbol of his new party, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) which had just now performed a political *kheda*, rounding up 68 seats in the 126-member assembly, consigning the Congress(I) to merely 25 inconvenient perches in the Opposition benches in a remarkable reversal of electoral fortunes.

This was the moment of truth. A chief minister at 32, a cabinet with an average age of less than 40 and, most mind-boggling of all, a mass euphoria of the kind never seen before in India's independent history at his back. Throughout the vast expanse of Brahmaputra valley, its water-logged paddy fields green with the winter crop, tumultuous drum-beats ushered in an entirely new era of hope. Where once blood had flowed from tribal and agitational violence and state repression, where six years of political manipulation and uncertainty had left people listless, indignant and cynical, there was now an ultimate release, as if an umbilical cord had been sheared separating the cathartic present from a torrid past.

The December 16 revolution of the ballot-box, vindicating once again the voice of democracy, was a vital turning point. For a people nursing an often self-inflicted sense of hurt and alienation from the rest of the country which resulted in the historic 1979 oil blockade and then the bloody resistance to the 1983 election, this was at last a chance to preside over their own destinies. And in Guwahati where half-a-million people had come out on the streets to the call of *"olahi aao"* (come outside) defying curfew on April 19,1980, as the Government tried to break the oil blockade, this was victory at last. Last fortnight, people were out in the streets again but now the mood was festive. They lustily chanted songs of the *Bihu* festival, many of them suitably modified to match the occasion. Hundreds danced in the Dispur residential complex around the houses of the beaten and dispirited Congress(I) ministers busy packing up their belongings for an inglorious retreat, singing: "When our elephant wakes up it runs over all that comes in its way—it has already chewed up your hand."

And chew it did. Forty-eight of the 64 assembly seats the AGP won were snatched from the Congress (I). Sixteen members of Hiteswar Saikia's 26-member cabinet, installed after the farcical election of February 1983, fell by the wayside as the AGP wave swept the valley. Saikia himself somehow survived a high-voltage election at Nazira in the Sibsagar district of Upper Assam where his party lost the remaining 16 seats. The Janata Party, which had 97 members in the 1977 assembly was now left with none; its state president and former chief minister Golap Borbora was trounced in Duliajan. Over 40 constituencies where less than 25 per cent people had come out to vote in 1983 after the agitators' boycott call now notched up an over 80 per cent voting percentage. Indeed, for the Assamese partisan the election was seen as the only hope of stemming the tide of illegal immigrants. "The battle of Saraighat, our last chance against the invaders," was how Bipul Chandra Goswami, a bank employee in the long queue at the Barakhat

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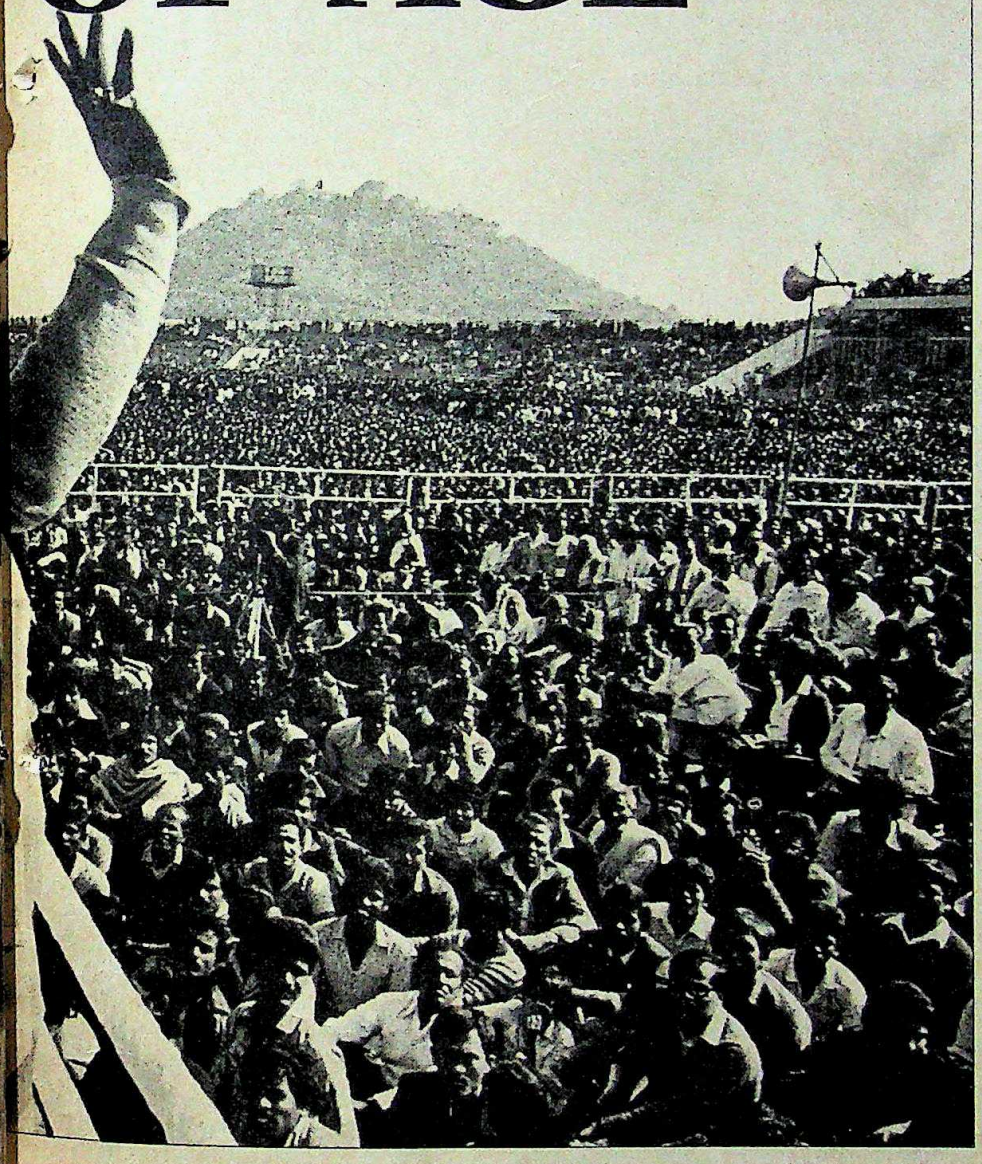
Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

OF AGE



polling booth outside Dispur, put it. To the ethnic Assamese, particularly the Hindus, this indeed was a replay of the legendary battle on the banks of Brahmaputra when Assamese warrior Lachit Barphukan decisively defeated the Mughals to end a series of bloody invasions.

For the striplings spearheading the AGP campaign this was also the consummation of all they had fought for. Two years ago, taking stock of the situation following the violence and killing that accompanied the February 1983 election, they had apprehensively decided to take on the "wild elephant", the political challenge from the Congress(I). Their shift in emphasis was well conceived. Replicating the feat of N.T.Rama Rao, the Asom Gana Parishad, formed a mere 67 days before the election, grabbed power trouncing the Congress(I) in what had long been its last stronghold in the North-east. The campaign was bitter, and saw Mahanta and his deputy Phukan address over a score of meetings a day reaching out to the corners of the valley, the river islands, minority pockets and the tea-gardens ignored even at the height of the movement. And as results trickled in, a sense of joy and relief was palpable in the AGP camp. Phukan capped it with an instinctive: "Oh, it's over now. We are very hungry," hastily dipping into the mound of boiled rice and sweet-sour Assamese fish curry at the house of Rameshwar Bora a long-time sympathiser of the agitation.

Ironically, the new leaders had their first taste of the problems that come with power even before they were sworn in. If the AGP was a party of the youth with an unusual political style and a fresh new approach to electioneering, it shared at least one thing with older, well established parties elsewhere: internal wrangling. And the conflicts that had first come to the fore during the ticket distribution were now sharpened as the stakes rose. With a victory behind them, everybody seemed to be making a claim for a place in the Cabinet. So much so, Mahanta and Phukan and their close advisors were mired in acrimonious confabulations that went into the early hours of December 24 before a reasonably acceptable cabinet could be cobbled up. Left out were Joy Nath Sarma, the fiery, controversial former chief of the AASU volunteer force and Biraj Kumar Sarma, a former convenor of the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad and one of the signatories to the Assam accord. Biraj Sarma refused to take the slight quietly, first organising a procession of sorts in his stronghold of Uzan Bazar in Guwahati and then abstaining from the swearing-in ceremony on December 24.

But such isolated show of ire and dissidence could not queer the popular pitch that morning as over a lakh of people jostled their way into the massive Nehru Stadium, that soon took the form of a huge coliseum with wildly cheering crowds at the public swearing-in ceremony much in the NTR style. And the 'gladiators' were all there, reading out the oath of office and secrecy administered in Assamese rather fittingly by Bhishma Narain Singh, at 52 the youngest governor in the country. There was Prafulla Mahanta wrapped in a saffron shawl that P. Upendra, the Telugu Desam leader had brought on behalf of NTR and Phukan still dressed in a very college-like blue blazer. The ceremony turned into an impromptu public meeting and thousands cheered lustily as columnist Arun Shourie asked the question: "Do you remember another swearing-in ceremony was held in Guwahati two years ago, attended by the BSF and the CRPF?" and added, "That was Saikia's government, this is your government."

The frenzy, the satisfaction and the

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PRAFULLA KUMAR MAHANTA

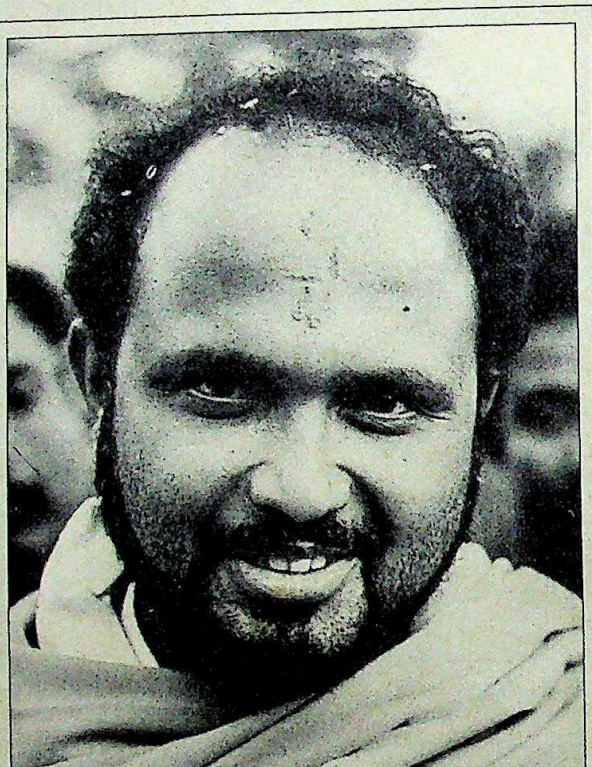
"We have been vindicated"

HIS SUBDUED style has often been mistaken for mediocrity and his characteristic quiet has invariably intrigued those who came in contact with him over these troubled years in Assam. But belatedly, even the most incorrigible sceptics now concede the fact that Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, now chief minister at 32—the youngest ever to rise to that position—has perhaps been the most underestimated politician in the country in recent years. He is shy and many of his close supporters complain that he can vacillate on vital occasions. He can also be excessively moralistic at times to the chagrin of the many "political pragmatists" in his party, as he did in clearly rejecting the prospects of the AGP entering into a coalition while his partymen, on the verge of a clear majority, were tensely awaiting the last few, vital results.

But he is a pacifist and has shown over the six tumultuous years, a remarkable capacity to hold together elements with disparate ethnicities, castes, political ideology and ambitions, a quality he will need now in fullest measure to keep together an inexperienced, exuberant cabinet culled out of the same elements.

From the streets of Nowgong to the Assam Government Secretariat at Dispur has been a long, eventful journey for the bearded, balding chief minister. Born to Devkanta, a modest, school-teacher and his wife Lakhani Prabha in 1954 Mahanta went to school in his hometown Kaliabar and later to Nowgong College. This is where he became an active participant in AASU activities. The leadership of the district AASU committee became the springboard for the presidentship of the AASU in 1979 the year history took an entirely new path in Assam launching Mahanta and his more vocal lieutenant Bhrigu Kumar Phukan (now home minister in his cabinet) into international limelight. In the years of the agitation he has been jailed many times and accused of crimes ranging from slogan-shouting to sedition. But he seeks vindication for all that in his party's victory now, saying: "The people are the best judge. They know better than anyone else who was responsible for the violence in Assam."

Even in the hub of the agitation and now politics Mahanta has continued to be in an impressive degree-hunt. His six years at the Gauhati University have fetched him a bachelor's degree each in science and law and a diploma in journalism. He is currently in line for an LLM degree and in case he decides to appear for his final year examination he will score yet another first, the first chief minister to appear for a university examination. While the AGP theoreticians claim that their party does not encourage personality cults and stands for collective leadership and responsibility, all along this victorious campaign they have projected Mahanta as the new chief minister realising that among all the AGP leaders he has by far the most mature and secular image something he will now have a hard time retaining while he fulfils his party's promise of implementing the Assam accord. Normally hesitant in opening up to newsmen, Mahanta spoke to Principal Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA on a wide range of issues concerning him and his party of political greenhorns. Excerpts:



"Ours is a victory for regionalism with a nationalistic outlook."

Q. *Has the extent and margin of your election victory surprised you? To which factors do you ascribe it?*

A. No, we are not at all surprised. We always knew we had the people behind us and all we needed was a fair election. This was a people's movement and the support had always been there. There is only one factor behind our victory, the involvement of the people. This election fully vindicates our decision to boycott and block the illegal, immoral 1983 election.

Q. *Do you agree that this was a fair election?*

A. Yes, it was generally a fair election. Perhaps everywhere except in Nazira (where Hiteswar Saikia won). The Congress(I) tried the usual tricks such as distributing money, liquor and blankets. They even did so in my constituency at Nowgong. But people were not swayed.

Q. *Would you say that your party has got a fair share of votes from all sections of society in Assam?*

A. Yes, don't the results show it? We are not a party of any community. We stand for all genuine Indian citizens in Assam. Do you think we could have won all those seats in Upper Assam without the help of the tea-garden labourers?

Q. *What explains the widespread rejection of the Congress(I)? Does the rise of UMF pose a long-term challenge to your party?*

A. The Congress(I) paid the price for the ultimate sin in democracy, by barricading themselves away from the people and letting loose a reign of repression terror and torture in the last six years. Their last 33-month rule can be summed up in just one word, misrule. The people have rejected them now but we are left with the by-product of the Congress(I) political culture in the form of the UMF. Yet the minorities are increasingly realising that this party has no positive

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programme for them and thus we do not look at the UMF as a serious threat in the future. Even now election results clearly indicate that the minorities have confidence among us.

Q. But doesn't your total failure in Cachar once again underline the region's very distinct character from the Brahmaputra valley?

A. Not exactly. But we realise that we have to strengthen the party's base in Cachar and I am confident that we will succeed in doing that.

Q. You will face an unusual assembly where everyone from the ruling party is a newcomer while the Opposition is full of veterans. Will that not make things difficult for you?

A. No, it will not. Because when it comes to working with the people we are also veterans. In our opinion, experience gathered from total involvement with the people is real experience. I don't anticipate problems either legislatively or administratively as our people are committed workers and quick learners.

Q. What are the first priorities before your government?

A. Our priorities are quite clear, implementing the Assam accord, accelerating development and revamping the economy. Besides we have to remove corruption from the government apparatus which has been heavily polluted under the Saikia regime.

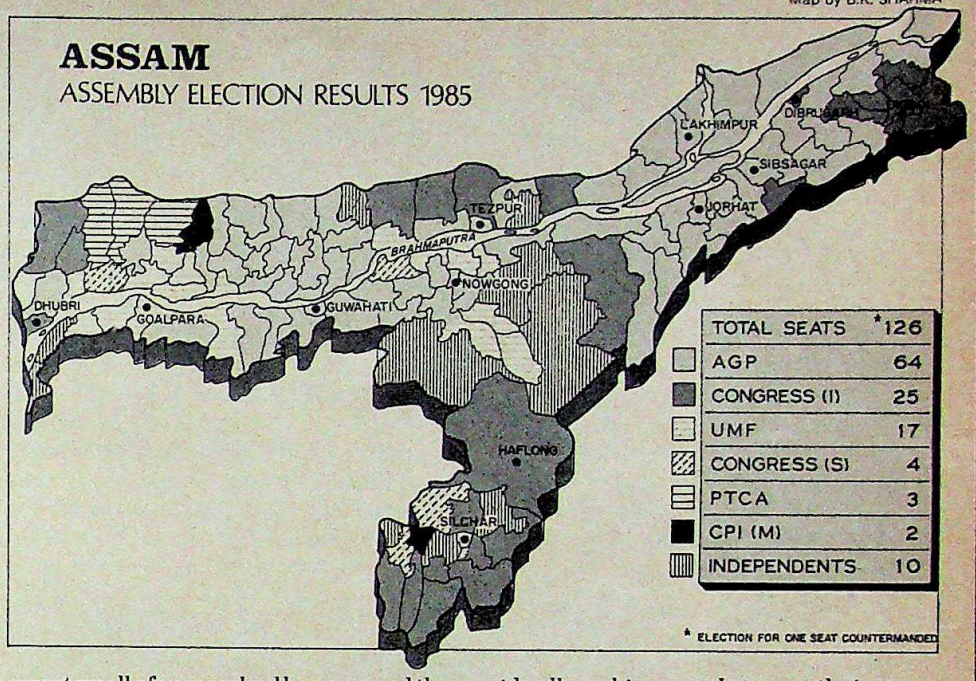
Q. Is yours a victory for regionalism? What kind of relationship will your government have with the other regional parties and the Centre?

A. Ours is a victory for regionalism with a nationalistic outlook. We will certainly have a cordial, friendly and programme-oriented relationship with the other regional parties. Our government also does not stand for Centre-state confrontation. Such relationships should be based on mutual trust, respect and cooperation.

Q. Charges of regionalism, parochialism and even secessionism have often been made against the AASU *and* AGP. *Now that you are taking over power and responsibility how do you react?*

A. Our victory is the most fitting reply we could give to these charges. The people of Assam have not voted for parochialism or secession. They have voted for peace, prosperity and national integration. These charges were made by interested, motivated parties to fool the people and how badly have they collapsed now.

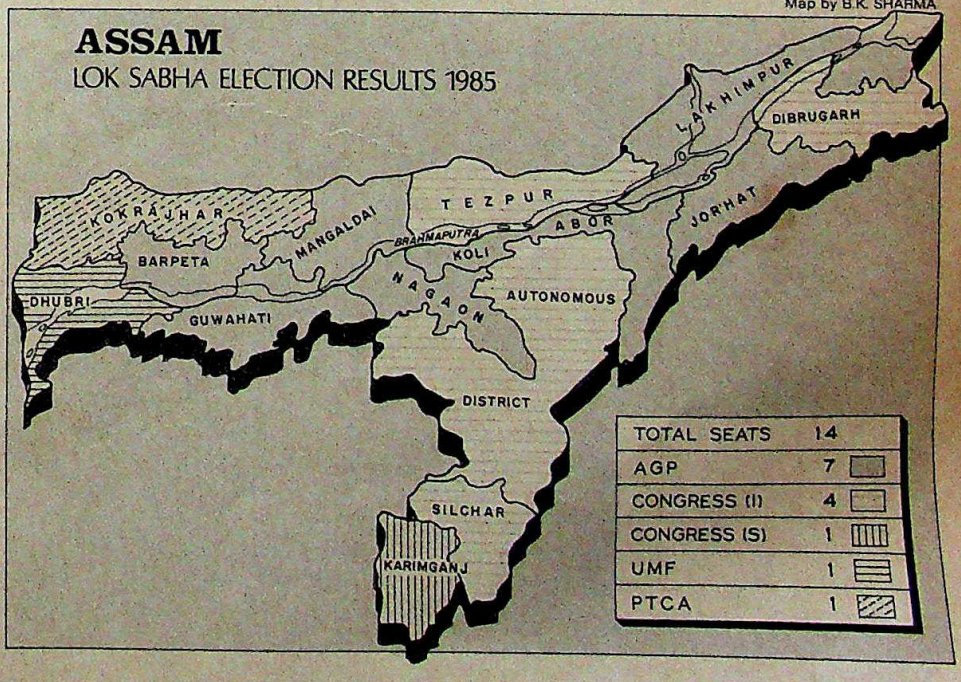
Map by B.K. SHARMA



sweet smell of success had been earned the hard way and the result of a campaign run with electronic precision. "We were short of funds and could not give our candidates more than Rs 5,000 each besides coupons to collect donations on their own," says Bhrigu Phukan. But the AGP's main strength was the massive force of student workers who took the fledgeling party's message to the deepest interiors in impressive bicycle processions, singing songs and holding impromptu meetings. "I have never seen workers of a party as active as this," Union Minister of State for Surface Transport Rajesh Pilot was to exclaim later as some Congress(I) leaders described with awe how their volunteers had reached almost every household individually, asking people to cast their votes. This resulted in the unprecedented high turnover, more than 90 per cent in all areas dominated by the ethnic Assamese.

The same sense of purpose had earlier marked the strategy sessions. The AGP realised early enough that it could never hope to snatch power without a fair share of the vote of the tea-garden labour and the Muslims. Emissaries were rushed to far-away state capitals in the country to garner help. College teacher Ranjit Narain Deka met Farooq Abdullah in Srinagar and Surjit Singh Barnala in Chandigarh. Neither could come but Abdullah at least sent in a poster with a signed appeal to the voters; it found some purchase in the Muslim areas of the state.

Map by B.K. SHARMA



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ASOM GANA PARISHAD

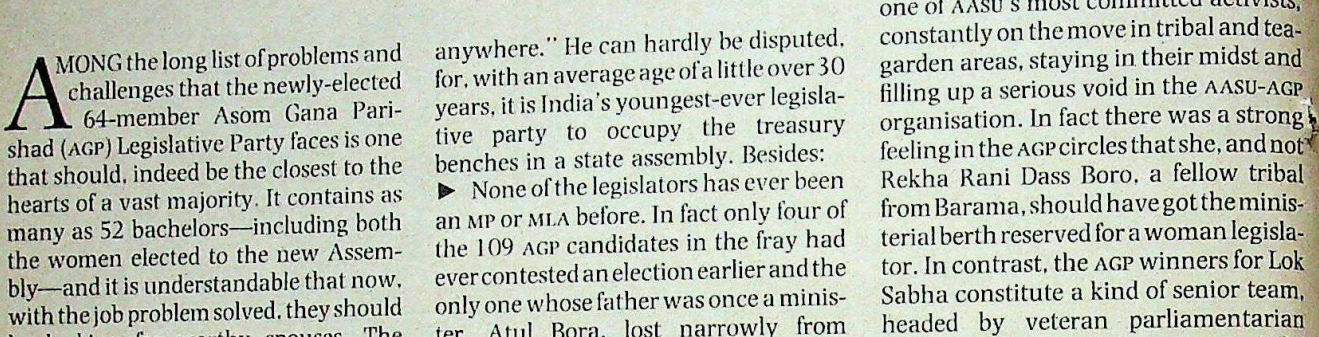
A Youthful Takeover

AMONG the long list of problems and challenges that the newly-elected 64-member Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Legislative Party faces is one that should, indeed be the closest to the hearts of a vast majority. It contains as many as 52 bachelors—including both the women elected to the new Assembly—and it is understandable that now, with the job problem solved, they should be looking for worthy spouses. The cabinet itself contains 14 bachelors and many AGP functionaries worry at the thought of so many marriages in quick succession bringing the work of the party and the Government to a standstill. "The only way to get around that is to hold a mass marriage ceremony at the Judges Field and then a mass feast," says Urvashi Hazarika, a Guwahati housewife. And given the AASU and AGP leaders' penchant for the unusual that just might happen particularly when at least a dozen of the new legislators, including Chief Minister Mahanta, his deputy Bhrigu Phukan and Irrigation Minister Bharat Narah are all believed to be "going steady".

But bachelorhood is not the only unusual characteristic that the new legislative party has. At the public swearing-in ceremony in Guwahati a visibly excited D.K. Kakati, a former police officer who has been in the forefront of the agitation exclaimed: "In the international year of the youth it is the greatest celebration of the young anywhere." He can hardly be disputed, for, with an average age of a little over 30 years, it is India's youngest-ever legislative party to occupy the treasury benches in a state assembly. Besides:

- None of the legislators has ever been an MP or MLA before. In fact only four of the 109 AGP candidates in the fray had ever contested an election earlier and the only one whose father was once a minister, Atul Bora, lost narrowly from Marigaon.
- The legislature party includes 56 with a bachelor's degree or more and with just two members without any formal educational degrees, this is the most educated legislature party in the country.
- Over two dozen MLA's are still registered as students and they will rub shoulders in the Assembly with at least eight serving teachers.

The youngest and probably also the richest in the list is Abhijit Sarmah, 25—scion of a Jorhat family that owns over a dozen tea-gardens. He was also a surprise inclusion in the list of candidates much to the chagrin of scores of AASU-AAGSP activists in Jorhat who coveted the AGP nomination. "He just stood there, quietly, while others fought for the ticket. So we said why not give it to the least insistent one and get rid of all the others," confessed an AGP leader who dealt with the ticket distribution. He is closely followed by Jyotsana Sonowal, a tall, stately tribal student from Sadiya, the backward constituency in the extreme east of Assam. She is considered one of AASU's most committed activists, constantly on the move in tribal and tea-garden areas, staying in their midst and filling up a serious void in the AASU-AGP organisation. In fact there was a strong feeling in the AGP circles that she, and not Rekha Rani Dass Boro, a fellow tribal from Barama, should have got the ministerial berth reserved for a woman legislator. In contrast, the AGP winners for Lok Sabha constitute a kind of senior team, headed by veteran parliamentarian Dinesh Goswami. The youngest of the MP's, Gokul Saikia, at 34 also just falls short of becoming the youngest ever MP from Assam, falling behind the venerable Dev Kant Borooah who first went to the Lok Sabha at 33.



New cabinet with Governor B.N. Singh: young brigade

Also, most of these are faces familiar to the police all over the state. Said a police officer in Dispur: "I do not think this kind of statistics will ever be compiled now, but our new crop of MLA's should have something like a hundred murder charges over them, a large majority of them being against three prominent ones from the area around Mangaldai." Joy Nath Sarma, MLA from Sipajhar and former chief of the AASU volunteer force also lost his brother in the rioting during the February 1983 elections.

Love and marriage are just one aspect of the peculiar challenges the AGP legislature party faces. Most of the legislators have spent the last six years agitating and have piled up family problems. There are sisters to marry, houses

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to build and family businesses to organise. Says Gagan Datta, a former AASU executive member and now a senior AGP functionary who kept out of the elections: "Many, like me, could not even think of contesting elections this time. If I married my sister and built a house after joining the Government people would have said I have made money through corruption. At the same time how much can one do with Rs 2,000 a month which is what the Government can give you. I will now set up an industry and think of contesting elections when I begin to earn Rs 5,000 every month." This, in fact, is an extremely significant factor for, unlike the conventional politician, the AGP leader will have to look upon politics as a full-time career with little else to fall back upon. "I hope that will make them more serious," says Ataur Rehman, a retired inspector-general of police and AGP's victorious candidate from the Barpeta Lok Sabha seat, adding: "Unlike us all, these people have something like three to four decades of politics ahead of them. If they want to survive through it they certainly cannot afford to take things easy at this stage."

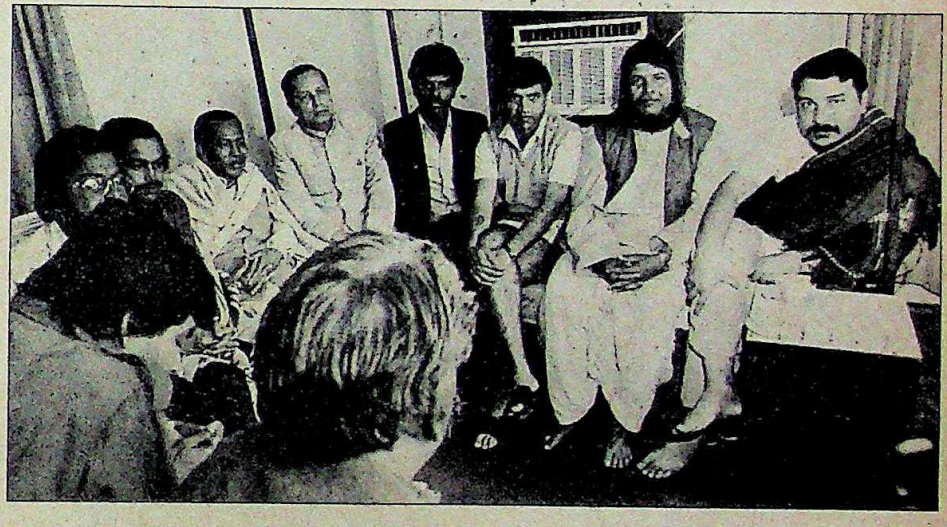
But for that political survival the AGP men—or boys as they have always been called in Assam—will have to learn fast the art of legislative politics and the craft of running a government but most of their supporters think they will take no time doing so. Said Ghana Kanta Barua, a Nowgong schoolteacher who came all the way to attend the swearing-in ceremony: "Come to think of it, what qualification did all those Congress politicians had to begin with except that they had all been to jail during the freedom struggle. So has each one of our new legislators done in the agitation against foreign nationals. Don't go by their age, they are veteran politicians already."

Just as Rajiv Gandhi's new-look list of candidates did in the December 1984 elections, the AGP youth brigade has thrown the state's age-old, familiar politicians out of business. But as AGP men themselves concede, it is at best a beginning. In months to come they will have to prove in the Assembly and the secretariat, that these boys are not boys any more. That indeed will be a real coming of age. It is one thing to seek votes for youth and quite another to perform from a position of power, till now considered a preserve of the old.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

but by far the greatest contribution was made by Telugu Desam. Atul Bora, a lawyer flew down to Hyderabad and got an immediate nod from N.T.Rama Rao who toured extensively through tea-garden areas with their huge share of labour of Telugu origins, tipping the scales decisively. NTR drew huge crowds and then his party got a large number of AGP posters printed at their own press at Rajahmundhry at nominal cost. "We had taken this campaign very seriously. In fact we held a training camp for our people deputed to spend a month in Assam to help the AGP and it worked," says TVR Shastri, a Telugu Desam executive member and the leader of their delegation based in Assam during the campaign.

Brindaban Goswami, their shrewdest strategist and now education minister



Pilot with Congress(I) candidates: inevitable defeat

made a telling contribution by choosing the elephant as the party symbol. It is familiar in Assam, and also has some religious significance. And the AGP ingenuity showed cheekily in the way its volunteers paraded decorated elephants around the booths on the polling day. "It was a stratagem. They did not shout slogans nor did they display any posters. And we could not have shooed away the elephants just like that," said an official.

The same ingenuity was evident in the party's campaign styles. They used both video and audio cassettes of the speeches of the Mahanta-Phukan duo and filled up almost every street-corner in the Brahmaputra valley with large, stuffed models of elephants. All day young boys and girls danced and limbered across the streets chanting: "Hathi jahibo Dispur, hath jahibo Tezpur" (The elephant will go to Dispur and the hand to Tezpur, where the state's mental asylum is located) or "Saikia bhang khaye podi ase lankhaye" (high on cannabis Saikia is lying in deep slumber).

The object of six years of accumulated ire, in retrospect it was Saikia who ultimately became the biggest target of the AGP's high-pressure campaign. While nothing was said against Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi anywhere in the valley, AGP men spewed venom against Saikia. More than an AGP versus Congress (I) election, this was a battle against Saikia and his assembly elected in the farcical 1983 poll with its laughable 32 per cent turnout.

Not surprisingly, then, the passions aroused by this year's campaign were daunting. At Dharampur, where in 1983 Dr Bhumidhar Burman (later health minister in the Saikia cabinet) had set up a record of sorts by polling 266 of the 267 votes polled (one having been declared invalid) an AGP supporter put up a placard in the town cemetery reading "site for Bhumidhar Burman". Till polling day no one had the courage to remove the placard. Burman, incidentally, lost by over 35,000 votes this time.

Later, as results came in, the victorious hordes danced merrily around Saikia's official residence, mobbed his car, spat at it and began to smash it till someone shouted: "Do not damage it. It is now our chief minister's car." In the Congress(I) circles there is a strong fear now that the AGP's populism and enthusiasm will spill into the streets. Complained Hiteswar Saikia: "The harassment of our people has already begun. Already (former education minister) Mukut Sarma, our candidate from Nowgong, is looking for a house in Shillong." But the new leadership was trying hard now to control the passions. "We have no accounts to

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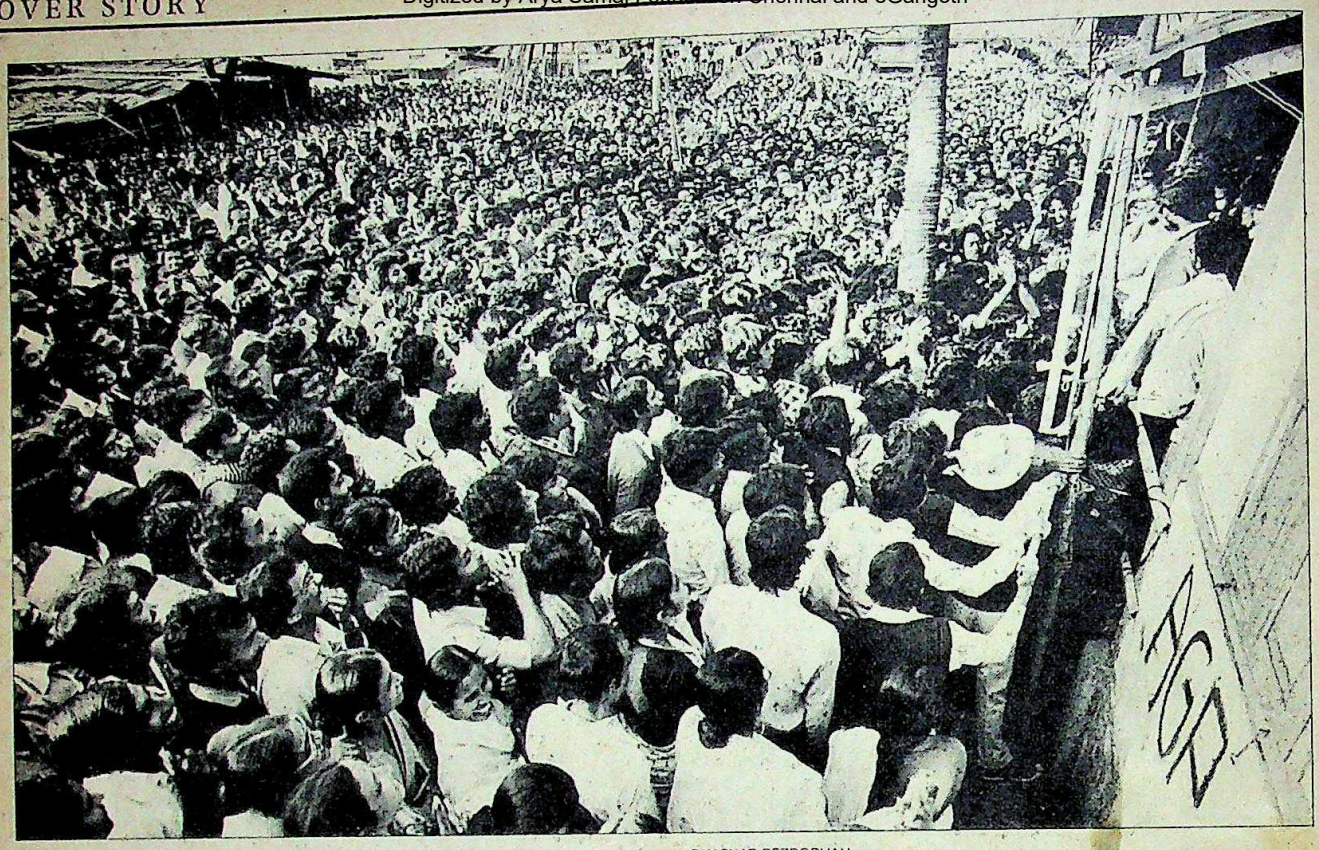

BHASKAR BEZBORUAH

settle with those who have been ground to dust by the ballot. We have no need now for any bullets or blood," says Chandra Mohan Patowary, the new AGP MLA from Dharmapur, counselling restraint with his partymen.

All Saikia could do now was concede defeat gracefully. "If this is the wish of the people we can only give it the fullest respect. My best wishes to the new government," he said somewhat condescendingly before leaving for Bombay to attend the Congress centenary celebrations, where the shadow of the Assam defeat loomed large despite a brave front showed by party leaders in Guwahati. Union Industry Minister Narain Dutt Tiwari, who had camped in Assam for a fortnight said: "If you ask me, today's defeat is tomorrow's victory. In this election, the same young men who were distributing dynamite till the other day, were handing out election posters. From a nationalistic point of view is that victory or defeat?" But off-record, partymen were openly admitting that Assam was never meant to be a Punjab-type operation, where the Congress(I) was only too pleased to have the Akalis in power. Said a senior party campaigner: "If that were the case would we have over a hundred MP's and 16 Central ministers, besides four chief ministers touring Assam? We feared we will lose but we never wanted to."

Enthusiastic crowds at the AGP rallies: spirited show

But in the party circles the loss of Assam, now the eighth state not ruled by the Congress (I) in the Union was not an event to be glossed over. Lamented a senior party functionary: "Suddenly we are becoming a party of the country's best losers, a kind of large regional party. Can we afford that?" There was a nagging realisation that when fresh elections are inevitably held in Jammu and Kashmir and then even in Mizoram sometime next year, the party will end up losing two more states.

The Congressmen themselves would never say it for the record, but the overriding feeling in the party circles was expressed somewhat dramatically by A.F. Golam Osmani, a former Congress (I) PWD minister and now the chief of the United Minorities Front (UMF), a rag-tag ensemble of Muslims and Bengalis formerly in the Congress(I) which had just taken away the party's minority vote banks. Said Osmani: "This young, nice prime minister, who wants to be good to everyone, is destroying his party in its 100th year." The accord had upset the minorities and the UMF played on their fears, completing the Congress (I) rout by grabbing 19 seats which would have gone to Congress (I) and cutting vitally into the party's vote in at least 10 others. "It is the UMF that made us lose so badly," said Hiteswar Saikia, adding, "wherever they won they took away our seats. Wherever they lost they took away our decisive votes."

But there was also realisation in the Congress (I) camp that this was one election they had to lose, as a kind of penance for the way the Assam issue had been handled in the past five years. "It is sad but this again is a price Rajiv Gandhi has had to pay for his mother's follies,"

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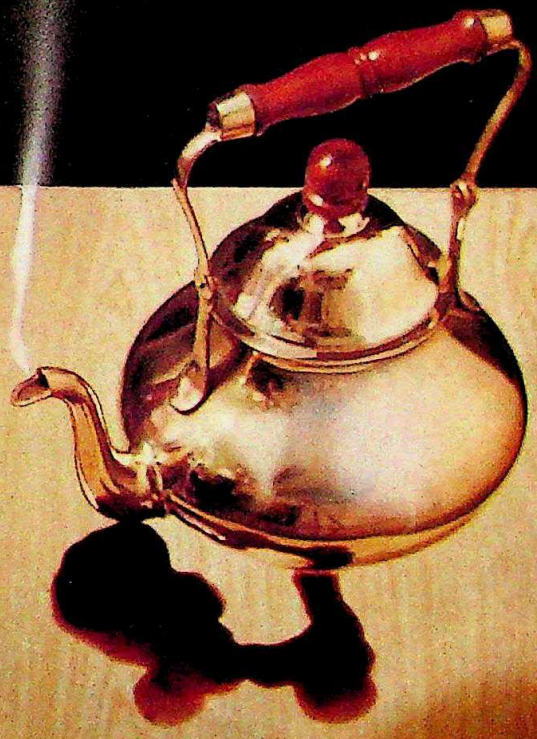
The difference in laminates now comes to surface



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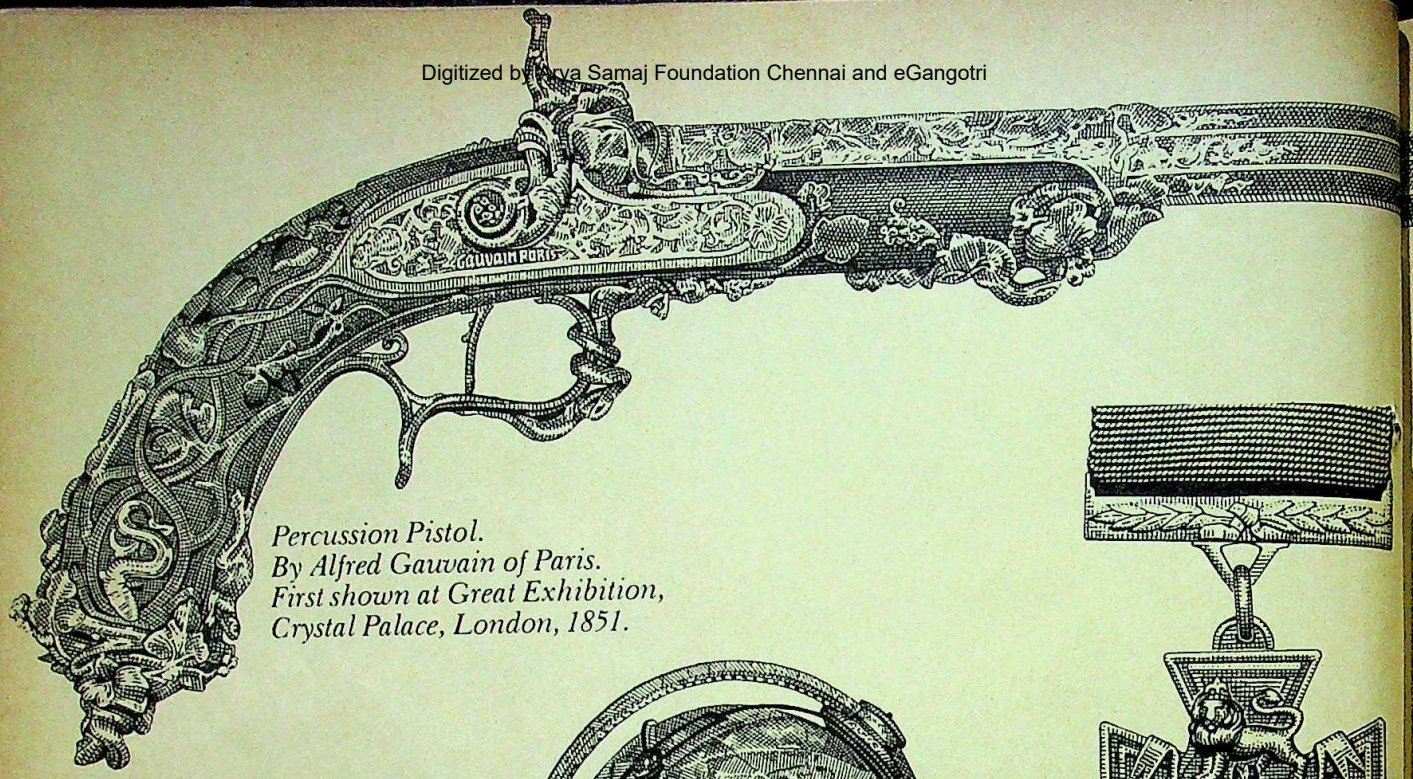
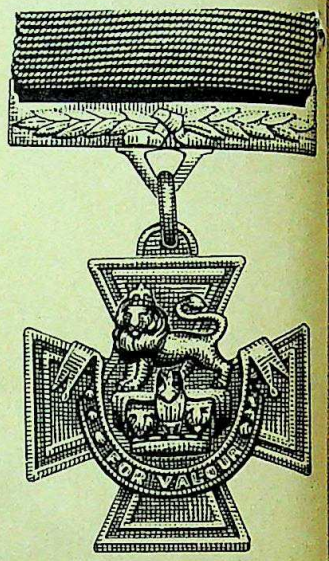


Percussion Pistol.
By Alfred Gauvain of Paris.
First shown at Great Exhibition,
Crystal Palace, London, 1851.



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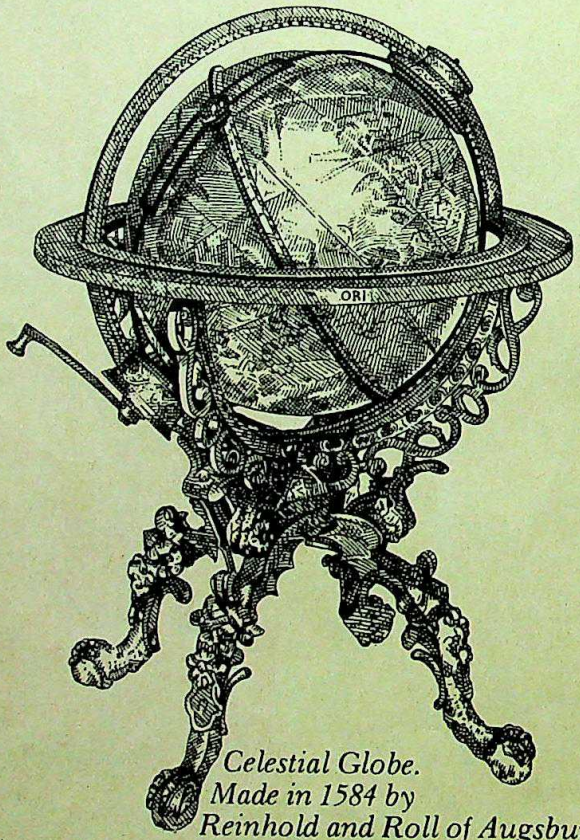
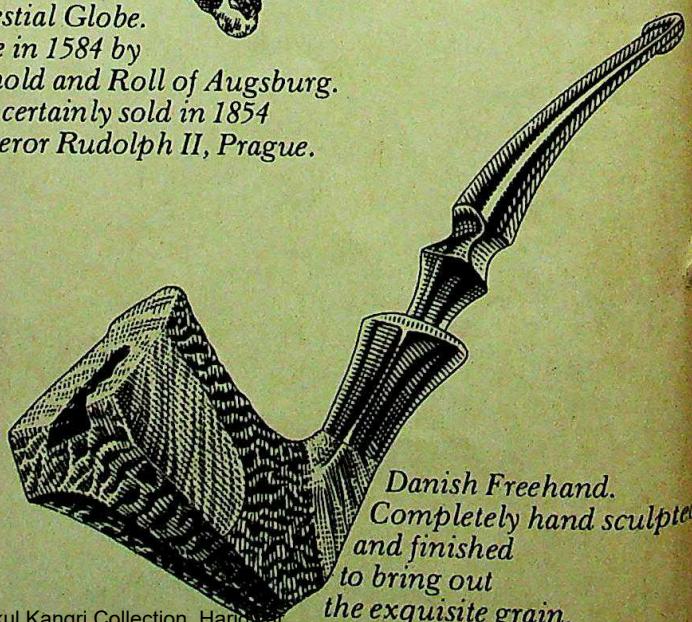


Celestial Globe.
Made in 1584 by
Reinhold and Roll of Augsburg.
Almost certainly sold in 1854
to Emperor Rudolph II, Prague.

Waterford Decanter.
Classic full lead crystal
brought to life by the breath
of a master glassmaker.



Danish Freehand.
Completely hand sculpted
and finished
to bring out
the exquisite grain.

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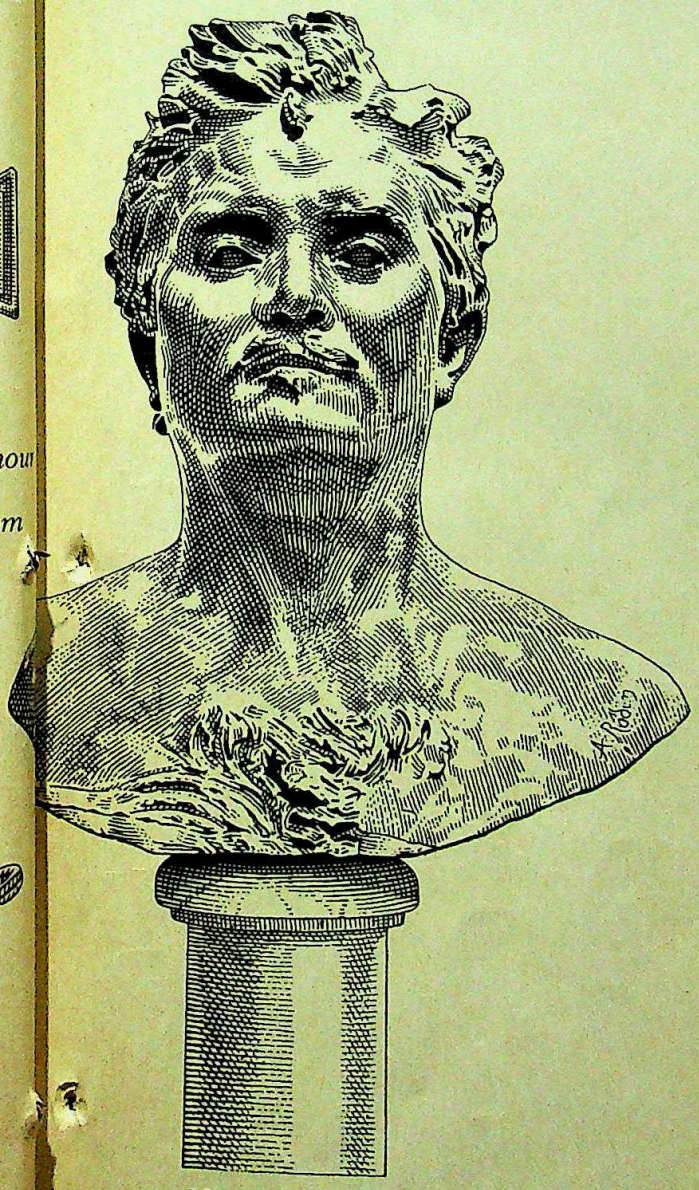

Head of Balzac.
Study in bronze by
Auguste Rodin, 1840-1917.

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reasoned a Central leader of the party.

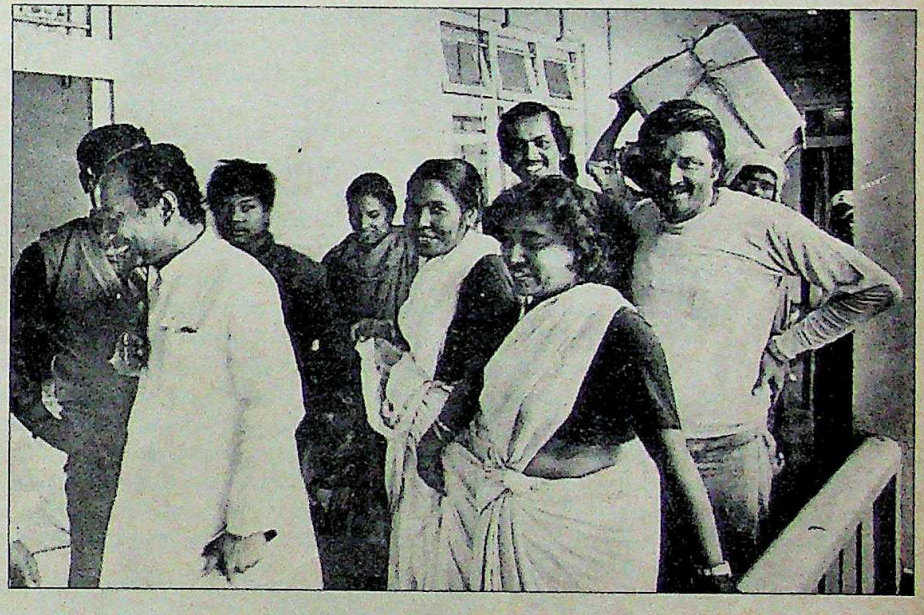
If there was anger in the Congress(I) camp, it was quickly submerged by voluminous explanations trotted out to explain the poll result. Certainly there was no dearth of foul-ups. The first lot of election posters and video cassettes arrived in Guwahati on December 7, just a week before the campaigning was to end. Worse, a lot many of these posters were in Marathi, apparently left-overs from the by-election there. Nothing shows up the party's lack of imagination better than the poster put up all over the minority areas with the question: "Even if I lose my voting right will I continue to own my property and carry out my business?" Printed across it in bold type is *"Nishchay"* (certainly). "Now is that a way to reassure the minorities? There are easier ways of committing suicide," a party leader complained bitterly.

Such short-sightedness, reflecting how far out of tune the party was in Assam, had more to do with the Congress(I)'s humiliation than any organisational hiccups. Whatever ethnic Assamese support the Congress (I) had was squandered away by A.B.A Ghani Khan Chowdhury's nonchalant dismissal of the Assam accord. In the course of his campaign in Bengali-dominated areas, he dismissed it as a "piece of paper that will never be implemented". The AGP which recorded the speech was quick to seize this initiative. Said Prafulla Mahanta in a series of election meetings all over the Brahmaputra valley: "We do believe that Rajiv Gandhi is sincere about the accord. But look at this, his minister for programme implementation says it will not be implemented. Will you still trust the Congress(I)?" Broadly the Congress(I) was unable to decide what its constituency was, the traditional *ali-coolie-bengali* (a term coined by former Congress president D.K. Barooah for the party's stronghold among the Muslims, tea labourers and Bengali immigrants) or the ethnic Assamese. Indecision cost the party votes from all.

Seeing the writing on the wall, the Congress(I) leaders grew desperate enough to invite Nar Bahadur Bhandari, the controversial Sikkim chief minister, to campaign among the Nepali-dominated areas forgetting that Hiteswar Saikia was the Congress(I) campaign chief against him at Gangtok in the December 1984 elections. Even Amitabh Bachchan, the Congress(I)'s greatest show-piece, was thrown headlong into the campaign.

But the Bachchan magic failed to work, and he faced more hostile crowds than he could possibly be used to. There were absurd episodes too. Midway through his three-day campaign there was panic as the organisers ran out of the Bisleri mineral water which he always drinks. The brand was not available in Guwahati but finally one of the hotels was able to produce a few bottles left over from the West Indies cricket team's tour.

But worse was yet to come. On the last day of his campaign, his helicopter landed by mistake in the very midst of an AGP meeting. The superstar was greeted with stones and chappals—"did you see those dents on the helicopter", he was to exclaim later—and forced to get away.



Saikia and wife moving house: graceful exit

But the drama did not end there. On taking off the pilot realised that he did not have enough room to make height at the usual angle because crowds had converged on the helipad. Nor could he land for fear of hitting people on the ground, and was left with no choice but to ask some of the passengers to jump out to reduce weight so that the chopper could fly off at a steeper angle. Bachchan's secretary Srinivasan and state Congress (I) campaign chief Bhubaneswar Kalita had to finally perform a real-life Bachchan stunt by jumping out of an airborne helicopter and face hostile crowds.

Finally, the Congress (I) aspirants' hopes were dashed by the one person they had expected would salvage some prestige for them. Rajiv Gandhi, visibly upset at the wrangling within the state unit and at the choice of candidates, acknowledged at a campaign meeting in Guwahati that many of the party candidates did not deserve nominations in the first place. Many Congress(I) old-timers strongly resented this. These remarks perhaps also prompted *The Times of India* into writing cynically that "the prime minister should realise that textbook morality does not pay in politics."

In their own way, the AGP leaders were trying to teach themselves the same lesson. Before the poll they had promised to set up an inquiry commission against Hiteswar Saikia. But afterwards they clearly did not want to repeat the mistakes of the Janata government which came a cropper hounding Mrs Gandhi. Saikia is an obdurate politician, a crafty customer who could thrive on a diet of political persecution. Said he: "Let them set up inquiry commissions. I have faced them before. I want them to give me more punishment so I could get some sympathy." Even as the new cabinet held its first meetings its leaders had a tough time persuading the hot-heads from giving up the inquiry demand. "No, there will be no inquiry commission and nothing else that shows a vindictive attitude. Saikia has already paid the price for his misdemeanours," says Home Minister BhriguPhukan. But there are hotheads who want action, Shah Commission style.

That sort of euphoria and youthful exuberance is going to be the new government's first immediate problem. It is one thing for a movement to ride a popular wave, but can a government ride it as well? "Why not, we have been doing it all along," says Telugu Desam's

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"Men who were distributing dynamite earlier were handling poll posters. From a nationalistic viewpoint is that victory or defeat?"
NARAIN DUTT TIWARI,
Union Industries Minister

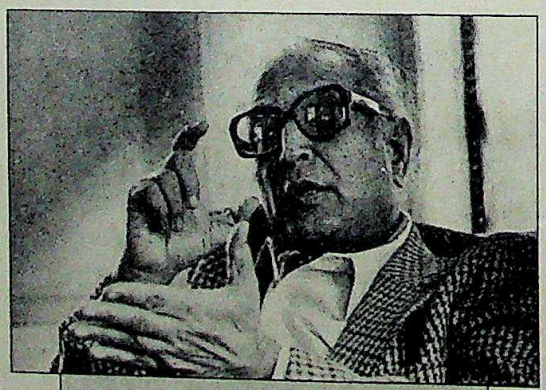
P.Upendra. But the AGP leaders say that they want to run politics much differently from NTR and would prefer to subdue passions and get down to serious governance. An indication of that resolve came last fortnight when the new cabinet members were barred from attending any public reception for a month so as to give them time to learn the ropes. Besides the party leaders were conscious of the inevitable demands that thousands involved in the agitation will now make for jobs or licences and ministers will have to be restrained from either handing out largesse or victimising those on the other side of the political fence. They do not, however, show too much worry on that score. "How long does it take to learn statecraft? Seven to ten days if we try. At least we are not a government of illiterate people," argued Atul Bora the new PWD minister.

Yet even in circles close to the AGP there is a feeling that the party suffers from administrative amateurishness. "Yes there could be a little excess of exuberance there," says former deputy inspector general of police D.K. Kakati, adding, "But democracy means a government of the amateurs and bureaucracy is what orients and guides it." On the other hand by far the greatest fears were being expressed within the bureaucracy and these were accentuated by the very first action of the new cabinet in shuffling the departments of 21 key bureaucrats, sending into cold-storage the known Congress loyalists and promoting some known movement supporters.

In the first flush of change a bit of that was perhaps inevitable. But the new leadership is conscious of the fact that the bureaucracy is the last institution it can afford to alienate. With a bureaucracy ganged up against it the AGP could hardly ever hope to tackle the serious, long-term challenges it is bound to face in months to come. None of these is as formidable as that of bridging the communal and ethnic divide which has now been formalised by the UMF.

A look at the election results (see chart) clearly indicates the kind of support the UMF was able to garner in the Muslim-dominated areas bringing about a complete communal split in the population. "Where are the great Congress leaders of the minorities, Anwara Taimur, Mohammed Idris, Sadhan Ranjan Sarkar today?" roars Osmani, bar-at-law and a one-time contributor to *The New Statesman* counting the names of the Congress (I) ministers humbled by his candidates. He adds menacingly: "The minorities will not allow this accord to be implemented by anyone from a position of power. Each clause of this accord is full of poison. It is a subversion of the Constitution to install into power a group which would not have come to power otherwise."

Osmani is too shrewd to say so clearly but his partymen say they will even launch a movement in the minority areas to prevent the implementation of the accord, making the going impossible for the fledgeling Government. And they have plenty of sentiment to play around with because even in the areas where the AGP won despite a sizeable Muslim vote, fear exists. At Nellie this is expressed chillingly in the words of Sirajuddin Ahmed, a petty shopkeeper who says, explaining why he voted for them: "You really think we could have voted for someone else? I lost my parents and four daughters in the 1983 massacre. My wife was cut up so badly she can barely move. Of course there is a lot of fear and if voting for the AGP means we will not die we will do it for the rest of our lives." But passions have not cooled on the other side as well. Said Pranay Patar, a Lalung youth at Nellie whose fellow tribesmen had spearheaded the murderous hordes in February 1983: "Yes I voted. Not once but twice. We want these foreigners out of here and that is what we are voting for."



"Muslims in Assam are like a shy horse. They want to come over to us but cannot decide right away."
ATAUR REHMAN
AGP MP from Barpeta

THE MORE mature elements in the party as well as the officials in the Union Home Ministry say they are conscious that the same fear that was translated into votes this time could be the key to irreversible break-up of Assam tomorrow. This is their greatest challenge and the party theoreticians are trying to devise ways of meeting it without seeming to be appeasing the minorities. Says Mahanta: "Those who have voted for us already belong to us. Now we have to reach out to the other Indian citizens who may have doubts about our intentions."

In this quest the AGP's approach is to tell the Muslims that in Assam Hindus and Muslims have shared an absolutely common heritage. "Look out of the window," says Ataur Rehman, a retired inspector-general of police and the new MP from Barpeta, pointing at the banks of the Brahmaputra from his hill-top house: "It was somewhere here that Bagh Hazarika, a Muslim commander joined forces with the Assamese Hindus to defeat the Mughals. We have a common heritage in Assam." But even Rehman, the party's most important Muslim functionary, admits that the communities have drifted apart: "The Muslims are like a shy horse. They want to come but cannot decide."

In the course of time, however, Rehman and his ilk will have their hands full with trouble as, along with the UMF, the Congress(I) also begins a renewed effort to win back the minorities. There is

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serious concern in the party high command which views this drift in the same perspective as the furore over the Shah Bano case and Syed Shahabuddin's victory from Kishanganj in Bihar. Assam, like Punjab is a problem sorted out by the prime minister at the cost of his own party, and he could now find the law of diminishing returns coming into play very rapidly.

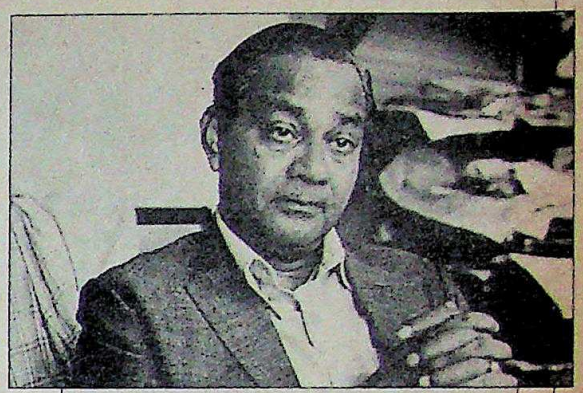
FOR THE AGP this will mean tight-rope walking on the relationship with the minorities which is the same thing as a go-slow on the implementation of the accord. Realistically speaking, the implications of the accord are mind-boggling. According to the old AASU stance Assam has at least two million infiltrators of the post-1971 stream. The agitation leaders also believe there could be over a million migrants in the 1966-71 bunch whom the accord disenfranchises. The Central Government's estimates are much lower. But numbers do not matter for even a single act of deportation in today's surcharged atmosphere could give the UMF the cause it so sorely needs.

In addition, over three million encroachers live on Assam's reserve forests and tribal belts and these include ethnic Assamese. Any effort to remove them could lead to mass violence. "The AGP will have serious problems implementing this document which is in fact an apple of discord," says D.K.Barooah, former Congress president and now a defeated Lok Sabha candidate in Nowgong. Even in party circles there is a realisation that the best policy is to forget about the accord for the time being. But can they afford to do that when it is part of their mandate?

This question brings into play the question of the AGP's relationship with the AASU which has mothered the new party besides providing it with its most committed cadres in this election. A go-slow on the accord will upset the hot-heads in the AASU spelling trouble. Says Kartik Hazarika, its new president: "We will keep the strictest watch on the government. In case it does not implement the accord we will even launch a movement against it." Despite their close relationship therefore, the AGP cannot afford to take the AASU for granted. The AASU leaders repeatedly emphasise that they are an independent organisation and not to the "AGP what the ABVP is to the BJP and the NSUI is to Congress(I)". In a few months the AASU may begin to ask searching questions particularly on the implementation of the accord. "This will be a difficult situation. It is difficult to govern people who have made themselves governable," says Dev Kant Barooah, summing up the newly elected party's compulsion to deal impartially now with the very forces that constitute its power base.

But this communal and ethnic divide, an empty treasury and a demoralised bureaucracy is the legacy the AGP has inherited. As one leader confessed: "Once excitement subsides we will realise that the real battle has only begun." If Saikia had the problem of finding legitimacy in ethnic Assamese areas, AGP has a similar problem in the minority pockets of Goalpara, Dhubri and the Barak Valley districts of Cachar and Karimganj.

Also, while the party leaders learn the ropes politically and administratively they will also have to find their bearings on the national scene. An overwhelming opinion in the party seems to be against a confrontation with the Centre but its seven-member team in Parliament will sit with the Opposition, the third largest group in its ranks. It is significant that, while maintaining a close relationship with Telugu Desam, the AGP has been shying from the Bharat Desam concept to bring together regional parties. "Tell me, is Bharat Desam a regional party?" asks veteran MP Dinesh Goswami. Mahanta has been talking in terms of a regional party with a national outlook but that is neither here nor there. Within Assam there are strong regionalistic pressures.



"This nice young prime minister who wants to do good to everyone is destroying his party in its 100th year."

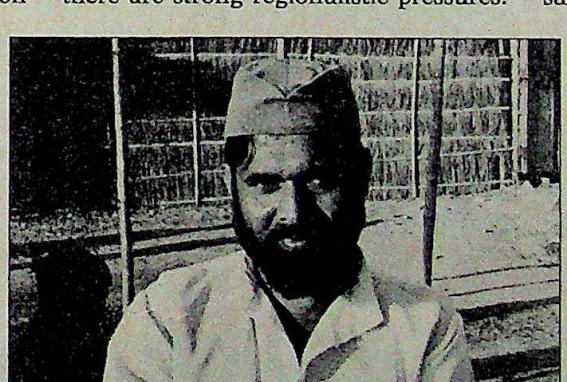
A.F. GOLAM OSMANI
president of United Minorities Front

"What is wrong with our having a regional party? If it is okay to be an Andhra in Andhra Pradesh and a Tamil in Tamil Nadu what is wrong with being an Assamese in Assam?" questions Indrajit Barua, a Guwahati engineer.

This is where the catch lies. Six years of agitation, destruction, the devastation of 1983 poll and now the communal polarisation in the election have almost redefined the word Assamese as an Assamese caste Hindu who also happens to be the mainstay of the AGP. But any party wanting to do even half a job of ruling a multi-lingual state with a history of recurrent violence cannot afford to have just about 30 to 40 per cent of the population on its side. To survive in power and to fulfil some of the aspirations that drove nearly 80 per cent of the voters in Assam, an all-time national record, the AGP's first priority will have to be to broadbase itself, to win the confidence of those who did not vote for it. "People have taken a great risk and if we fail it will be a colossal let-down," says MP Dinesh Goswami.

The coming months will prove whether the AGP was worthy of that trust. Though now perched atop lofty political heights the student leaders will need to show results quickly; bring together a fragmented society, restore order and resume economic activity, a stiff test for a bunch of men and women with an average age of less than 31.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Guwahati



"Of course there is fear among us. If voting for the AGP means that we will not die, we will do so for the rest of our lives."

SIRAJUDDIN AHMED
Nellie shopkeeper

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BY-ELECTIONS

Congress(I) Woes

EVEN as north India shuddered through a series of cold waves last month, a chill seemed to have struck the Congress(I). The news from Assam was bad enough: what added to the gloom were the results to the by-elections to seven Lok Sabha seats and nine assembly seats. Not only did the Congress (I) lose in three parliamentary and five assembly seats, with the sole exception of Churu in Rajasthan and Madhepura in Bihar its voting percentage plummeted in all the seats it contested. Without exception, its victory margins in the four Lok Sabha seats and the two assembly seats were lower than the last time around, while the margins of defeat were invariably higher.

The contrast with last December's verdict could not have been more stark. Then, the Congress (I) had won more than 80 per cent of the seats it contested and nearly 50 per cent of the votes polled. This time it got a majority of the votes polled only in Churu, with the fall in the voting percentage ranging from a high of 28 per cent in Banka to the lowest of 5 per cent in Bolpur. Even in South Delhi its voting percentage fell by almost 7 per cent.

Nor was the decline sudden. The trend was noticed as early as March and April when elections to the state Assembly were held in 11 states followed by by-elections in three Lok Sabha and 22 assembly seats. In the Assembly poll, the party won a quarter less seats compared to the Assembly segments it had led in December 1984 with its share of the popular vote falling in every state apart from Gujarat. And in the by-elections it won only one of the three Lok Sabha seats and seven of the assembly seats.

Opposition leaders were elated. Said Bharatiya Janata Party leader Atal Behari Vajpayee: "If the March results were a warning, these results are final proof that the myth of Rajiv's popularity has finally been exploded. What is most surprising is the speed of the decline: even the Janata Party's popularity had not declined so rapidly." Added Janata Party leader Chandra Shekhar: "This is bad news. If their popularity continues to decline, I am afraid they might decide to close their democratic options."

What was disturbing for the Congress(I) was the evidence of a growing alienation between itself and its vote banks. In the last general elections—admittedly a battle fought in unique conditions—the party had not only got the support of its traditional vote banks—the Muslims and the Harijans—but also the votes of the majority Hindu community. The support of the Hindus held through in the Punjab elections in September but last month's by-elections suggest that it has lost a great deal of ground not only among the Hindus in Punjab but also among the Muslims and Scheduled Castes in most other areas. Admitted former Bihar chief minister Jagannath Mishra: "The results definitely show an erosion in the party's traditional bases—Muslims, Brahmins and weaker sections."

The BJP wrested both the Jalandhar North and Central seats, both Hindu-dominated areas, from the Congress (I). The Janata Party General Secretary, Syed Shahabuddin, trounced the Congress (I)'s Maulana Israrul Haque Quasmi in the Kishanganj constituency in Bihar which has a 60 per cent Muslim vote. In Bijnore, which has a 30 per cent Muslim and 20 per cent Harijan electorate, Jagjivan Ram's daughter, Meera Kumar, contesting on the Congress (I) ticket barely scraped home with 6,000-odd votes. And the little known Mayawati of the Bahujan Samaj Party, which speaks exclusively for the Harijans, took away a healthy chunk of 61,000 votes.

The reasons for this alienation were not hard to seek. Admitted Shahabuddin: "Though I kept my campaign very secular—not even mentioning the word Shah Bano once in my speeches—there is no denying the unease in the Muslim mind about the Centre's ambivalence regarding the Shah Bano case and the unfair deal given to the minorities in Assam gave me a solid base of support." Said Vajpayee: "There is no denying that the Hindu in Punjab is very unhappy. Our votes reflect this."

The poor results cast a shadow over a host of Congress(I) chief ministers who virtually staked their personal reputation in the electoral contests. Topping this list was Janaki Ballabh Patnaik of Orissa, who virtually contested the Kendrapara Lok Sabha seat through his

WINNERS

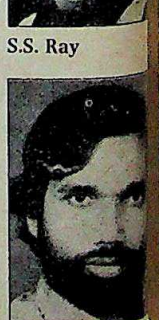
Shahabuddin

Meera Kumar

S. Chatterjee

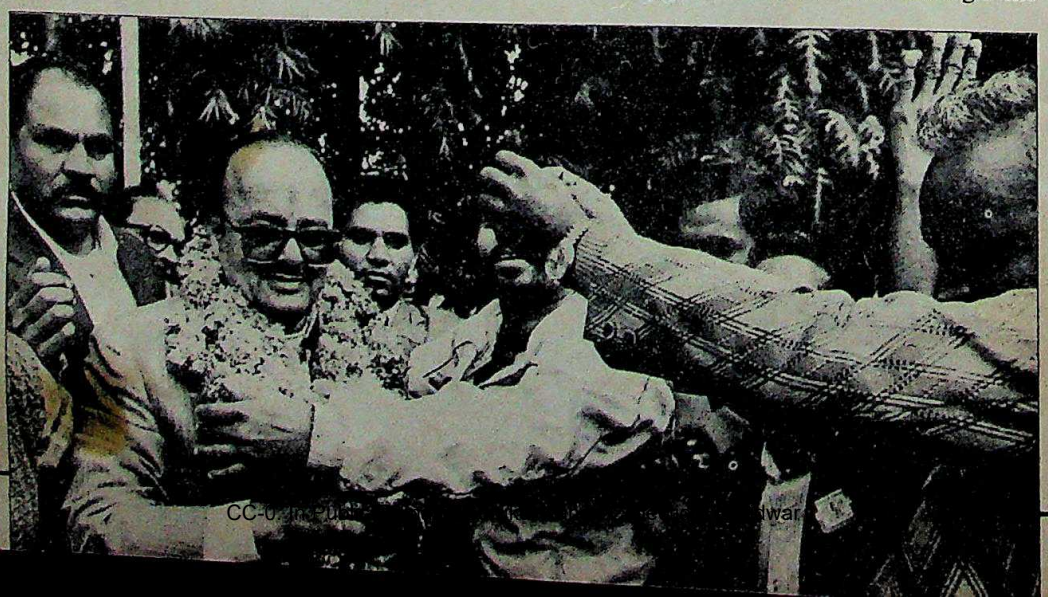
LOSERS

S.S. Ray



B.K. Paswan

B.K. Biswal



Arjun Singh after the victory

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nominee, Basanta Kumar Biswal, only to be convincingly beaten by the Janata Party's Sarat Chandra Deb. The seat had been vacated by Biju Patnaik, who had won by a margin of 16,000 votes: Deb triumphed by two-and-a-half times the margin.

For the chief minister, this defeat represented his fourth straight loss in by-elections. In April, the Congress (I) had lost three Assembly by-elections, including one seat that had been vacated by J.B.Patnaik himself. He tried to rationalise the defeat by arguing that it was "normal" for a ruling party to lose a by-election. He also said that this was a "sympathy vote" for the Opposition, so as not to deny the only seat out of 21 from Orissa that does not belong to the Congress (I).

There were the inevitable allegations of sabotage. The reference was to supporters of the state party chief, Nityananda Mishra, who are known to be unhappy with both the chief minister and Biswal, though Biswal would only say: " I am a disciplined Congressman and I do not want to say anything." But for Biju Patnaik, the ballot-box's message was clear: "The people have shown J.B.Patnaik and his crony the exit gate but he has got stuck up there."

J.B.Patnaik had the consolation, however, that he was not lacking in company. Gujarat Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary and his Maharashtra counterpart, Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar, were embarrassed by the party's losses in Sayajigunj and Shingnapur. In the former, which is part of the Baroda parliamentary constituency, the party ticket had been allotted to Dr Chandrika Purohit, with the full backing of Chaudhary, though former finance minister Sanat Mehta, who also belongs to Baroda, might have been a more formidable candidate. But former Baroda police commissioner Jaspal Singh, who contested as an independent, left her way behind to win by 8,365 votes.

An independent also proved to be the nemesis for Nilangekar. Shingnapur falls in Parbhani district in the Marathwada region, which is where Nilangekar comes from. The Congress (I) candidate here was Raosaheb Jamkar, a former minister, who is considered close not only to Nilangekar but also to the ex-chief minister Vasantrao Patil. Ranged against him were a rebel Congress (I) candidate, Suresh Varpudkar, and Uttamrao Gavali of the Congress (S). Nilangekar left no stone unturned to retain the seat—even sowing confusion among Congress (S) ranks by charging that party leader Sharad Pawar was all set to join the Congress (I)—but still his candidate finished third, after Varpudkar and Gavali. The defeat was the signal for Nilangekar's detractors within the party to hoist the flag of dissent. One powerful Marathwada MP, who had previously led campaigns to dislodge Babasaheb Bhosale and Patil, openly asked how proper it was for Nilangekar to continue as the chief minister when he wasn't even a member of the Assembly (he was elected to the council).

For Bindeshwari Dubey, the results in Bihar—one Lok Sabha and one assembly seat lost, one each won—came as so much of a shock that he refused to comment on them. His track record is only slightly better than J.B.Patnaik. In April, the party had lost in two of the three assembly by-elections. This time around the party lost the Kishanganj Lok Sabha seat because of the disenchantment among Muslims even though Dubey had spared no effort to defeat Shahabuddin. Not only had he attacked Shahabuddin personally from every platfrom, on the day of the polling there were as many as 18 state ministers present in Kishanganj. The party also lost Kishunpur (in Saharsa district) to the Lok Dal.

It took Madhepura to retrieve some of the lost prestige, but here the credit went more to Congress (I) MP, Satyendra Narain Sinha, than the chief minister: the party candidate is known to be a close follower of the veteran Sinha. It also triumphed in Banka, where former chief minister Chandrashekhar Singh was up against George Fernandes, but Singh's margin was greatly reduced. While the BJP's Janardhan Yadav took away 70,000 votes, Fernandes' ire was reserved for the Bihar administration, which was accused of posting officers convenient to Singh on the eve of the poll. As expected, the indifferent result only sharpened the factional quarrels within the party. Said Kamal Nath Singh Thakur, MLC and known Mishra's alter ego: "It is high time the high command assessed the mood of the people and gave the state a popular leader to run its affairs."

Veteran Siddhartha Shankar Ray's defeat in Bholpur at the hands of the Marxist Somnath Chatterjee was doubly embarrassing. By fielding a high-profile candidate like Ray, the party had upped the ante in a traditionally Marxist seat and Ray's campaign, virtually a referendum on Left Front rule, elevated it to more than a simple by-election. In the event, Ray's

DECLINING FORTUNES

Percentage of Congress(I) vote in By-elections

LOK SABHA

	December 1984	March 1985	December 1985	Swing: '85 over '84
BANKA	64.08	53.80	43.85	– 20.23
KISHANGANJ	44.19	39.11	36.15	– 8.04
SOUTH DELHI	61.70	n.a.	54.81	– 6.89
KENDRAPARRA	50.14	49.50	44.17	– 5.97
CHURU	51.28	40.92	54.10	+ 2.82
BIJNOR	56.78	8.80	37.10	– 19.68
BOLPUR	44.53	n.a.	39.52	– 5.01

(The March 1985 percentages are the total of the assembly segments in that Lok Sabha constituency as polled in the Assembly elections; n.a. = not applicable as no election was held.)

ASSEMBLY

	December 1984	March 1985	December 1985	Swing: '85 over '84
BIHAR				
Kishunpur	41.43	39.80	33.00	– 8.43
Madhepura	47.41	39.53	51.79	+ 4.38
MAHARASHTRA				
Singnapur	57.98	54.82	24.50	– 33.48
GUJARAT				
Sayajigunj	53.45	63.64	35.61	+ 17.84
PUNJAB				
Jalandhar North	n.a.	66.26*	39.59	– 26.67
Jalandhar South	n.a.	47.72*	35.40	– 12.32
WEST BENGAL				
Nanur	45.92	n.a.	43.16	– 10.54
NEW DELHI				
Laxmibai Nagar	68.28	n.a.	51.64	– 16.64

(The December 1984 column refers to votes polled in that assembly segment during the Lok Sabha poll; n.a. = not applicable since no election was held;
*Punjab comparison is with September 1985 election. The details of the Cheyyar by-election in Tamil Nadu and Aurangabad in West Bengal were not available.)

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SAYAJIGANJ

Poll Upset

FORMER police commissioner of Baroda Jaspal Singh's victory in the Sayajigunj assembly by-elections last fortnight was a result as much of his own popularity as the chaos in the Congress(I) camp. The ruling party's organisational setup, manned by two of Solanki's lieutenants Mahant Vijaydasji and Hasmukh Patel, was unable to whip up an effective campaign. Worse still was the choice of a candidate. Hoping that sentiments would play a part, the party fielded Dr Chandrika Purohit, wife of the late Shirish Purohit, the party whip, whose death resulted in the by-election. The choice came as a big disappointment to party workers.

Jaspal Singh

Singh's victory in Gujarat assumes significance because Sayajigunj has always been a Congress(I) stronghold. Barring the victory of Janata front nominee Gajanan Paradkar in 1975, the Congress always reigned supreme. The defeat of the Congress has been blamed on the negative vote by the poor. On one hand, traditional vote banks like Harijans and Muslims did not turn up at the polling booths in expected numbers because of doubts over the state Government's commitment to reservations for backward classes and apprehensions whipped up in the wake of the Shah Bano case. Significantly, Singh, who polled 31,274 votes compared with Purohit's 22,909, secured more votes in backward areas of Navayard and Tandilja.

Singh had emerged as a controversial figure after he was transferred from Baroda city to Gandhinagar as DIG (Computers), an administrative job. The Solanki administration didn't—understandably—take kindly to his open criticism of its policies while he was in service. But by then he had become something of a public hero. His transfer triggered off communal riots as it was believed that a delegation of Muslims in Baroda had asked for his transfer suspecting that he was igniting communal feelings. The Hindus felt that they must demand for his continuation as police commissioner. He then sought voluntary retirement from service and contested the last Lok Sabha election from Baroda on a BJP ticket, which he lost.

But Singh wasn't a man to give up easily. He filed his nomination in Raopura from where BJP state party president Makrand Desai was contesting. The BJP was not amused and expelled him. Singh contested as an independent—and lost. His perseverance has now paid off. Singh ascribes his victory to the electorate's desire for action and their disgust with petty politics. "The people expect me to represent the new culture of upholding values and fighting corruption. I have been getting letters from all corners of the state telling me that they expect me to set things right. Their expectations scare me, but I will not fail them now," he says.

Singh—always the showman—is now planning to lead a rally of over a lakh of Baroda citizens demanding elections to the city municipal corporation which would have taken place in February '86, but the corporation has postponed it for a year. Singh alleges that this is because they do not have the confidence to face the electorate. One of his foremost tasks, he says, is to save the city from pollution and improve civic facilities. "I am going to wage a war with the corporation and make all officials accountable," he says. And Baroda's citizens are eagerly looking out for some fireworks in the Assembly now hoping that the otherwise tamed opposition in Gujarat will get some long needed thrust.

True to his style, Jaspal's campaigning caught the imagination of the voters. He is a fast learner and met as many people as he could personally. He took time off to be with those who live in jhuggi jhopadis, sitting down to listen to them as no other candidate had ever done in the past. "The misery and the poverty that I have seen in the last few weeks among my supporters has taught me much," he says. His switch from a policeman to a politician has obviously been quick and effortless.

—RAMESH MENON

margin of defeat was nearly 40,000 votes more than the party's loss in the December election, and put paid to the Congress(I)'s strategy of projecting an alternative to the charismatic Jyoti Basu.

Ray's loss was also a jolt to the new state party chief, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, who faces powerful detractors within the party. Das Munshi tried to explain away the defeat as a victory for the CPI(M)'s capacity to organise votes, but the state CPI(M) secretary Saroj Mukherjee was quite clear in his mind about the result: "This is a positive vote for the good work done by the Left Front."

For the Congress (I) the silver lining was provided by Churu, where its fresh-faced 31-year-old candidate, Narendra Bhudania, a mere village sarpanch, convincingly trounced the veteran Jat leader, Daulat Ram Saran of the Lok Dal, who had won this seat twice in the past. This was the one seat that the Opposition was most sanguine about winning. Saran's defeat left them nonplussed. Lok Dal leaders accused the Congress (I) of rigging the poll but the message was fairly clear: the voters preferred a young Jat with a clean image to a tired old warhorse.

Set-backs in by-elections are normal after the kind of massive victories witnessed in 1984, 1980 and 1977. But the Congress(I) has slipped rather more than it expected. But there seems to be little reason for the kind of euphoria that has erupted in opposition ranks which see in these by-election results the beginning of the end of the ruling party's fortunes. Said Lok Dal leader Karpoori Thakur: "The people can no longer be taken for a ride. This is the beginning of the people's revolt against Congress (I) misrule." Adds Vajpayee: "The poor everywhere are showing their disillsionment. Even in Delhi we got more votes than the Congress (I) in areas where the poor are in an overwhelming majority." They expect that the Congress (I) will now take some ameliorative measures—particularly to assuage the Muslims, whose conceived threat to the Shariat comes on top of the community's feeling of discrimination on government jobs—but feel that the party's image as anti-poor is too indelible to erase. Says Chandra Shekhar: "The image has stuck to Rajiv that he has no sympathy for the poor." Opposition leaders might be guilty of overstating the case but it would be disastrous for the Congress(I) were it to satisfy itself with Patnaik's reasoning that ruling parties always lose by-elections. Perhaps, but not so badly.

—AJAY KUMAR with FARZAND AHMED

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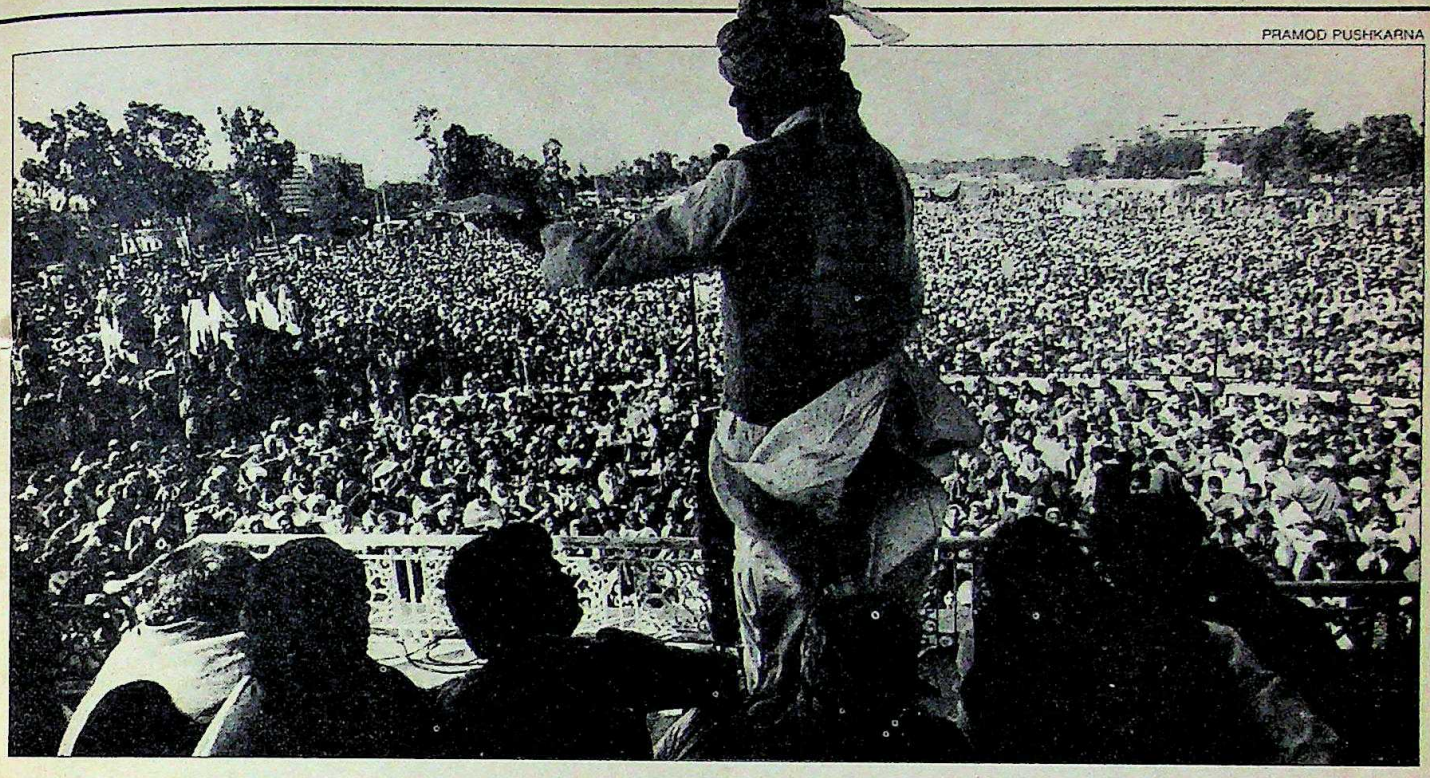
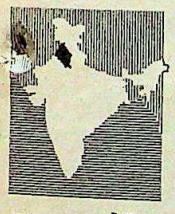

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Devi Lal addressing rally: new rhetoric

PUNJAB & HARYANA

Discord over the Accord



STRAINS are beginning to manifest themselves in the implementation of the Punjab accord and the question increasingly doing the rounds in the corridors of power in Haryana and Punjab is whether the "memorandum of settlement" will be implemented in the spirit with which it was drawn up.

The ball was set rolling by none other than Lok Dal leader and former chief minister Devi Lal, who led a massive demonstration to Parliament last fortnight. And joining him were supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Janata—no matter that they had been perhaps the first to welcome the accord—who lent their support to what Lal called "a march to get justice." Warned the fiery Haryana leader: "If we do not get our share of waters and Hindi-speaking villages in lieu of Chandigarh by January 15, 1986, we shall bring to a halt all movement on road or rail."

That the Haryana Government had thrown its weight behind the marchers was evident in the orders issued to the district administrations to arrange vehicles to ferry the demonstrators to Delhi. And Chief Minister Bhajan Lal's denials only lent credence to Punjab Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala's charge that it was a government march. But the Lok Dal and Janata leaders asserted that the tremendous response was a result of the peoples' anger. "The Government tried its best to stop the march at Bahadurgarh but failed. The Centre must understand the anger of the people of Haryana," said Balwant Rao Tayal, former Janata minister who was arrested in Delhi.

Police controlling demonstrators: emerging conflict

The march also made it clear that Bhajan Lal had gone back on his earlier stand that a few villages here and there meant nothing. Said the wily Jat: "My government and the people of Haryana will not honour any decision taken on the basis of the accord, even if the Mathew Commission gives the Hindi-speaking areas of Abohar and Fazilka to Haryana, until prompt steps are taken to complete the Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal that will give Haryana its share of surplus waters." Much the same was stated in New Delhi after a meeting with the prime minister—obviously, Lal was intent on stoking the fires for all it was worth.

But his rhetoric had had its effect. Senior Akali leaders like Balwant Singh made repeated trips to Delhi to voice their concern to the Union Commerce Minister Arjun Singh and the

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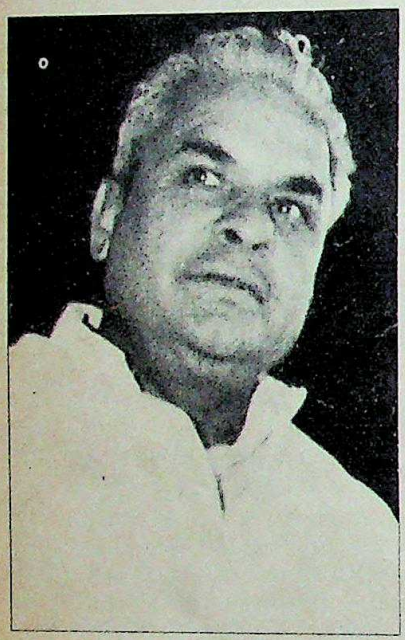
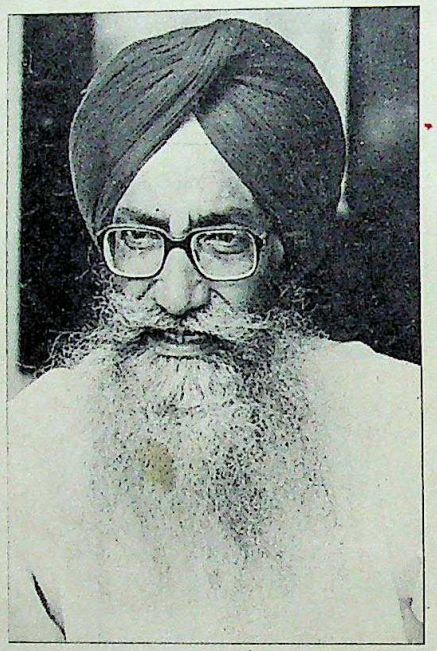
Minister of State for Internal Security Arun Nehru about the implications of Bhajan Lal's stand. And Barnala categorically told INDIA TODAY: "The accord is explicit. Chandigarh is to be transferred to Punjab by January 26 and the canal is to be completed by August 15. Work on the canal is in progress and there is only a minor dispute over the realignment of a small section of the canal. We are confident that this will be done in the stipulated time."





Bhajan Lal (left); and Surjit Singh Barnala: tug-of-war

His apparent confidence only underscored the apprehensions in the Akali camp. Both Barnala and Balwant Singh fear delay and have pointed out that loss of Abohar and Fazilka would mean a serious loss of face for them. Said Barnala: "If the accord is sabotaged and the prime minster, as one of the signatories, fails to get it implemented in letter and spirit, we shall not be able to govern the state."

What has the Akalis really worried is the prime minsiter's failure to amend a clause in the terms of reference of the commission while publicily admitting it to be an oversight. Clause 7.2 of the accord directed the commission to strictly adhere to the twin principles of contiguity and linguistic affinity in deciding the boundary question. But there was a vague "other factors" clause upon which Haryana has rested its claims to Abohar and Fazilka.

Justice K.K.Mathew's term, which was to have ended on December 31, 1985, has now been extended till January 15 pending a solution, but nothing is in sight. His suggestion that the Centre should send fresh enumerators to Abohar and Fazilka, has met with opposition. Intelligence Bureau (IB) teams sent by Union Home Minister S.B.Chavan to study the feasibility of holding a fresh census in Abohar and Fazilka have warned of the situation taking a communal turn. "This mini-census will create an explosive situation. The life of enumerators will be under constant threat and the findings would be disputed by the aggrieved state. It could be simple disaster in an atmosphere already surcharged with tension," the IB report says. The fear is that the head-counting may turn into a head hunt with Hindus and Sikhs on opposite sides. Moreover, since the enumerators will be from Punjab—as per census operation practices—the result might not be acceptable to Haryana.

More important, the census commissioner had made amply clear to the Centre that the doubts expressed by the Haryana Government—which termed the 1981 census as coloured—were unwarranted and unethical. Haryana feels that the census showed more than 85 per cent of the people as Punjabi-speaking, which is "incorrect". But the census commissioner felt otherwise. "The 1981 census was conducted under normal circumstances and a fresh census would be nothing but a mockery of the system itself," the commission representatives told the Union Home Ministry. With so much at stake, there is a suggestion from the Centre that the aggrieved parties in the territorial dispute sort things out across the table but the snag is nobody is sure if the spirit of give and take exists.

Last fortnight, Union Home Secretary R.D.Pradhan flew into Chandigarh to assure Barnala that the prime minister was keen that the accord be implemented in the time frame envisaged. And in fact for the Akalis, the prime minister is their only hope. "Whenever we have met him, we have come back with the hope that we shall get justice," said Barnala. But others, like SGPC President Gurcharan Singh Tohra, think differently. "Bhajan Lal has no courage to speak a word unless his bosses in Delhi tell him to do so. I fear mischief at the Central level and that is very sad," he says and warned that the prime minister must get the accord implemented if confrontation is to be avoided. His opinions are shared by many. Said Akali MP Shaminder Singh: "I have discovered in Delhi that all are keen to help Haryana and we have no sympathetic ear." Fortunately, matters seemed to clear when Balwant met Rajiv Gandhi and Arun Nehru in Delhi. "The accord will be implemented as scheduled," he said confidently. He added that he had told the prime minister that Bhajan Lal should identify three dozen villages contiguous to Haryana in Patiala district. Earlier the Akalis had offered only 13 villages.

What really stands in Barnala's favour is the fact that he is the first Akali chief minister to head both the Government and the organisation wing of the party. Previous chief ministers Prakash Singh Badal and Gurnam Singh had to function under overbearing party presidents but Barnala was elected unopposed as head of the party. With an unprecedented authorisation from the delegates, he is now finalising his 31-member working committee and expanding his six-member cabinet.

But law and order is taking up much of his time. A Hindu-Sikh clash was averted by timely police intervention in Gurdaspur district after a violent group of Shiv Sena workers pelted stones at some petty Sikh shopkeepers near a temple. Police had to fire killing one and injuring a dozen others. "We had to resort to firing to scare away the warring communities after lathi charge and tear-gassing failed," said district police chief J.P.Birdi. "But for our intervention, the town would have witnessed unimaginable bloodshed." More was to come. Terrorists led by a dismissed police constable Balwinder Singh, who were in-

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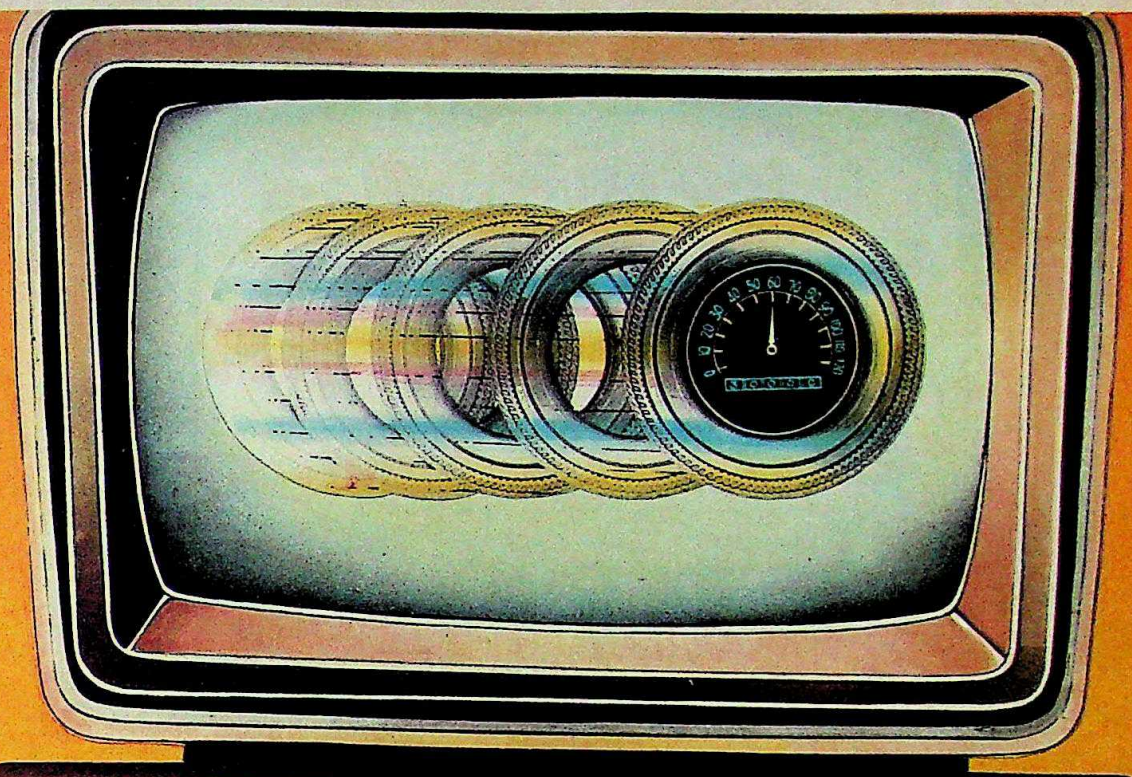

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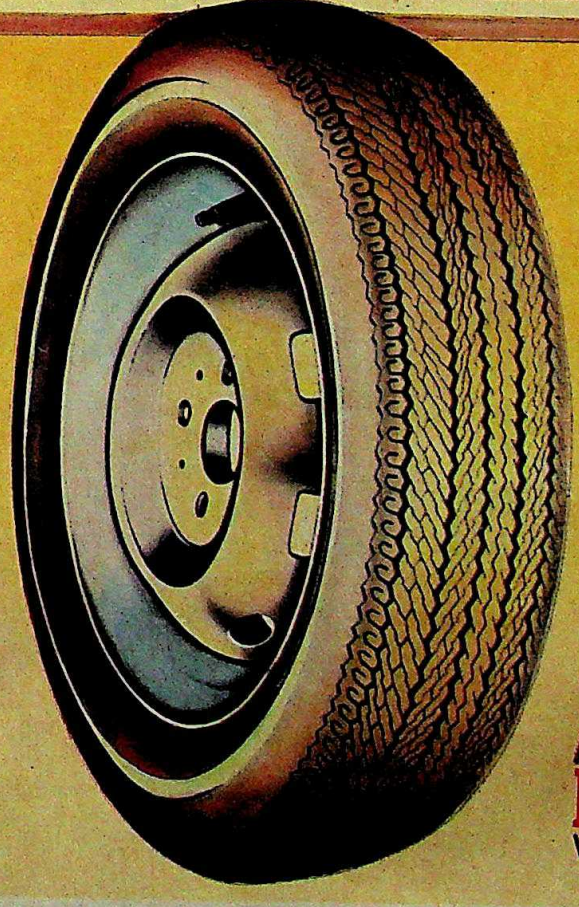

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volved in the killing of Hiralal—a businessman of Barnala—were trapped by the Barnala police. While Balwinder Singh was captured, another terrorist Jagtar Singh was killed in the shoot out. On December 20 a three-member gang looted a branch of the State Bank of Patiala in a Bhatinda village. An alert police inspector Jhanda Singh chased them and killed gang leader Gurcharan Singh in an exchange of fire. Two others—one of them the son of an executive magistrate of Bhatinda—were arrested.

But these successes were meager compared to the extent of terrorist activities throughout the length and breadth of Punjab. In Amritsar, Ludhiana and Hoshiarpur, terrorists struck at chosen targets looting banks and robbing bus passengers and seriously injuring BJP leader Hardial in Dasuya in Hoshiarpur. More worrying to the state police is the frequent crossings of terrorists from Pakistan into Punjab—no less than seven such groups have infiltrated into the state and intelligence reports and interrogation of some of those captured indicate that though they are operating independently of each other, their aim is the same—create panic and incite communal violence. "We have definite information of Pakistan training Sikh terrorists and have used this information to nab at least three terrorists," claims Amritsar Police chief S.S.Virk.

For the politicians, however, empty posturing and sabre-rattling provides all the histrionic appeal they could ever ask for—no matter that the future of the Punjab accord and all that it implies stands in increasing danger of being annuled.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

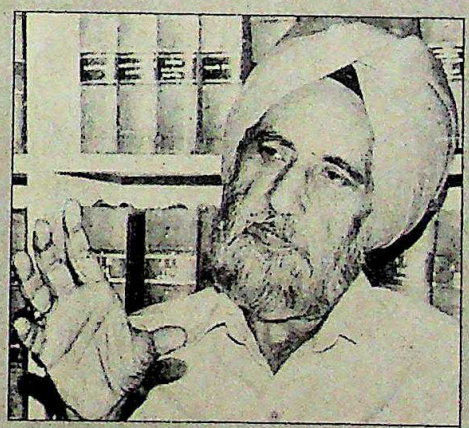
BAINS COMMITTEE

Lack of Action

TO RELEASE or not to release—that is the Hamlet-like dilemma facing Punjab Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala. On the one hand is the promise that he and his party made to the electorate three months ago, to release all persons detained during the Akali agitation against whom there are no serious charges or insufficient evidence of wrongdoing. On the other hand is the objection voiced by the prime minister to "indiscriminate releases" and the subsequent stand of the state police opposing any large-scale release of detenus. To make things worse, a confrontation has developed between the police and retired high court judge Ajit Singh Bains who headed the four-man committee appointed by the state Government to review the detenus' cases.

The appointment of the committee was to be expected after the Akalis charged before and during the election that "innocent persons, particularly youth, were arrested on false charges by the police which ran berserk killing scores of people in false encounters". The committee was set up on October 1, and initially given a month, and later six months more, to go into 2,170 cases involving over 4,120 persons. The state police never hid their unhappiness with the committee. Eventually, says Bains, he managed to screen 80 per cent of the cases but as even he admitted: "We had hurdles all the way. The police took its own time and did not put forward all the cases."

The police attitude disappointed and distressed Bains. His committee had recommended the release of over 2,000 persons in October itself but so far the Government has released only 992 of them. The police admit the niggardly pace of releases and add, that the number of detenus actually released is even less—in fact, only 26. As Inspector-General of Police (Crime) Hardyal Singh Sekhon says, 833 of the 992 persons recommended for release were already out on bail. Only 26 were actually released and the remaining 33 are still behind bars in connection with cases other than those registered during the Akali agitation.



Justice Bains: disappointed

For Bains, the unkindest cut of all was the appointment of a police committee to screen the recommendations of the Bains Committee. "It is the police which launched false cases, maimed or killed scores of people and now it is to be the judge to screen our recommendations... and ask the committee to furnish evidence for the recommendations," Bains protested to Barnala. Bains wondered why this step was necessary when the "prosecution admits that it has no evidence to support in court the cases which have been pending for years."

Bains believes that 99 per cent of the police encounter cases are "bogus". "Having failed to catch the real culprits, the police, more often than not, involved innocent persons in encounters. This state terrorism which had the backing of the rulers of that time complicated the already complex situation in Punjab," Bains observed. A police spokesman promptly joined issue saying: "The committee is obviously labouring under the misconception that it is an executive body. It is not. It is just an advisory panel whose recommendations we are reviewing." To which, Bains retorted: "I have not recommended the case of every Tom, Dick and Harry."

This slanging match between Bains and the police is hurting the image of the Barnala Government and adds grist to the extremist mill. "This is a bogus government; it does not accept the recommendations of its own committee," snorted H.S.Kahlon, convenor of the militant All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF) which has threatened an agitation on this issue. Barnala has not only to counteract such propaganda but also convince his Sikh constituents in Punjab of his sincerity to carry out his poll promise while at the same time carry assurance with the Central Government that the releases are not indiscriminate. "We are aware of the grim reality and know our responsibility," he had said in reply to Rajiv Gandhi's charge of indiscriminate releases. His dilemma admits of no easy solutions and how he resolves it will be watched with interest.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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MADHYA PRADESH

Ending An Inquiry

THE MEMORY of that night still haunts. But the average Bhopali is struggling hard to salvage what he can from the disaster of the Union Carbide gas tragedy. For most people that now means a seemingly unending wait for compensation for the loss and suffering. Nothing else seems to matter much. So when the state Government last month announced its decision to close the judicial inquiry into the tragedy, there was not even a whimper of protest.

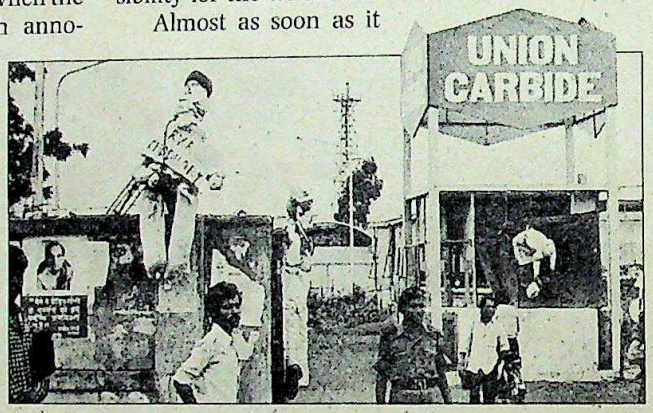
In fact most of the victims were not even aware that the Government had begun an inquiry into the affair in the first place. And it was precisely this ignorance and indifference that the Government turned to its advantage in taking this decision. As Chief Minister Moti Lal Vora said: "The decision will help the people who were affected by the gas." The implication was clear: that the victims would be better off getting money rather than fretting about the causes behind the tragedy.

However, a senior state government official who did not wish to be named, said the decision had been taken at the instance of the Government of India's lawyers in USA since they felt that the inquiry's findings might affect the compensation claim of $500 million made on behalf of the victims.

If the N.K. Singh Commission, which was entrusted with the probe on December 6, 1984, eventually established that the Madhya Pradesh Government, the Union Government and Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) all shared the blame equally, Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) might have got away with less compensation. In fact, Union Minister of State for Law and Justice H.R. Bhardwaj even suggested that the probe had been withdrawn because "information submitted there was reaching the Union Carbide Corporation in America".

Vora, however, denied that the probe had been withdrawn under pressure from the lawyers. Said the chief minister: "There was no reason to keep it going since the Government had also appointed the Vardharajan Committee and the Krishnamurthi Committee to go into the incident." This suits the Government fine, since both committees are carrying out their investigations on a scientific level only and do not enjoy the wide terms of reference of the N.K. Singh Commission—to determine the causes and effects of the tragedy and responsibility for the whole sad affair.

Almost as soon as it provided these terms, the Government seems to have become ambivalent. As a result, Justice Singh complained that he was not being provided any facilities at all. The Government relented and all at once Singh got a swankily equipped and air-conditioned courtroom. The Government spent nearly Rs 6 lakh on the commission in this one year, of which Rs 3 lakh alone was on fixtures and fittings and Rs 2 lakh on the salaries of the 10 judicial officers and secretarial assistants helping him, besides Singh himself. As a result, there was no question of the commission meeting its deadline of March 15, 1985, for submitting its report. And just as the commission was to begin the hearings, the inquiry was suddenly called off.



Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

Union Carbide factory (above) and Vora: controversial move

Singh, however, is studiedly noncommittal on the withdrawal of the probe. Endorsing the Government stand that the decision is in the "national interest", he says: "The Government has the right to appoint a commission under Section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952, and it has the right to discontinue it under Section 7. Nothing illegal has been done." But sources close to him reveal that Singh had himself grown disenchanted with the commission, due to the lack of cooperation from the Government.

Despite the sudden nature of the inquiry's withdrawal, it is the ones who stand to be directly affected by it—the gas victims—who are the least bothered. All they care for is compensation. The attitude is: give us the money and let bygones be bygones. The general feeling is that the lawyers, reporters, social workers and politicians have been able to do precious little to alleviate their suffering. Their complaint is that the Government has not done enough. Says Sheikh Shabir, a taxi-driver who lost his niece in the tragedy and himself became half-blind: "What difference would the inquiry make? All we want to know is why we haven't got the money that was promised."

There may not have been any protest at the local level, but a lot of eyebrows—and strident voices—have been raised elsewhere at the sudden withdrawal of the probe and that too without a valid reason. Crying foul are the various organisations that took up the cause of the gas victims for relief and rehabilitation and who are now feeling cheated by their complacent passivity.

At least two groups, the Zahrili Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha and the Lawyers' Collective, are reported to be seriously contemplating filing writs against the closure of the inquiry. As noted lawyer Soli Sorabjee said: "The whole rationale behind a commission is that it is going into a matter of public importance. There may be an explanation for why they have dissolved it. But the manner in which it was done has raised certain doubts about the bona fides." And thereby hangs a tale.

—TAVLEEN SINGH in Bhopal

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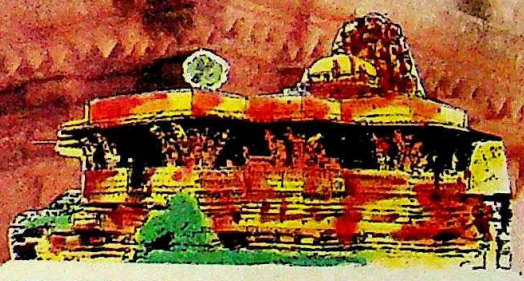

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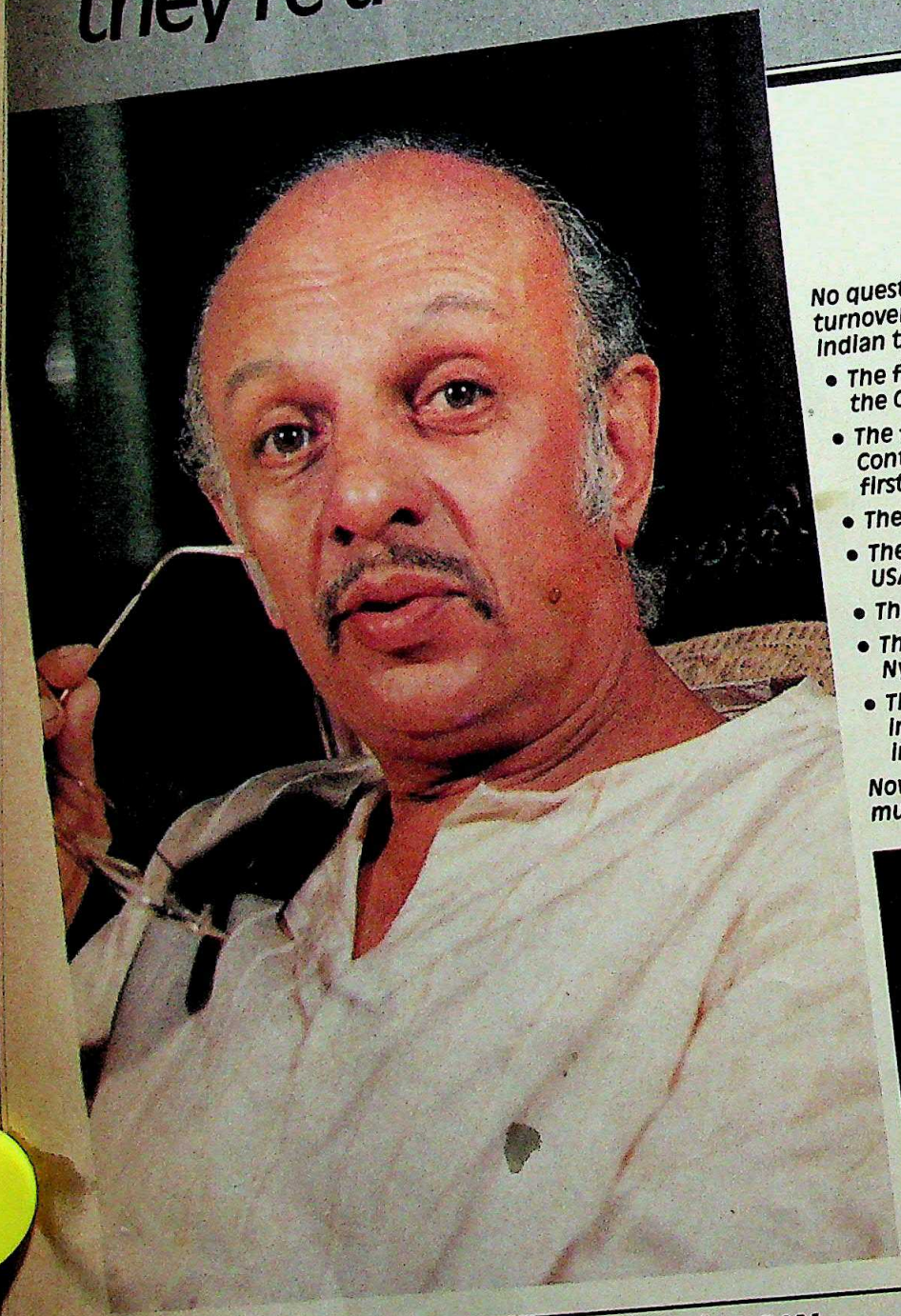

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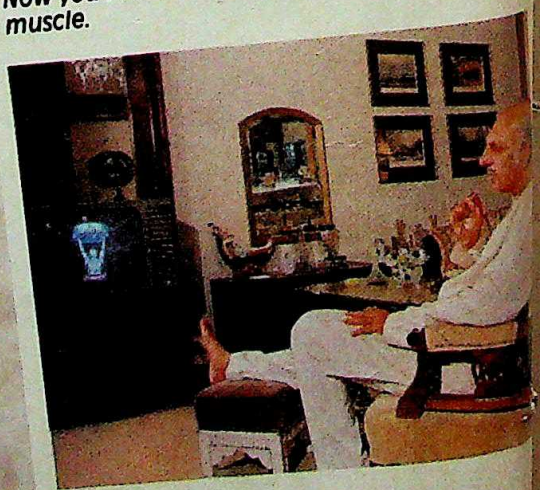

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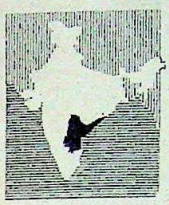
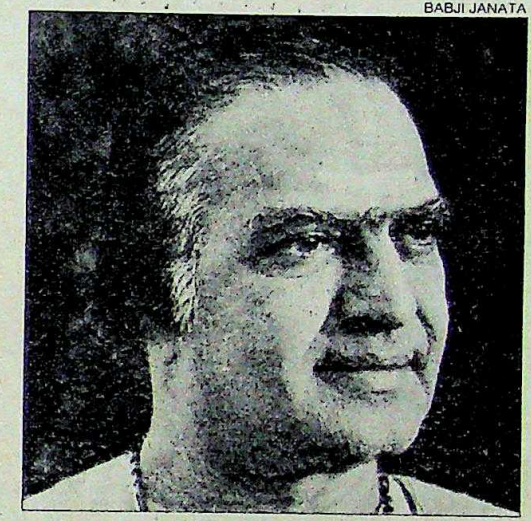


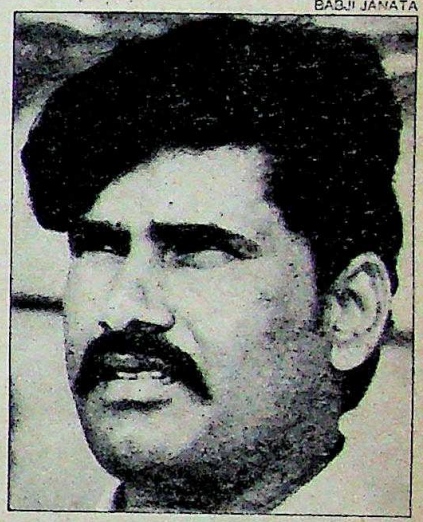
AN *ALLUDU* (son-in-law) is a specially welcome guest in a traditional Telugu home. But when the home in question is that of a chief minister, all axioms fall by the wayside. For Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao, this is specially true. Two of his *alludus* live in Tamil Nadu but the other two are in-house party activists and their scrambling to surpass one another is sending alarm signals through the party ranks.

S.V. ANJAN BABU

BABJI JANATA



BABJI JANATA



Rao, Rama Rao and Naidu: growing rifts

Naravaripalli Chandrababu Naidu, 34, is the *de facto* working chief of the party and Daggubati Venkateswara Rao, 32, is an MLA and chief of the party's 200,000-strong youth wing—the Telegu Yuvatha. They are up against one another in their efforts to pick partymen for various posts so as to build a bigger clout for themselves.

Rama Rao had assigned Naidu the task of organising the party at the grassroots level and conducting elections to the village, mandal and district units. But even before elections to the 26 district committees were held on December 22, the five-man election committee were rewarded with rent free accommodation, telephone and transport facilities. Despite Rama Rao's protests against the spoils system before becoming chief minister, Naidu's gifting of posts has made many flock to him with hope.

The man most hurt by this is Venkateswara Rao, a founding member of the party. He protested to Rama Rao in November about the growing influence of Naidu and ex-Congress(I) activists ignoring the claims of those who joined the party when it was started in 1982 and stood by Rama Rao when he was temporarily unseated in 1984. In an interview Naidu pooh-poohed Rao's protest: "In the Telugu Desam minus NTR, all of us, Chandrababu, Venkateswara Rao or anybody else are zeros." He publicly demonstrated his lack of any ill feeling towards Rao by inviting him to a family dinner. Not to be left behind, Rao turned up and pleasantly surprised the Rama Rao family—but there was no let up in the cold war.

Naidu's party image was enhanced by his role in keeping the flock together when Rama Rao was thrown out of office in August 1984—but his increasing influence and power have now begun to worry many of the ministers. While some have begun to curry favour with him, others are ranged behind Venkateswara Rao to help him organise the Telugu Yuvatha in their districts. Rao told INDIA TODAY: "I am writing to the party chief that I am not interested in becoming a minister but in building the Telugu Desam as a strong alternative to the Congress in Andhra Pradesh. Many joined the party with this motive before it came to power and we have to be cautious against repeating similar mistakes as the Congress(I) did for many years in the state." So, he insisted that only those who had been with the party since its inception should be elected district presidents, but for the December 22 election an ill-advised Rama Rao despatched ministers with sealed covers containing names of those he felt should be on the district committees.

The move boomeranged. In many districts the party's electoral colleges refused to be dictated to and elections had to be postponed. For the elections in the lower tiers, the mandal and municipal committees, the party dispensed with the secret ballot and instead met voters individually, recorded their choice in a register and declared the result. But this style of controlling the process was not tried on the district committees.

After the bitter experience of 1984, Rama Rao has not found reliable advisers in his party and depends on the *alludus* to glean facts from party dossiers about candidates for various posts. INDIA TODAY enquiries reveal that the members of the state executive committee are to be hand-picked men whose past is being screened before their formal election at the approaching party convention. Naidu's supporters want him to become the party general secretary.

It will be a difficult decision for Rama Rao because the party constitution limits him to only picking office bearers from the 25-member state committee and Naidu would have to be elected to the executive. His supporters are also demanding strict implementation of the one-man one-post principle to prevent Rao from being the Telugu Yuvatha chief and an MLA simultaneously. Rama Rao is aware the deepening row between his *alludus* may lead to rifts in the party but finds he cannot do without them.

If there is an issue on which the two agree it is in delaying the launch of the

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Bharat Desam, deeming it early days yet since the Rajiv euphoria is still omnipresent. But according to Telugu Desam parliamentary party leader P.Upendra: "A nucleus may emerge after discussions with the Akali Dal, Asom Gana Parishad, Sikkim Sanghram Parishad, National Conference, Congress (S) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagham after the *Mahanadu*."

Rama Rao's interest for the moment is to keep alive the enthusiasm for starting a loosely-knit federation of regional parties. But growing opposition to the police bill and the characteristic Rama Rao flip-flop over the assembly session are not the only flash-points in the run-up to the *Mahanadu*, the party convention. The war of the *alludus* and the demand for democratic elections reveal the growing cracks in the party monolith and his priority is obviously to set his own house in order. Some observers feel Rama Rao has reason to rejoice having built a cadre of "yellow shirts" but fear he may not be able to control them. And for other political parties though, Rama Rao's woes seemed just one more cause for year-end jubilation.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

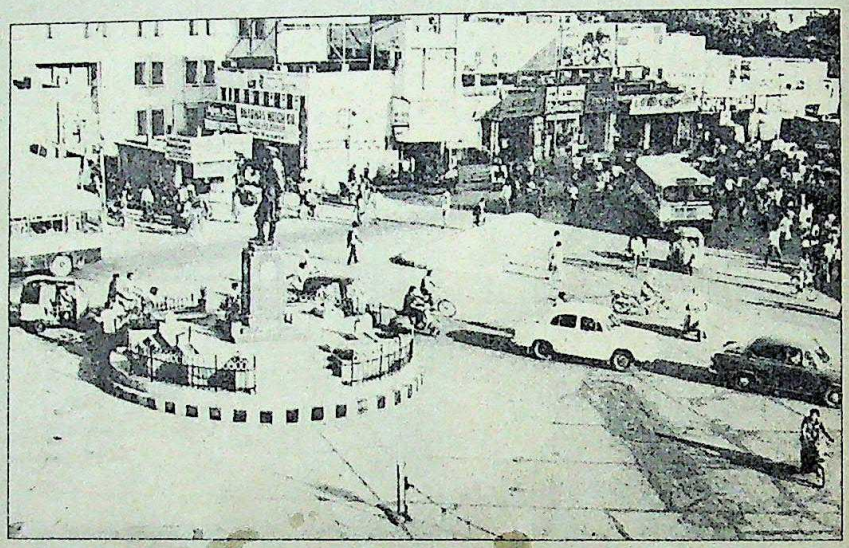
HYDERABAD

Dressing Up

HYDERABAD is beginning to look like what it is: the third largest metropolis in the south and the capital of a state of 60 million people. Roads are being widened and blacktopped, pedestrian paths paved, traffic islands being greened and Begumpet airport has recently been put on the international map. Plans to develop the state capital had been hanging fire for the last five years but with the city slated to play host to the non-competitive film festival, Filmotsav '86, from January 10, the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad (MCH) is racing against time to spruce up for the jamboree.

Work began in early November with a typically grand gesture by Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao. The corporation's special officer, Cheeli Arjuna Rao, a senior IAS officer, was told to send a demolition squad to break down the compound wall of NTR's private home on Bank Street to take the 30 sq ft required for widening the road. This act galvanised the MCH and served notice that the authorities meant business.

The MCH can do little without the help of the state Government. It was superseded by the state Government in 1969 and consequently lost two major sources of income—octroi and motor vehicles tax. As Rao pointed out to the chief minister, the MCH budget of Rs 26 crore is less than half the budget of the Bangalore corporation and a fifth of the Rs 135 crore available to Ahmedabad. Explains Rao: "The two cities of similar size and population are able to do better as octroi and motor vehicle tax earnings are ploughed back and the corporation limits are wide enough to include the industrial areas. The MCH is bound by a six-point formula which prevents the inclusion of industrial suburbs in the corporation limits." Rama Rao responded to Rao's pleas and sanctioned Rs 16 crore for the MCH.



A smaller traffic island: the new look

While part of this sum will go towards implementing the four-year-old proposal to widen 550 km of roads, some will be used to pay compensation for land taken over to widen roads. During his earlier stint as MCH chief which ended in June 1982, Rao had cajoled some 6,200 people to give up 104 acres of land for a token compensation of Rs 200 a sq yd to help widen the roads. But none of Rao's five successors could convince the Government of the need to advance money for paying the compensation. It was only when Rao returned to the post that he took up the matter with the chief minister.

Having finally got the chief minister's nod, the pace of work quickened almost overnight. Four-man teams of officials were asked to complete paying the compensation to all except those few who have taken the issue to court. While MCH engineers are working round the clock to ready the arterial roads by January 10, work on the remaining roads is scheduled to be completed by March 31. But roads are not the only problem area being tackled. The city's acute water scarcity is also being addressed.

But by then the city should have a new set of godfathers and guardian angels. Elections to the 100-seat corporation are to be held in February after a 16-year break. Both the Congress(I) and the Telugu Desam have been reluctant to hold the elections, apprehending domination by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen in the city hall. But with the Andhra Pradesh High Court ordering elections by February, the state Government has been left with no choice.

Once elections are completed, the Rs 16 crore sanctioned may prove inadequate. In their keenness to impress their constituents, the corporators are bound to ask for more. And if their demands are ignored, then, says Rao: "Even if God was appointed as the municipal commissioner he will seek a transfer to the state secretariat." But those clouds are far away: for the moment, Hyderabad is busy dressing up.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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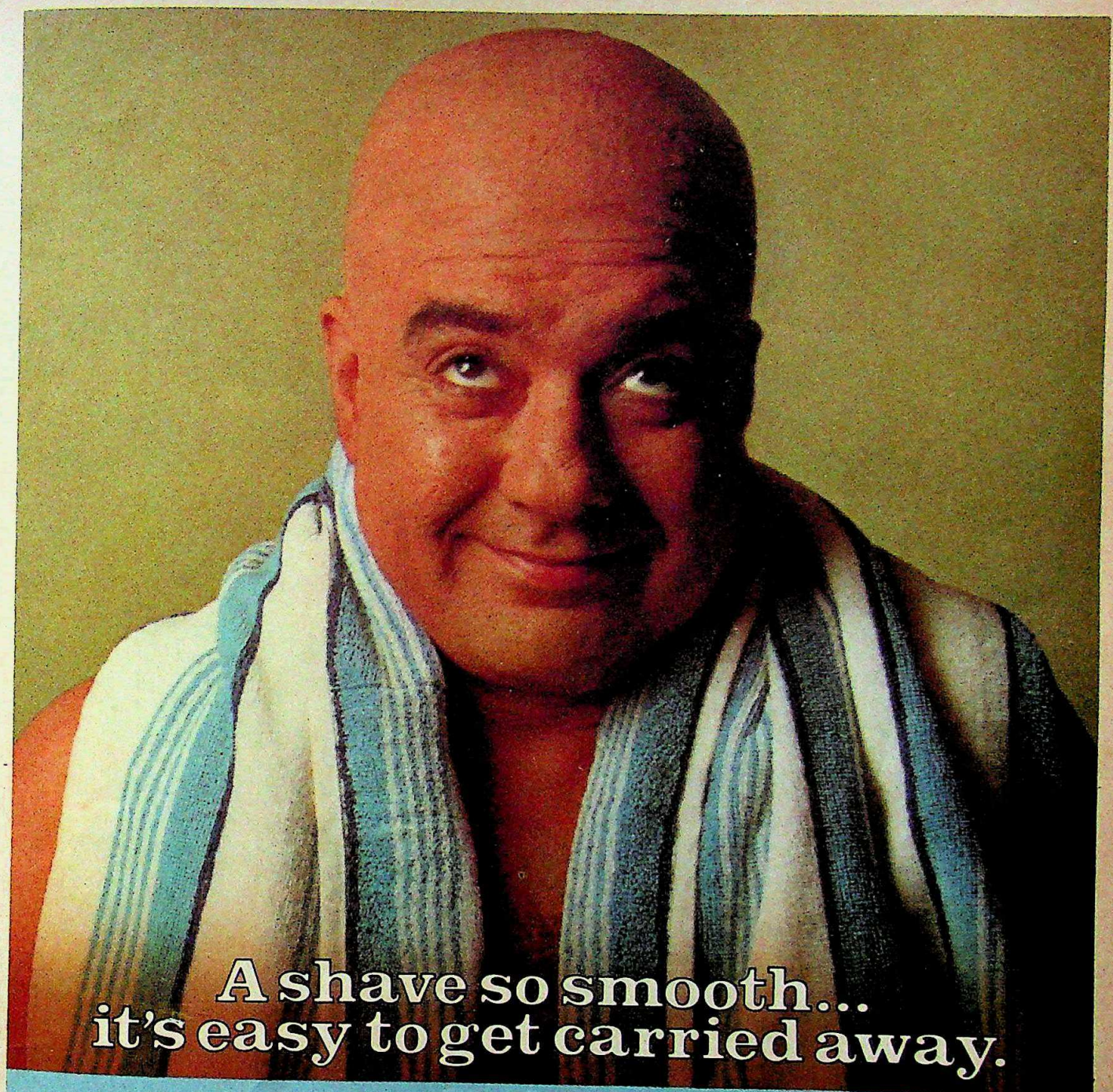

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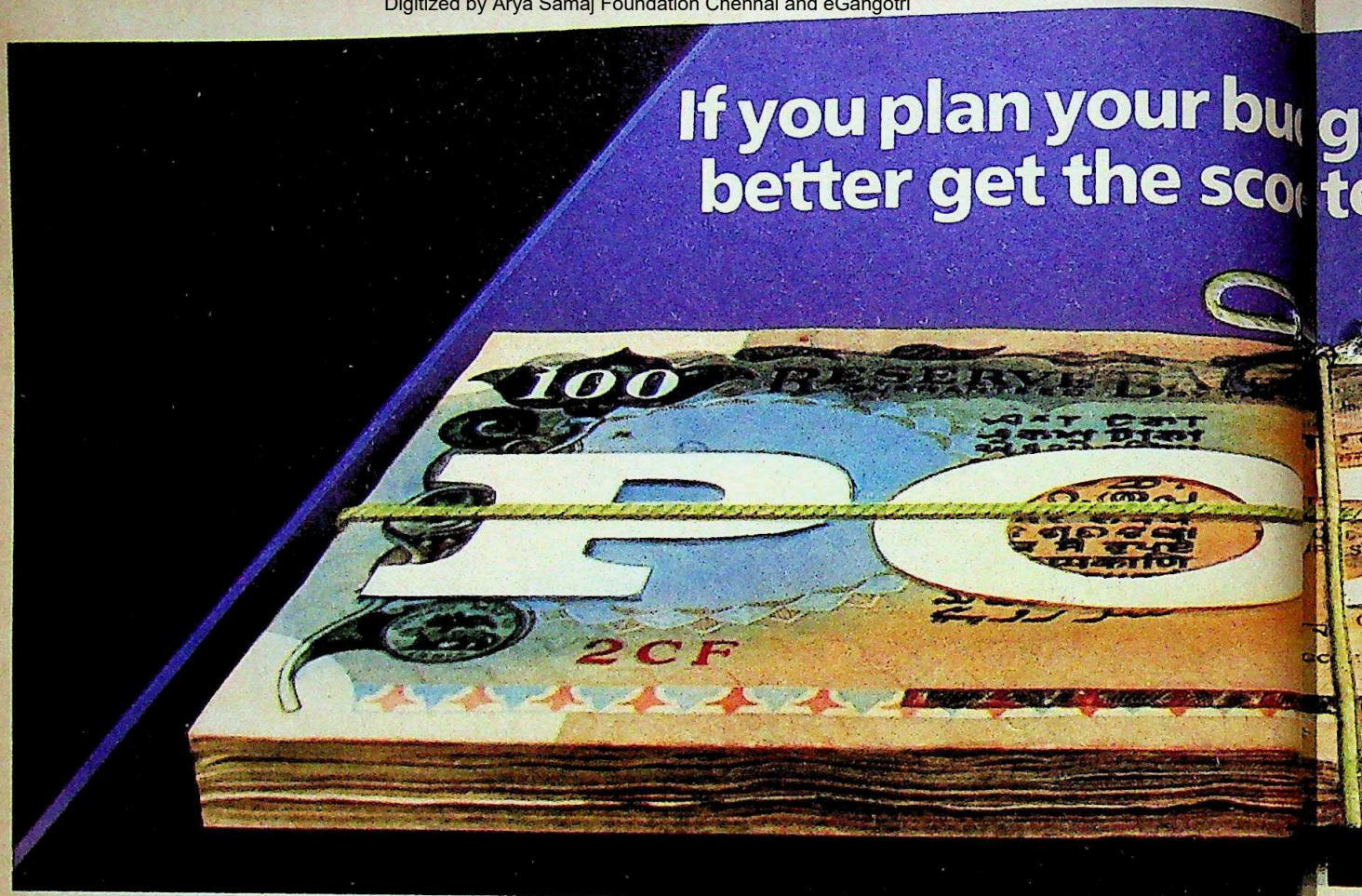

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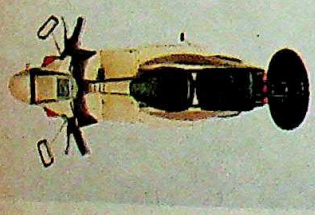

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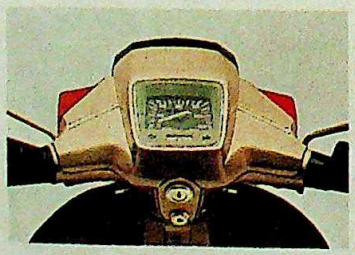

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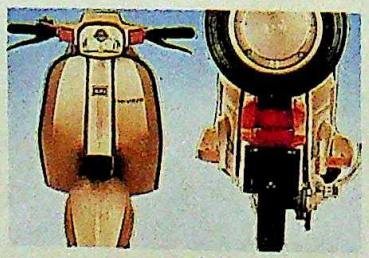

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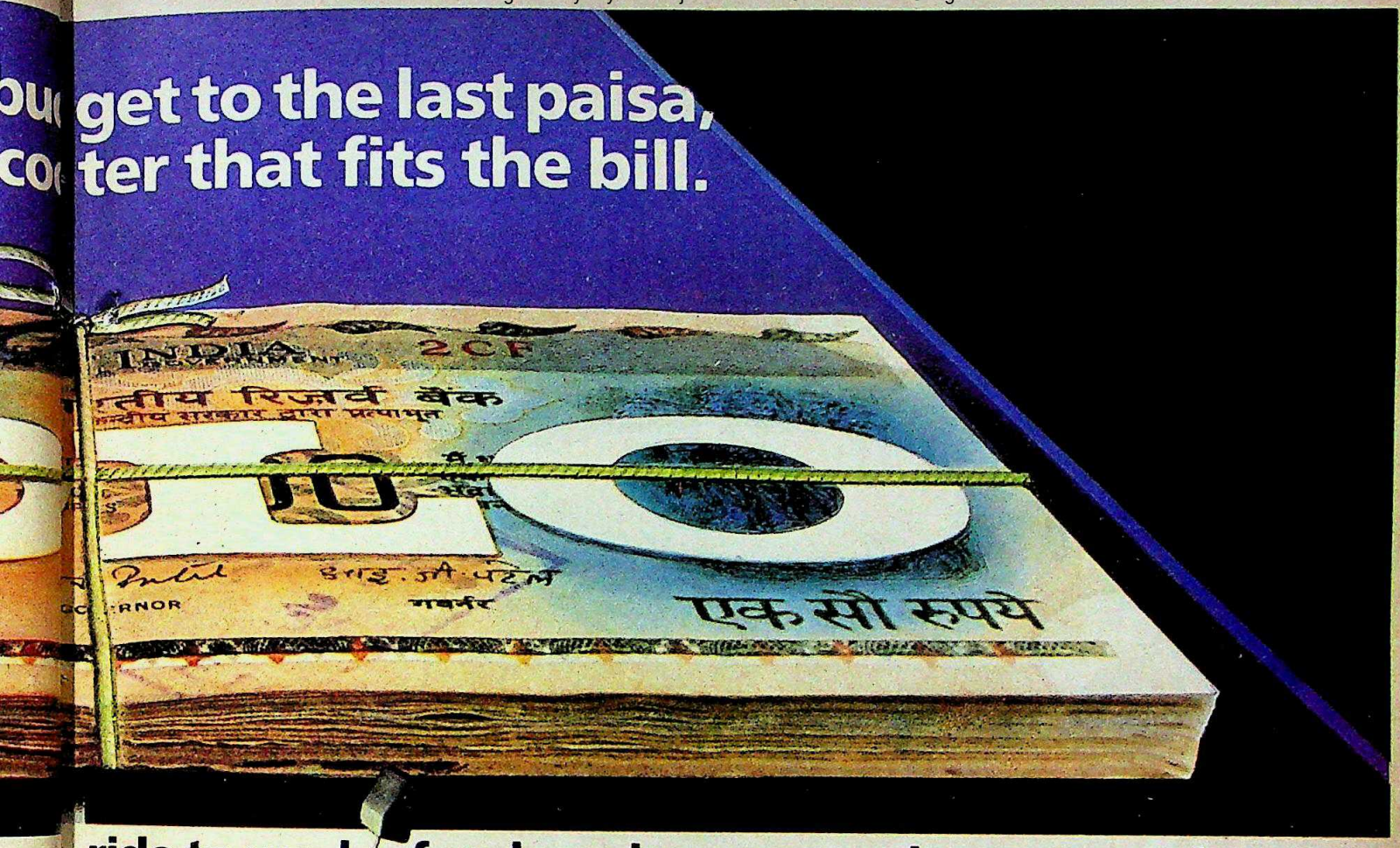

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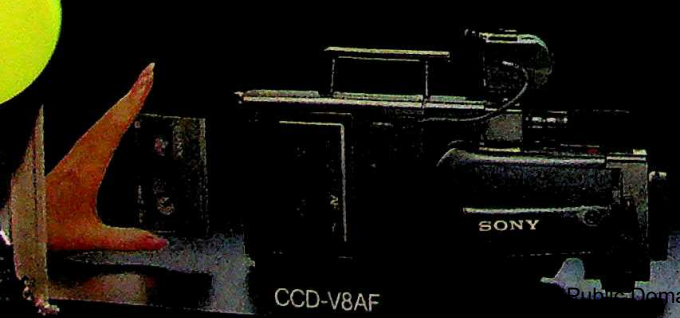

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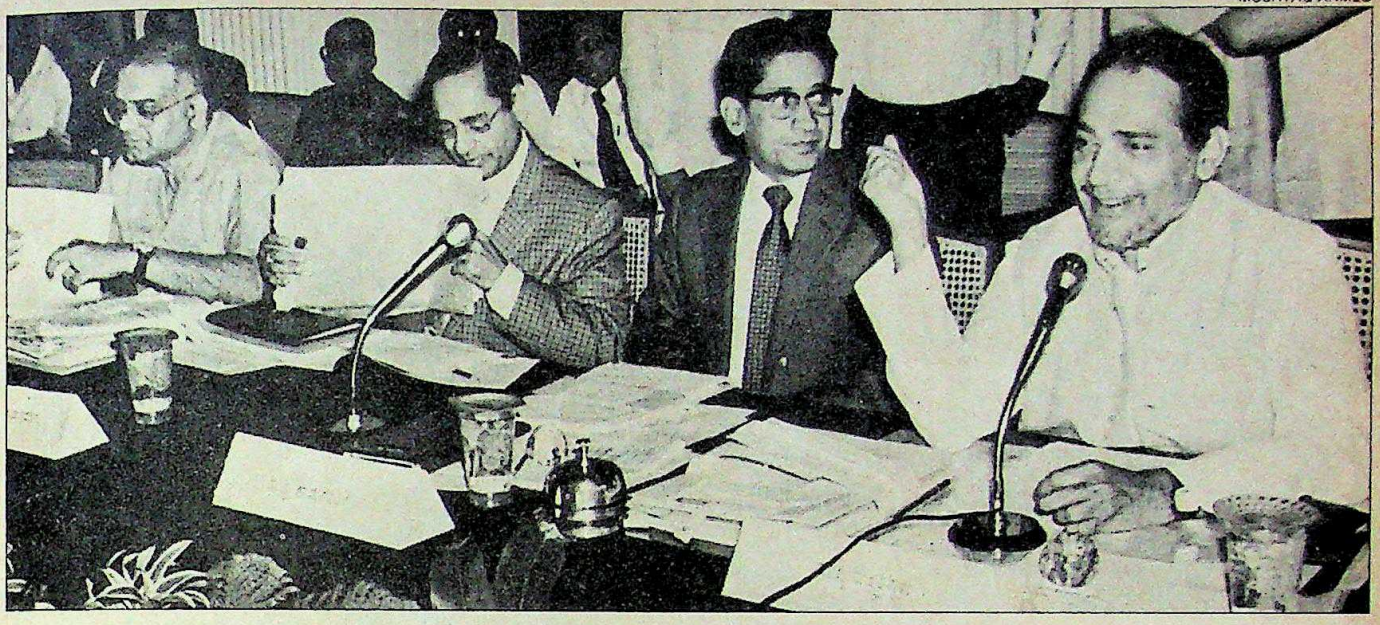

Chief Minister Hegde addressing officials: last warning

KARNATAKA

Politics of Language

KARNATAKA has declared war on English. And the censure of a senior IAS officer in the state Government has come as a clear warning to the bureaucracy that Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's Government will brook no delay in the use of Kannada in all official transactions. While nobody disputes the need to use the language in the state administration, the haste with which it is being enforced has posed some practical problems apart from kindling fears among the minorities about the status of their own language.

The censure of Adhip Chaudhury, commissioner in the Department of Public Instruction, came as a shock considering the apparent innocuous nature of the crime. His department had called for applications in English for lecturers' posts but a week later a baffled Chaudhury was bluntly asked if he was aware that Kannada is the state's official language and all applications should be received in that language.

The censure came close on the heels of a "last warning" to all government employees—use Kannada in all official transactions or else—from Chief Secretary T.R.Satish Chandran last month. Chandran's circular minced no words: "Kannada is the state's official language. It is the Government's policy that Kannada should be used in the secretariat onwards to a village-level office. The umpteen number of instructions issued to the staff in this regard have been followed more in the breach. Whoever doesn't heed this last warning will face merciless action." Perhaps to show that this time the Government meant business, the "last warning" came only in Kannada. All previous sermons had been delivered in English only or in both English and Kannada.

Keeping tabs on the officials is the fearsomely called Kannada Watchdog Committee (KWC), a 15-member panel of politicians and litterateurs set up by the chief minister to ensure that Kannada is used. So it was left to the committee's Chairman, Patil Puttappa—editor of two provincial weeklies in Hubli—to elaborate on what could happen to officials who are fond of English. Said Puttappa: "If the officials don't use Kannada, their increments may be stopped." Warned Mahadev Banakar, a former legislator and the most vocal of the KWC members: "A record is being maintained in the service book of each official to mark his efficiency and interest in using Kannada." The watchdog panel has been touring the state, sniffing around government offices and pulling up officials who are even partly using English.

While no one objects to Kannada being implemented as the administrative language of the state, the haste with which the Government is going about it, often showing signs of chauvinism, is raising quite a few eyebrows among Kannadigas and non-Kannadigas alike. Kannadiga officials themselves complain of "technical difficulties" like finding the right Kannada word for the established and so convenient English words and the shortage of Kannada typewriters. The minorities also crib about the language being forced on them. To this the watchdog panel's answer is—if the officials have the will they have the way. The minorities, panel members say, have been given enough time to learn Kannada.

The Janata Government's growing association with the cause of Kannada was also evident last fortnight when it hosted the "World" Kannada Conference at Mysore "to promote Kannada". Not surprisingly, the justification for spending Rs 4 crore on constructing an auditorium and another Rs 50 lakh on hosting the three-day affair was questioned by many, especially when most of the state is in the grip of the worst-ever drought. The opponents included some eminent Kannada writers who boycotted the conference.

By holding the conference, which served no perceptible purpose, the Janata Government also made yet another policy volte face. When the previous Congress(I) government of R.Gundu Rao first mooted the idea of the meet in 1981, the Janata had opposed the proposal vociferously and the meet was put off. At the conference itself, while Hegde

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kept a discreet silence, a piqued Shivrama Karanth, Jnanpith award-winning writer, asked from the dais: "Has anyone stopped eating masala dosais because of the drought ?"

Although previous governments had been making occasional noises about Kannada since it was declared a state language way back in 1963, it was Hegde who got serious about it when he came to power in early 1983. Starting with the removal of all English name plates from the Vidhana Soudha, the imposing stone structure that houses the state legislature and the secretariat, he passed a series of orders. But without much success. Addressing a meeting of top bureaucrats along with Puttappa last fortnight, Hegde said: "Writing and even thinking in English has become a habit with you. This has got to be changed." And the change, he feels, can only come through threats.

Earlier, declaring the observation of "Integrated Kannada Administrative Language Year" from November 1—the day Karnataka came into being following the states' reorganisation—he set himself the deadline of October 31, 1986, for making Kannada the "100 per cent" official language. In August last, Hegde had set another deadline: all employees whose mother tongue is not Kannada should acquire proficiency and pass a test in Kannada in two years. The Government will go a step further on the expiry of this deadline on August 7, 1986. From then on, a Kannada language test would become a prerequisite for anyone joining the Government.

If the Government is not already being openly accused of being fanatical, it is sure to be if a KWC proposal comes into force to stop the exemption from Kannada given to linguistic minorities in areas where they number more than 15 per cent of the population. As of now, such minorities can use their own languages. The stoppage of this concession can create serious problems in the areas bordering Maharashtra where relations between Marathis and Kannadigas are already strained as a result of the border dispute between the two states.

Political observers feel that all this talk is politically motivated and is obviously aimed at stirring the Kannadigas' linguistic emotions in an attempt to consolidate the Janata Party's power base in the state. But for the moment all that the Hegde Government seems to have succeeded in doing is give another handle to its detractors to beat it with.

NAGALAND

Rebel Wars

THE BIRTH of a new rebel group is normally bad news for the troubled administrations of the insurgency prone north-eastern states. But the formation of an outfit called the Peoples' Militia of Nagaland (PMN) might actually be a welcome development. For, in its manifesto circulated openly in Manipur and Nagaland recently, the PMN has declared its sole enemy to be the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)—the region's largest and most active insurgent group. This intriguing rebel-versus rebel scenario, intelligence officials believe, is a denouement of the 1975 Shillong Accord which was later denounced by a group led by Isaac Chishi Swu and T.Muivah who went on to form the NSCN in 1980.

Ramyo (above) and Vamuzo: unenviable battle

The brain behind the PMN is Zimik Ramyo, a former rebel leader and one of the signatories to the Shillong Accord, who came overground after the accord. Several former accordists are known to support the militia unofficially. Ramyo, who is on the NSCN hit list, argues that the PMN is essentially a product of desperation. "We have maintained peace for the past 10 years but some people are deliberately trying to scuttle peace and much of their activities are directed against people like me who have signed the Shillong Accord."

The army and the police have been powerless to stop the NSCN from murdering the accordists. Ramyo was attacked by gunmen at his Dimapur residence three years ago. Many of his associates, besides over 100 civilians, have been killed in the Naga Hills of Manipur and Nagaland during the last couple of years. Nagaland Assembly opposition leader Vamuzo, who also stands by the accord, claims only advance information helped him elude three NSCN killers lying in wait at Dimapur airport in October last. Ramyo dismisses the army as "being impotent against the NSCN." But the army argues that it cannot be expected to prevent isolated killings.

Left out in the cold, with even the Centre refusing to ban the NSCN, the accordists and their supporters have rearmed themselves and not only set up camps (with some 40 men equipped with arms) in the Manipur East district, an NSCN stronghold, but gone on the offensive, killing three of its men and imposing punitive taxes on pro-NSCN villages.

More important, point out intelligence officials, the PMN has the capacity to counter the NSCN ideologically. Leaders like Ramyo and Vamuzo retain considerable influence among the tribals and the powerful churches that dominate Naga social life.

By putting down the NSCN, the PMN and its supporters hope that the Centre will also heed its demand for a fuller implementation of the Shillong Accord. Says Vamuzo: "The Centre, according to one of the clauses in the accord, was to have worked out a conclusive political settlement with the help of the Naga leaders but did not bother to honour this commitment." And to this day, the accordists continue to hope that their leader Zapu Phizo will be brought back from London and reinstated in the state by the Centre.

But prospects for this look bleak because there has been no reaction from the Centre. The army, too, seems non-committal about the help it could receive from the PMN in countering the insurgency. Says a major: "We have not sponsored the PMN and we can do nothing about inter-rebel rivalry." For the moment, the PMN and its accordist supporters are fighting what can only be called an unenviable battle with the Centre and the NSCN.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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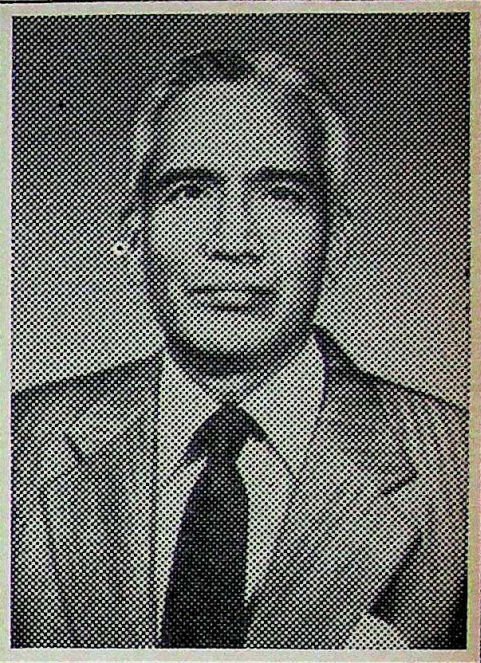
Excerpts from
Chairman's Review

A Record of Rapid and Continuous Growth

Increased production and sales. Excellent profitability. Expansion and diversification.



Mr. S P Acharya, Chairman

"During the year of twelve months ended 30th June, 1985, the Group performed extremely well, with a pre-tax profit for the parent company of Rs 860 lakhs and for the Group of Rs 1,599 lakhs..."

The year under review was marked by very important events and developments, on the national scene as well as for the Shaw Wallace Group. The manner in which the nation and the Government, led by the Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi, surmounted the trauma of assassination of the late illustrious Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, and the ease with which the democratic credentials of India were firmly re-asserted to the amazement of the rest of the world, through peaceful national elections covering an electorate more than thrice that of the next biggest electorate in the world, should give us all the confidence we need in the strength of the basic fabric of the nation and in its leadership. Subsequent policy announcements of a Government backed by an unprecedented mandate, have given a clear indication to the private sector that the Government does recognise its valuable role and would like all the constituents of the nation to work unitedly towards improvement in living standards and in ensuring national cohesion, integrity and strength. These goals are to be achieved in a competitive environment which is in keeping with the late twentieth century, but also remaining in harmony with our traditions and culture.

Among the signs on the horizon are a fairly good monsoon in most parts of the country, greater interest from foreign investors and buoyant stock markets, with a shadow, however, of a still creaking infrastructure — railways, coal and power. Steep increases in administered prices and higher indirect taxes have had some cascading effect on prices, hopefully now well under check. If the long term fiscal policy to be announced in November of this year contains encouraging fiscal reform and assures stability of policies, as it is expected to do, it will give us all a promosing environment for growth.

We, in the Shaw Wallace Group, would like to reiterate the pledge expressed in the last Annual Report, namely, our whole-hearted support to the Government and our determination to do our best in helping to build a strong, united and prosperous nation.

The Directors have succeeded in effecting a substantial improvement in the already very satisfactory profitability and business of the Group. Expansion and diversification continue. The Group is making very active efforts to enter the field of Contract Drilling for Hydrocarbons for the ONGC and Oil India and render other services. Its entry into the field of Detergents some two years earlier has been a success and the Group expects further substantial growth in consumer products. A Letter of Intent has been received for the manufacture of Hydrogen Peroxide. These growth areas are in addition to the Letters of Intent in hand for white cement and gypsum board, blocks and tiles.

Financial Performance

During the financial year of twelve months ended 30th June, 1985, the Group performed extremely well, with a pre-tax profit for the parent company of Rs. 860 lakhs and for the Group of Rs. 1,599 lakhs, compared with the profitability for the previous financial period of eighteen months of Rs. 912 lakhs and Rs. 1,879 lakhs respectively. Group revenue in India and Sri Lanka aggregated Rs. 197 crores. An equity dividend of 30% is proposed, which is the same as the annualised rate of 30% paid for the previous year.

Profitability is only one index of performance. The following analysis of results of principal divisions, subsidiaries and associates, will give shareholders a pen picture reflecting not only the diversity of the Group and the many directions in which it is progressing, but also an indication of future prospects. Barring unforeseen circumstances, turnover and profits in 1985-86 are expected to increase significantly over 1984-85.

Principal Divisions

Agricultural Inputs

As stated in my review of the previous year, Madras Fertilizers Limited decided to market its entire production directly, without the agency of principal distributors. The full impact of this was felt in the year under review and resulted in sales of fertilizers being 31% lower than in the previous year. The substantial adverse effects were to an extent made good by reorganisation of operations and increased sales of agrochemicals. Market share of Dimethoate and Ethion produced at our Haldia Plant increased. While Research and Development efforts continue to achieve cost reduction, action has been initiated to increase the range of agrochemicals. Various measures were taken to control pollution and I am assured by the technical staff that there are no risks to the environment from our plant in Haldia.

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The second stage of expansion of the Sulphuric Acid Plant was completed which, apart from increasing production, fully met the Government's requirements regarding pollution control. There is scope for further increase in production in the coming years.

There was a record production of Superphosphate crossing the 80,000 tonne mark. Granulated Superphosphate has been introduced into the market for the first time in South India. There was encouraging acceptance from farmers in view of the advantages of lower loss in application and greater absorption.

Consumer Products

Production at our Detergent plant in the no-industry District of Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh increased to satisfactory levels and demand for the products — Regal and Chek detergent cakes—continued to grow. Availability is being extended rapidly. It is a measure of satisfaction that within two years, an annual sales volume of 10,000 tonnes coud be built up. Profitability has been satisfactory and prospects are encouraging, despite the intense competition from well-entrenched and very large companies in the field.

Footwear

Although there was an appreciable increase in sales, Government subsidies and incentives were not available to this unit, being a 100% Export Oriented Unit. Sales have not reached optimum capacity as yet. These two factors affected the working results.

With a change in the terms of the Industrial Licence recently agreed to by the authorities, it is hoped that, in the second half of the current year, operations will become viable. To establish a high profile consumer product like high quality leather footwear in the international market takes some time, but I believe that, in the long run, this diversification will prove very rewarding.

Shipping

While international shipping continued to face depressed market conditions, Liner Shipping with containerised cargoes as well as freight forwarding have shown satisfactory growth. The Division was able to maintain its earnings. We are grateful to our Principals and our clients, both in India and overseas, for the trust and confidence which they have placed in our organisation.

An agreement has recently been signed with Messrs. Kuehne and Nagel Management AG., one of the best known firms of international freight forwarders. It is our hope that, with this connection, we will be able to serve Indian importers and exporters better, and at the same time improve the profitability of the Division.

Wines, Spirits and Beer

Despite difficulties in availability of raw materials at some of the production units and increase in the cost of all inputs, results of the Division for the year under review have been very satisfactory.

Consumer demand for the Company's products continues to be excellent and significant growth was achieved in the De Luxe segments. Both Royal Challenge and Director's Special have become outstanding brand leaders. The newly introduced Band Master Blend Whisky and Olde Adventurer Rum had encouraging consumer acceptance.

Excessive Government controls over the trade continue. The incidence of taxation on wines, spirits and beer also remains very high. Such a situation remains potent with unhealthy practices on the part of some parties, such as tax evasion and spurious products, which not only deprive the Government of very substantial revenue but also pose a peril to public health and life. Rationalisation of the duty structure and easing of unwarranted controls will help considerably to reduce this menace, by making quality products available at a reasonable price and at the same time augment the revenues of State Governments.

On current trends, the Division should continue to register very satisfactory progress.

The year at a glance

GROUP	1984-85
Sales and Other income Rs Lakhs	19678
Profit before taxation Rs Lakhs	1599
Profit after taxation Rs Lakhs	904
Earnings per ordinary share	Rs.12.01
Dividend per ordinary share — Parent Company	Rs. 3.00

Principal Subsidiaries

Cruickshank & Co. Ltd.

Due to reduced earnings from sale of Liquor products owing to the incidence of higher levies, profit for the year under review was reduced. Nevertheless, performance may be considered satisfactory under the prevailing circumstances.

The Indian Yeast Co. Ltd.

The company achieved satisfactory results in 1984-85 making an impressive turn-around in profitability.

Vigorous steps were taken to improve operations and reduce costs. TOWER Brand Bakers' Yeast continues to enjoy a good image throughout the country. The company expects to improve its performance further in the current year.

Additional ordinary shares of the face value of Rs. 35 lakhs were subscribed by Shaw Wallace & Co. Ltd. which increased its holding to 73%

Kerala Chlorates and Chemicals Ltd.

Current installed capacity of Potassium Chlorate in the country is almost double the demand. As a result, selling prices fell heavily, which in turn affected margins. This unit became a subsidiary during the year. Its modernisation plan, now under implementation, will reduce cost, improve quality and increase production. Once it is complete in another year's time, operations should become profitable.

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Maharashtra Distilleries Ltd.

Profitability was affected due to low allocation of alcohol and ever increasing cost of raw materials, but was still at a very satisfactory level. The premium brands produced at this unit have been well accepted by the market.

Shaw Wallace Gelatines Ltd.

Performance was satisfactory. An expansion programme to increase Pharmaceutical and Edible Gelatine capacity has been taken on hand, partly financed by institutional loans. An application has been made to the Government for approval to an issue of Rights shares to help finance the balance outlay.

Tezpore Tea Co. Ltd.

Buoyancy in the market continued and yet another record profit, of Rs. 305 lakhs, was achieved.

During the year, various restrictions were imposed by the Government on the marketing of tea.

Planted area was extended by 15 hectares and there was a satisfactory improvement in yield.

The company continues to follow a policy of extensions, renewals and replacement, which should strengthen its operational base in future years.

Bonus shares were issued in the ratio 1 : 2.

Shaw Wallace & Hedges Group in Sri Lanka

The Group turned in yet another record profit. A unit to manufacture hosiery with West German collaboration and a second unit to manufacture specialised high polythene engineering products, both located in the Free Trade Zone, commenced production during the year.

Profitability is largely dependent on exports. In view of the increasing tendency towards protectionism and adverse changes in tariff structure in the importing countries, volume of exports and profitability may be affected until the new projects that went into production recently reach optimum production levels.

A dividend of 45% was declared.

Principal Associates

Detergents India Ltd.

Owing to prolonged labour problems, production and sales of Detergents India Ltd. were poor and operations resulted in a loss. Since the close of the year, production has improved and this company should turn in good results in the future.

Sica Breweries Ltd.

Production was satisfactory. Profitability level was maintained. The company had used up all carried forward tax benefits. Hence the incidence of normal income-tax reduced appropriations to reserves.

SKOL Breweries Ltd.

Production and sales were adversely affected solely due to inter-union rivalry from early August 1984. Consequent disruption of production and danger to life and property forced the Company to declare a Lock-out from end September, 1984, which lasted 95 days. Production has since then stabilised. Barring unforeseen difficulties, it should be possible to improve production and sales substantially during the current year. Margins are under pressure because of competition and continuing inflationary trends in the cost of inputs, but current year profitability should be good.

Projects

Detailed prospecting of the lease in Himachal Pradesh for the White Cement project has proved encouraging and we have now entered into foreign collaboration agreement with LaFarge Coppee Lavalin of France, subject to Government approval.

The proposal for establishment of a new undertaking for the manufacture of Gypsum Board, etc. in the State of Jammu & Kashmir, was not proceeded with as the lease grant area did not contain adequate reserves of Gypsum. However, sources of raw material elsewhere are being explored to assure a regular supply of the right quality. Technology is being arranged from Europe.

Technical collaboration was concluded with Blocker Energy Corporation, U.S.A., subject to Government approval, to enable us to enter the field of oil and gas drilling. Bids were made for tenders floated by ONGC the results of which are awaited. In the meantime, a cadre of trained personnel is being built up.

We are actively pursuing a project to manufacture Hydrogen Peroxide. Offers of technology, which is closely guarded internationally, are being evaluated.

Other projects are under examination.

General

My thanks go to all employees for their co-operation and contribution to the progress of the Group.

I am confident that the Group, with substantial resources both in money and manpower, will achieve further progress in the years to come. Shareholders will benefit by healthy growth of the Group, and their investment should appreciate, barring totally unforeseen circumstances.

The Group will reach its Centenary in 1986. The history and growth over one hundred years of existence bear ample testimony to pioneering efforts, stamina and adaptability and the sustained adherence to professional ethics. The Group has carved for itself a distinct place in Indian Industry, with a tremendous amount of satisfaction to everyone who participated in its growth or is currently associated with it.

Shaw Wallace & Co. Ltd.

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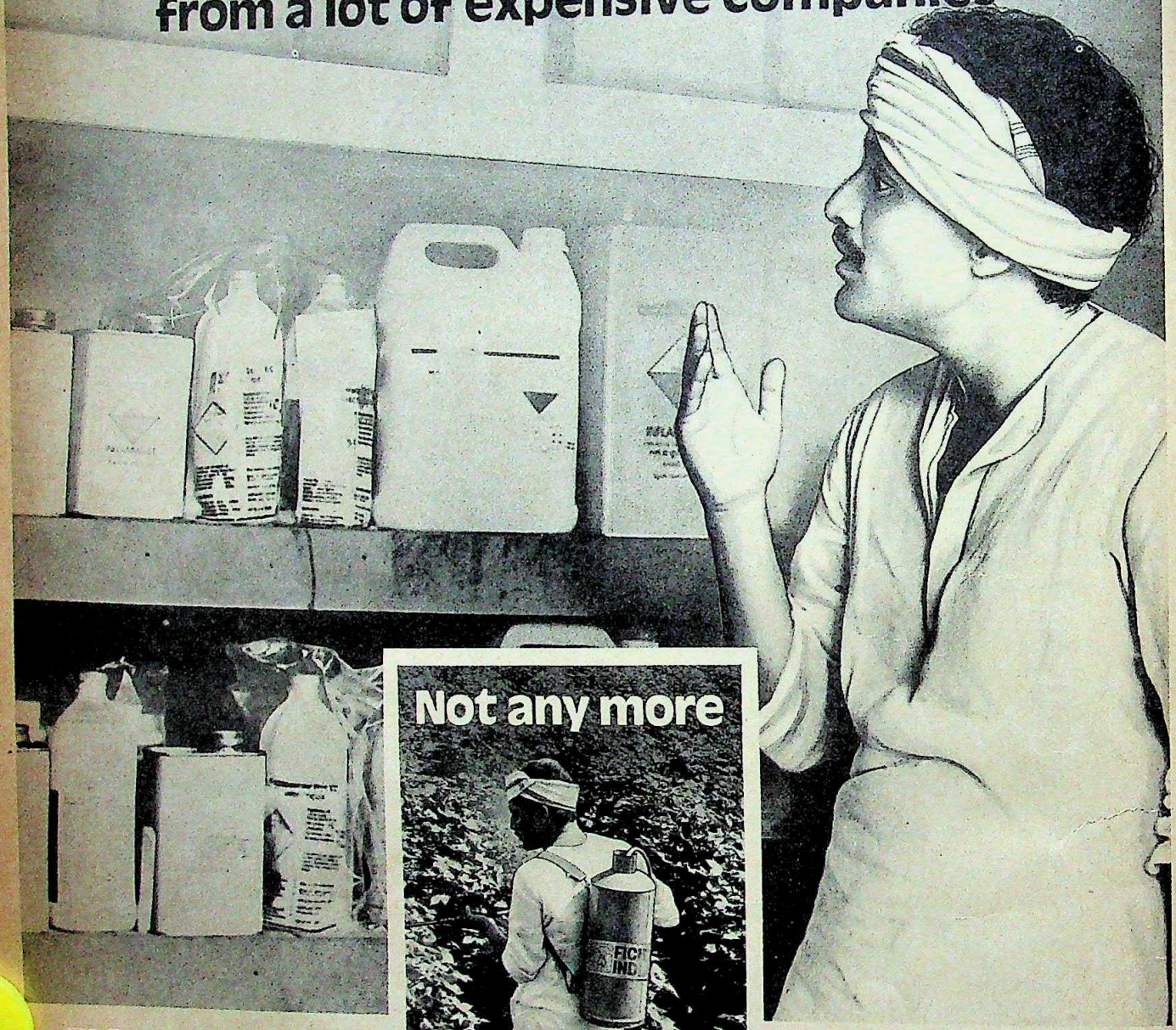
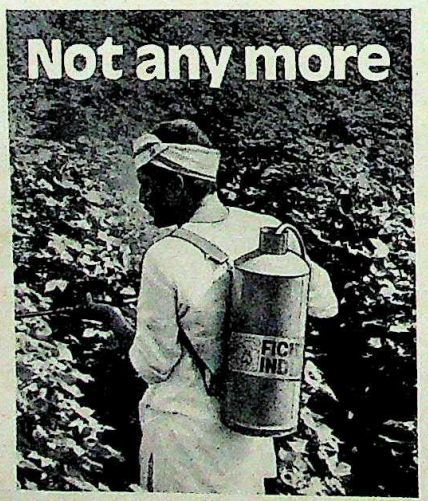
For the Indian farmer complete crop protection meant a lot of expensive buying from a lot of expensive companies





FICIDES INDIA

From sowing to harvest - Complete crop protection - economically balanced

For the first time, the Indian farmer can cover his every crop protection requirement - cost effectively - through one company. FICIDES INDIA.

As a wholly Indian Company, FICIDES INDIA have access to, and the freedom to implement in India, the world's latest crop protection practices.

Our products - The FIGHTING FORCE - make up a complete range of pesticides, covering every crop protection need from sowing to harvest - cost effectively. Giving the Indian farmer the best value in the market - for the first time.

Untroubled by Pests

FICIDES INDIA

Sweeping Green Fields to Golden Harvests

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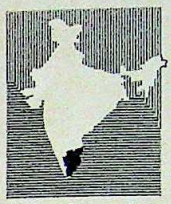
TAMIL NADU

An Elusive Catch



EVER since the Emergency, beautification drives have lent themselves to a certain notoriety. And when recently the Tamil Nadu Government decided that the fishermen's catamarans were an ugly blot on the Marina Beach seascape and seized them, it immediately brought back memories of Sanjay Gandhi's Operation Beautification of Delhi. But the fishermen were not as unfortunate as the people of Jama Masjid. They asked for—and got—justice, and in no small measure.

The Supreme Court issued an interim stay order last month directing the state Government to return all the boats it had seized from the fishermen during the beautification drive. The order was issued pending final disposal of a number of writ petitions challenging the state Government's action. The division bench comprising Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy, Justice V. Balakrishna Eradi and Justice V. Khalid requested the chief justice of the Madras High Court to depute a deputy registrar to supervise the delivery of the catamarans and report to the court about their condition, since the boats had allegedly been damaged during the seizure.

The battle began in November when vanloads of policemen, armed with lathis and rifles, surrounded the fishermen's villages, called *kuppams*, opposite Marina Beach while Madras Corporation and Public Works Department (PWD) officials began removing the catamarans left by the fishermen on the beach. The logs were carted away in lorries and dumped some 2 km away from the beach, apparently for the time being.

The roots of the battle go back many years. The tussle has been going on for quite some time, with the Government wanting to cleanse the beach of the catamarans and the fishermen standing their ground on the plea that their catamarans had always been there and they had no alternative place to keep them. Says P.R. Selvaraj, who has been representing the Tamil Nadu Catamaran Fishermen's Association before the Madras High Court and the Supreme Court: "The logs, which are tied by ropes to make the catamarans, are very heavy. So if they are kept away from the seashore the fishermen will have a terrible time carting them all the way to the sea whenever they want to fish."

According to the President of the National Union of Fishermen Kuppuswamy Subramaniam, prawns have to be caught as soon as they are sighted since they do not stay at one place for long. So it is necessary to have the catamarans at hand. He supports his argument by pointing out that prawns and shrimps form the most important part of the catch on Marina Beach, which contributes 37 per cent of the state's total prawn catch of 4,000 tonnes.

So it is a case of beauty against utility. And at the crux of the matter is the fishermen's fundamental right to earn a living—the right of a whole community to its traditional means of livelihood. In their writ petitions to the Supreme Court, the fishermen have cited Article 19 of the Constitution which gives Indians the right to an adequate means of livelihood—or as Subramaniam insists, "the right to facilities which are necessary to eke out your livelihood".

The basic issue of the case apart, the fishermen are incensed at the high-handed manner in which the seizures were carried out, with government officials descending on them and carting away their boats without any notice. For years now, the state Government has been negotiating off and on with the fishermen for removing the boats from the beach and berthing them at alternative sites. Recalled R. Gandhi, counsel for Subramaniam: "In fact, at one stage of the negotiations, the Government was able to persuade the fishermen to stack their catamarans at five clearly demarcated and secluded sites on the beach itself. But it did not take any follow-up action on this. So, for the corporation and the PWD to have swooped down on the beach and removed the catamarans was an arbitrary, mala fide and colourable exercise of power."

SADANAND MENON

Fishermen with their catamarans on Marina Beach: tug-of-war

The state Government, however, denied this in the high court, saying that it had given the fishermen adequate notice to shift their catamarans to alternative sites. Said PWD Deputy Secretary R. Ramakrishnan in the Government's counter-affidavit: "The fishermen were advised by the executive engineer (of the PWD) and his subordinates personally to remove these obstructions for the better use of the beach by the visitors. This request was made almost daily. It is therefore not correct to say that there was no notice."

The Government has taken the position that it has not tampered with the right of the fishermen to fish. All that it has done, it says, is to shift their boats to proper parking lots. The issue, it points out, is only the cleanliness of the

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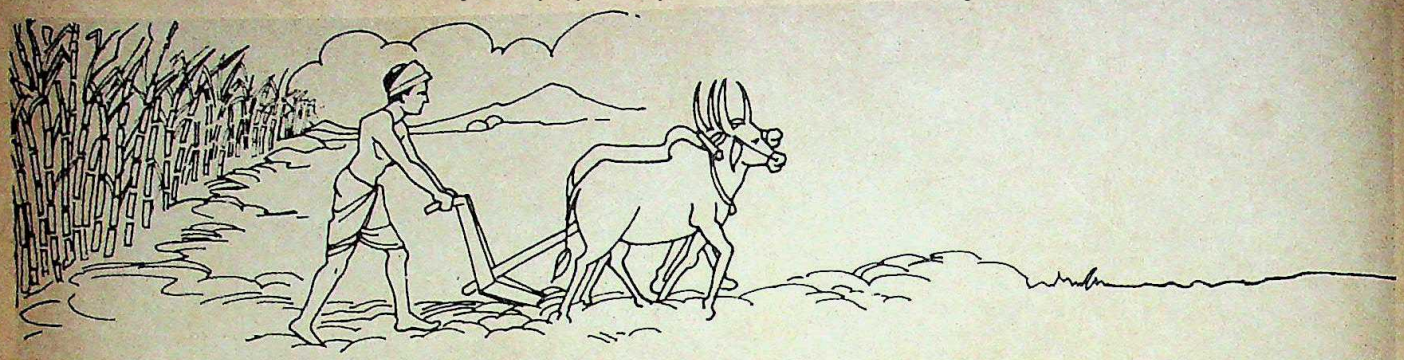
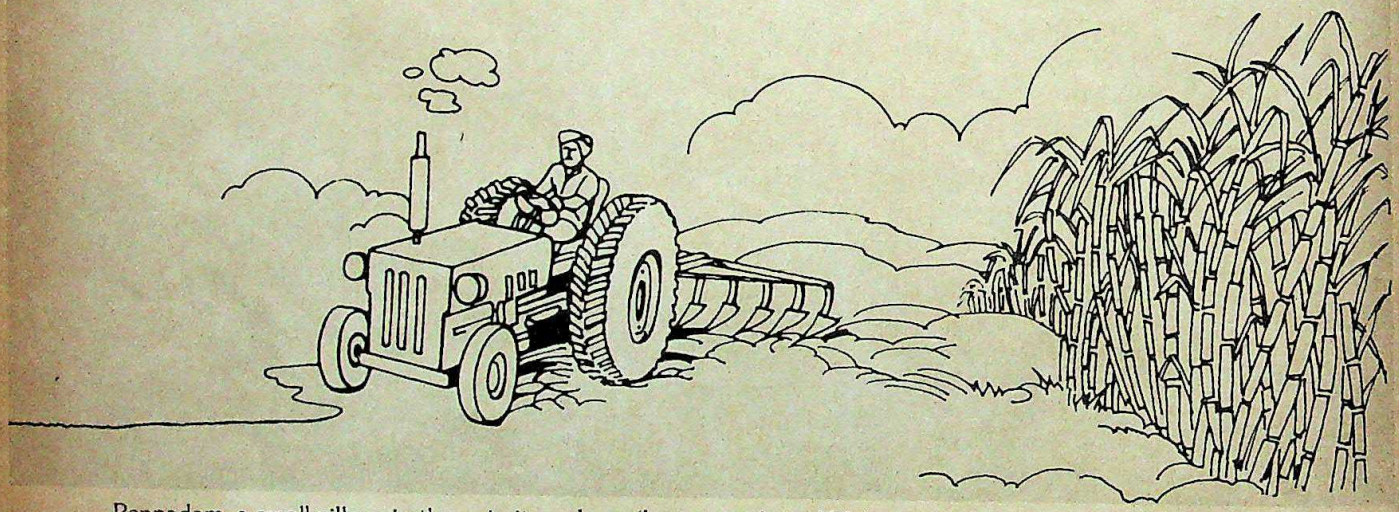


When the people progress the sugar is sweeter



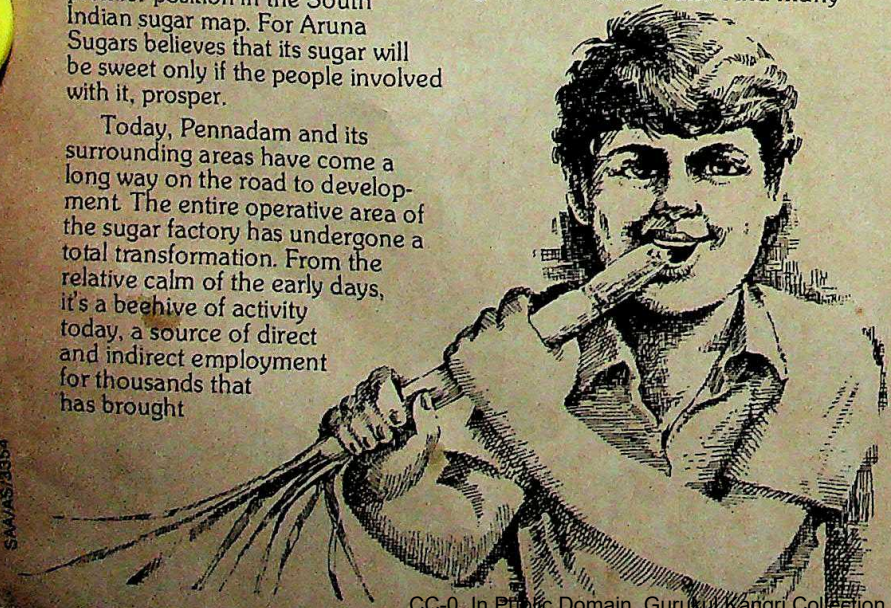
Pennadam, a small village in the South Arcot District of Tamil Nadu is today bustling with activities. Where Aruna Sugars, for two decades now, has been producing cane sugar... Recording success upon success and drawing its strength from the people involved with it, Aruna Sugars has reached a premier position in the South Indian sugar map. For Aruna Sugars believes that its sugar will be sweet only if the people involved with it, prosper.

Today, Pennadam and its surrounding areas have come a long way on the road to development. The entire operative area of the sugar factory has undergone a total transformation. From the relative calm of the early days, it's a beehive of activity today, a source of direct and indirect employment for thousands that has brought in its wake, a 'better quality of life' for all concerned.

Community development programmes already launched on educational, health care and communication areas have helped translate many dreams into realities. The Rotary movement has gathered momentum. And many more welfare measures are in the offing.

Aruna Sugars' commitment to the nation is no less deep rooted. While there has been a continuous Research & Development programme at work bringing forth new varieties, production schedules have been simultaneously kept at the optimum level, even when the country's sugar performance has recorded a downward trend.

That's Aruna Sugars, yielding sweet results for all round prosperity.



SAARAS/3354

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Factory :
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P.O. Pincode : 606 111.
South Arcot Dist., Tamil Nadu.

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beaches. The right of anyone to offer an explanation and to be heard is a principle of natural justice and this precisely is what the fishermen's writ petitions have been hammering at. Whether or not there has been a violation of natural justice will be decided by the Supreme Court when it resumes hearings in January. Meanwhile, the exercise of returning the catamarans has been gone through, though not without confusion.

The Government claimed that it has returned all the 1,200 logs it had seized while the fishermen contend that not less than 4,800 logs had been seized and the few that have been returned are in a damaged state.

What has hurt the fishermen most is the timing of the action—at the peak of the fishing season of November to January—the golden months for prawn and shrimp catches. Even if they are restored their rights to earn their livelihood as they have been doing for long, some damage will already have been done. For at a time when they should be out in their catamarans looking for a prize catch, they find themselves entangled instead in the net of their legal battle.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

NEW MARKET

Fiery End

FOR 111 years Calcutta's famous New Market had remained one of the city's most resilient landmarks, surviving the depredations of the pre-Independence communal riots, the Naxalite rebellion and the modernisation plans aimed at obliterating its stately brick columns. But last fortnight, a raging fire devastated the market, paving the way for the modernisers to erect yet another monstrous steel and concrete structure.

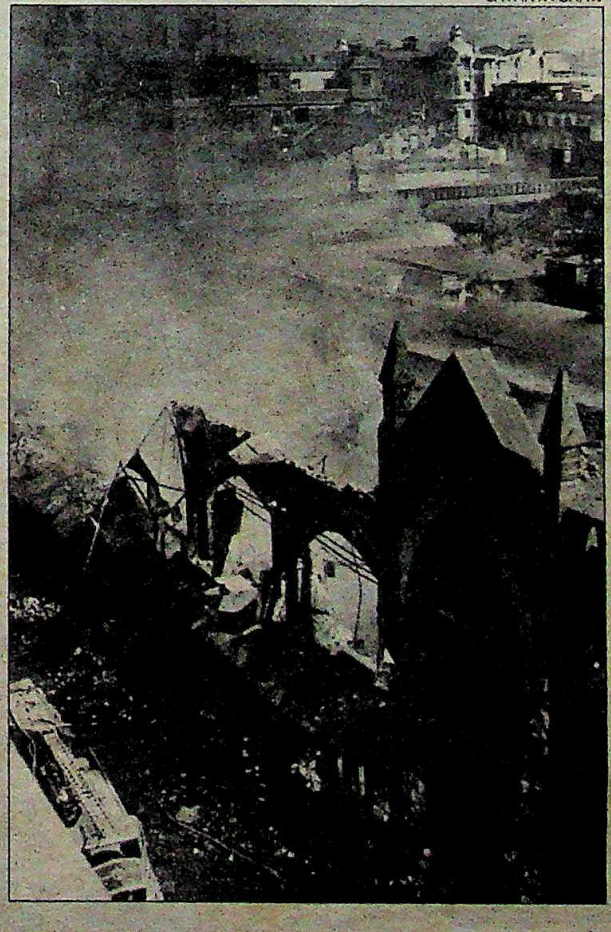
Hardly had the embers of the market's 600-odd devastated shops cooled among the stumps of charred columns, when municipality Mayor Kamal Basu announced that phase two of the market's redevelopment plan had begun rolling. Even while distraught shopkeepers were picketing the municipal headquarters, demanding that they be allowed to put up tin huts in the devastated portion of the market and continue business, demolition teams were moving into the market to prepare a site for a modern four-storey market and Basu, irked by the protesting shopkeepers, remarked: "At this rate I will not be able to do any modernisation."

The shopkeepers want to stay on because they paid absurdly low shop rents to the municipality—between 12 and 40 paise per sq ft per month—while some of them sold as much as Rs 18 lakh worth of goods during the peak months of October-December. Not surprisingly, they are pretty worked up at the suggestion that they continue their trade well away from the premier shopping site. "The mayor should resign," raged shopkeeper Madan Das, and added: "The municipal corporation has deliberately neglected the market in order to demolish it."

While it is impossible to substantiate the furious shopkeeper's charge, there can be no disputing the municipality's neglect of the market. Despite earning a whopping Rs 58 lakh annual revenue from the market, the municipal authorities did little to maintain the historic buildings. Curiously, even the deep tube-wells installed six months earlier near the market, were found inoperative on the night of the fire and could be put into operation only after the electric supply corporation hastily fixed their power lines. The fire started at midnight on December 11 and continued till 11.30 next morning despite army help.

The devastated New Market

JAYANTA SHAW



The shopkeepers' loss has wittingly or unwittingly been the municipality's gain. Most shopkeepers, being illegal tenants, will not have to be compulsorily rehabilitated. Besides, the municipality's moribund phase one redevelopment plan, which consists of putting up a 14-storey marketing complex in the south eastern corner of the market, will also get immediate boost. Lack of takers for shop space in the new complex had saddled the municipality with a few crore of blocked funds. Now the corporation's Chief Architect, Achintya Sarkar, expects a scramble for space in the new complex.

To the city's fanatic conservationists, the municipality's dreams of constructing convenient modern structures with adequate parking space is anathema. "Modern government buildings turn out to be as sordid and ill conceived as the most ancient of our buildings and they also have the disadvantage of being aesthetically repugnant and devoid of historical value," explains D.N. Banerjee, member of the Society for the Preservation of Archival Materials and Monuments of Calcutta. Most Calcuttans, however, would now prefer a smarter and newer "new market" and this time round all the shopkeepers and the conservationists seem fated to lose.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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CHANDIGARH

Fears and Uncertainties

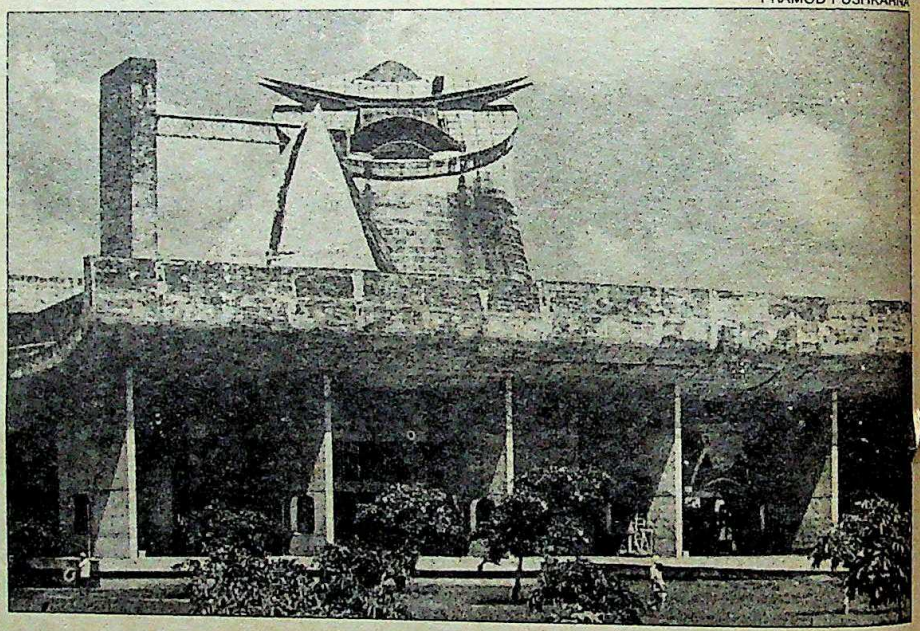
REPUBLIC Day 1986 should dawn as a day of fulfilment for Punjab. On that day the capital city of Chandigarh will be legally restored to the state in fulfilment of a major clause of the Rajiv-Longowal accord. But some others await that day with foreboding for, it will signal a return to uncertainty for the employees of Haryana and the Union Territory of Chandigarh who have spent 19 undisturbed years in this city. For different reasons the city of Chandigarh has enjoyed an almost mythical status. For the people and Government of Punjab it is more than a valuable piece of real estate; for nearly two decades it has been an emotional political issue, the subject of morchas, agitations and high level accords. For its residents it has been a safe haven, sheltered from the political strife raging around it in neighbouring Punjab and Haryana. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Union territory considers itself unique and its employees see themselves as a special breed of super clerks who flinch from the prospect of merger with the ragtag cadres of Punjab. As D-day draws near waves of anxiety course through Le Corbusier's grey edifices with the ripples originating in the corridors of the Chandigarh Secretariat.

The important questions being asked are: what will become of the 19,000 directly recruited employees of the Union territory administration. How soon will the families of 18,500 Haryana officials and staff have to move out if Haryana shifts its capital elsewhere. What will be the fate of the institutions housed in the more famous landmarks like the high court, the Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGI), and the attractively laid out campus of the Panjab University?

This dread of the future finds an echo in the words of P.S. Lamba, general secretary of the Chandigarh Subordinate Services Federation, which recently organised a massive convention of Union territory employees to demand the creation of a separate cadre for the Union territory's employees even after it is merged with Punjab. "We are facing a very big danger," says Lamba. "Let Chandigarh be a small state within the state of Punjab," he argued, adding that specific provisions be written into the law protecting their terms and conditions. Basically what that demand means is that the 19,000 directly recruited staff of the Union territory should not be transferred out of Chandigarh where most of them have lived, in government housing, since 1966. In all, Chandigarh has 22,500 employees but there is no uncertainty about 3,500 deputationists from Punjab and Haryana, who will automatically revert to their parent cadres.

The high court: legal tussle

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



For nearly two decades Chandigarh has been an emotional political issue, the subject of morchas and agitations and, for its residents, a haven from political strife in Haryana and Punjab.

This refrain about special treatment is echoed in the memoranda submitted by various organisations of Chandigarh employees to the two-man committee set up by the Home Ministry to "identify and examine the issues consequential to the transfer of territories and suggest how they could be dealt with". During several visits to Chandigarh, the committee members Mohan Mukherjee, former chief secretary of Rajasthan, and A.R. Shirali, member of the L.K.Jha Commission on Economic Administration Reforms held detailed discussions with the chief secretaries of Punjab and Haryana and the head of the Chandigarh administration, about the transfer of the Union territory's assets and liabilities, the fate of its Central government institutions and more importantly the fate of the 19,000 employees.

The Mukherjee Committee has to sort out the nuts and bolts issues, like the apportionment of the public debt incurred by Chandigarh to finance its developmental activities, the status of the government institutions and most of all, the fate of the government staff. Some of the answers are quite simple. The public debt has already been squared up, says Punjab's amiable Chief Secretary P.H. Vaishnav, a Gujarati whose idiomatic Punjabi would shame even the homespun rustic. "The PGI is a Central institution and the Chandigarh High Court will remain here till Haryana finally sets up its capital somewhere," he adds.

What is still not certain, however, is the future status of Panjab University, an "inter-state university" which at present gets 60 per cent of its funds from the Centre and 40 per cent from Punjab. Vaishnav set at rest all misgivings about Punjab's ability to maintain the city and its services: "Chandigarh is a special city and will remain that way. The administrative framework will remain much as it is today. We are working on the idea of declaring it a city district like Gandhina-

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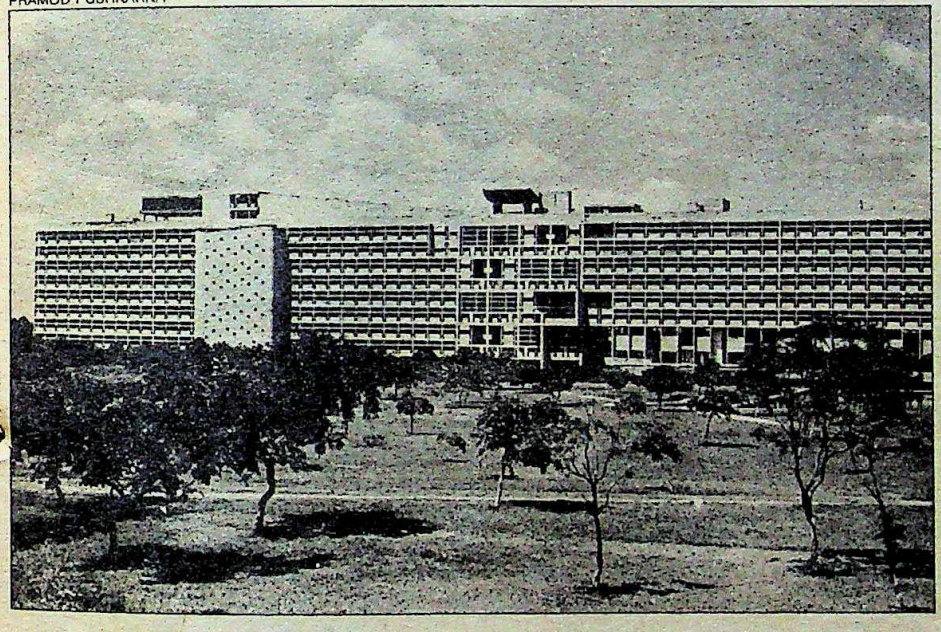
gar in Gujarat, with a chief administrator."

Doubts persist about the staff too. In the past, senior Punjab officials used to quote former chief minister Prakash Singh Badal's 1978 letter to the home minister objecting to the wholesale recruitment of staff by the Chandigarh administration. They said that with 22,500 employees for a population of 4.5 lakhs, Chandigarh was the country's most over-administered city. Moreover, it was argued that the inflated seniority of these employees would create problems at the time of their absorption into the Punjab cadre.

Vaishnav suggested that the directly-recruited employees had been hired to

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



service two capitals. He said: "We are thinking of suggesting that they be divided in a ratio of 60:40 between Punjab and Haryana." As for seniority, "one way is that the initial date of recruitment should count for seniority and not the date of promotion." He said lower level personnel have little cause for worry about transfers because the state Government had decided to retain the capital project as it was, and according to one estimate this would require about 7,000 people to maintain services.

It is clear by now that if Punjab can help it would not like to take on all the Chandigarh employees. Similarly, those who hail from Haryana—and Satpal Gupta, chairman of the National Organisation of Government Employees, says there are 4,000 to 5,000 of them—would like to go to Haryana instead. "We have asked that the employees should be given an option," said Gupta. It is probably in view of this demand that the Chandigarh administration is collecting data on the state of domicile of its employees.

Since Chandigarh has been an oasis of relative calm in the desert storm of terrorist violence, not only Haryanvi but Sikh employees of the Chandigarh administration too would like to stay on there. Said Gupta: "We have sought an assurance that the Union territory's employees, even after allocation to Punjab, should not be transferred out of Chandigarh for 15 years." Others would like to retain the considerable benefits they enjoy as Central government employees.

The secretariat: future shock

Brij Lal Sharma, president of the UT Federation, says Central employees categorised as industrial workers, like the 1,300 workers of the Government of India Press, retire at the age of 60. The moment they join Punjab they will have to retire at 58. Sharma said nearly 200 press workers aged between 58 and 60 would retire the day they are transferred to Punjab. Other benefits are also not to be scoffed at, such as tuition allowance for their children, interim relief, bonus and leave travel concession. Moreover, the electricity tariff in Chandigarh is just 40 paise a unit whereas the rate in Punjab is at least double that. The same is true of entertainment tax and registration fees.

Apart from the wrench of leaving a clean and modern city like Chandigarh for far less appealing towns like Sangrur or Malerkotla, the main fear is losing government housing and disruption of children's education. Satpal Gupta argued that 80 per cent of the schoolchildren in Chandigarh have adopted Hindi as the medium of instruction, and they dread a change of syllabus as well as medium of instruction. Added P.S.Lamba: "We are not against the accord, but we have to protect ourselves. We feel the Punjab Government will soon lower the retirement age to 55 as it has to fulfil its promise of providing 8,000 jobs in two months and 60,000 jobs in a year."

Employees apart, another problem which the Mukherjee Committee is wrestling with is the definition of the Capital Project, which according to the Rajiv-Longowal accord, is to come to Punjab along with the Punjabi-speaking areas which were merged with the Union territory in 1966. The Hindi-speaking area in the north-eastern part of the Union territory is to revert to Haryana. This has created problems because nowhere, say officials, is the term Capital Project precisely defined.

Said one official: "We cannot go by the areas notified under the Capital of Punjab (development and regulation) Act of 1952, because after 1966 all lands were acquired under the Land Acquisition Act, such as the land for the railway station and the 39 tubewells for the water supply scheme." The station and these tubewells now fall in the Hindi-speaking area of Chandigarh, which is to go to Haryana. "The only way to avoid controversy is to give the Union territory as defined in 1966 to Punjab, minus the five Hindi-speaking villages," said a retired official who has been involved with Chandigarh's development for nearly two decades.

The legislation giving effect to the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab has to contain specific solutions to all these issues. In drafting that legislation the Home Ministry and the Law Ministry will go by the recommendations of the Mukherjee Committee which is due to submit its report this fortnight. A Home Ministry official said the new law would be pretty similar to the Punjab Reorganisation Act of 1966, which carved Haryana out of the composite state of Punjab.

Meanwhile the city's environmental lobby comprising eminent citizens and former and serving officials, won two resounding victories last fortnight, raising hopes that the city's environs will not be permitted to degenerate into an unregulated urban sprawl. With real estate prices in and around Chandigarh shooting up, Haryana, unmindful of the law prohibiting any construction in a 10-mile belt surrounding Chandigarh, started

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selling plots of land in the area falling between the city and the Shivalik foothills.

Last December Punjab governor K.T.Sataravala sought Rajiv Gandhi's help to stop Haryana's urbanisation of this green belt, saying it was "bound to lead to environmental degradation". Last fortnight, Rajiv appeared to have heeded that plea. His office sent off a letter firmly directing Haryana not to urbanise the green belt around Chandigarh. At the same time the Prime Minister's Office ordered cancellation of all industrial plots allotted in unseemly haste from 1981 onwards in Chandigarh's green belt by a committee of local administration officials. The allotments had been severely criticised by several politicians in Punjab and the matter went up to the prime minister.

Along with the Punjab announcement that the city of Chandigarh would be maintained as it is, these two developments raised hopes of the public that the country's pre-eminent planned city would remain an architectural and environmental show-piece for many years to come.

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Chandigarh

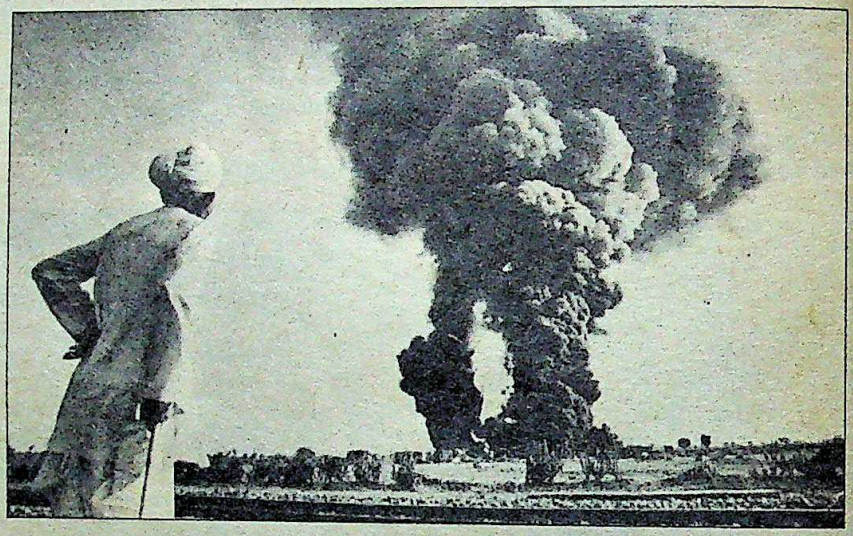
ONGC

Blow-out

IT WAS a chilly night on December 15 when the quiet little town of Kadi in north Gujarat woke up to an explosive sound followed by a burst of orange flames, 35 metres high, licking the dark sky. An oil well being drilled by the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) had suddenly caught fire. Panic gripped the town with several residents immediately migrating to nearby villages. Recalls Hijibhai Ghanchi, a tea stall owner: "We were terrorised. We thought that soon parts of the town would be reduced to ashes."

Quickly realising that they had a potential disaster on their hands, ONGC rushed officials from various parts of the country to Kadi to try and put out the fire. But oil well fires are notoriously difficult to handle: when the *Sagar Vikas* caught fire in 1982, ONGC was obliged to call in famed fire-fighter Red Adair and his men (INDIA TODAY, August 31, 1982). This time in the Kadi well incident, the fire refused to respond to the thousands of gallons of water dumped on it. Even 200 hours after the fire broke out, it continued to rage, sending billowing clouds of smoke into the sky.

ONGC set up a camp near the burning oil well for its crack team to stay as it drafted in the help of the army and other government agencies to help with fire-fighting equipment. Later this fortnight, huge ponds were dug around the well and filled with over 4,000 cubic metres of water to launch an onslaught. After nine days of continuously trying to tame the fire, the ONGC decided to blast the exploratory well with the help of the army. This decision was taken after they found that all attempts to remove the charred steel oil rig weighing about



Smoke and flames from the well: explosive situation

150 tonnes was futile. Even thick wire ropes thrown in to pull the rig out so that the mouth may be capped did not work as the ropes snapped in the heat. Villagers from nearby areas who came to see the massive fire watched with awe as they saw oil being thrown up to a height of over 10 feet as firemen with fireproof overalls tried to stop the fire from spreading. With changing wind directions making it harder to approach the blazing well head, J. Swaroop, deputy manager, Ahmedabad project of the ONGC, said: "We are fighting against nature. This fire may continue despite all our efforts." This was also amply clear as the ONGC has already started digging a relief well about 350 km away so as to ease pressure from the flaming well. It will take nearly a month for the well to be dug. To assist in their operations, the ONGC called in Russian expert V.G. Vaskanov, who has handled nearly 200 inland blow-outs.

The ONGC officials are still not clear how the blow-out took place. Oil had been struck at around 2,000 metres and so a metal pipe had already been put in along with a cement casing necessary to harden the well and prevent it from collapsing. The drill had reached 2,174 metres, when oil and mud gushed out. To control this, a blow-out preventer was clamped on the rig, but the enormous pressure blew it off in 40 minutes. A few hours later the well suddenly caught fire.

A separate inquiry has been ordered by the Union Ministry of Mines and Safety into the causes of the fire at Kadi in addition to the one already ordered by the ONGC. As officials are involved in putting out the fire, no estimate of losses have been yet tabulated. But in the first 10 days of the fire, the rough losses to ONGC were put above Rs 10 crore. As a precautionary measure, Western Railway cancelled all trains running between Kadi and nearby stations as the railway line is just a few metres from the fire. While determined ONGC men try to put out the fire, L.L. Bhandari, member, drilling ONGC, who rushed from Dehra Dun to direct operations strikes a positive note: "This well may not be retrieved, but we have discovered a new pocket of oil. We can still dig a well nearby and exploit it."

—RAMESH MENON in Kadi

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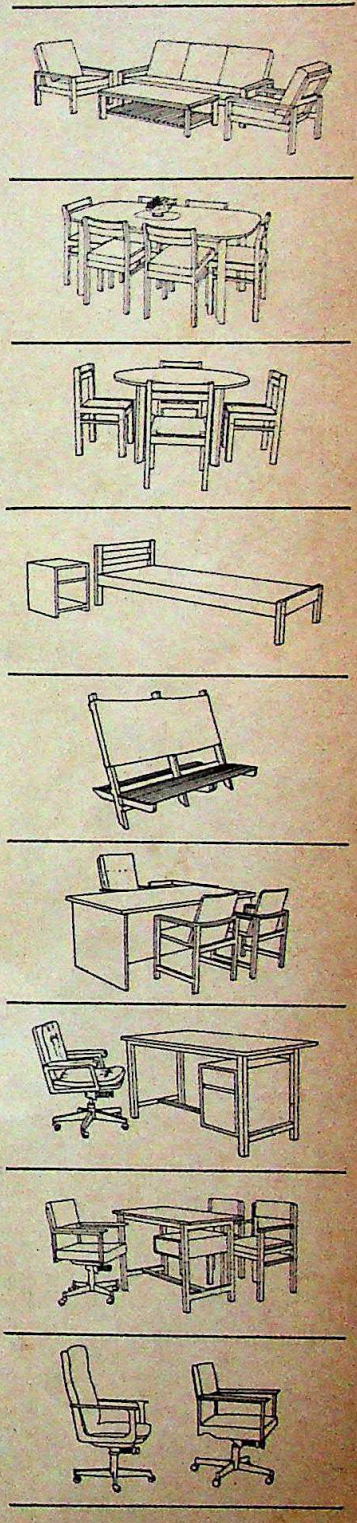

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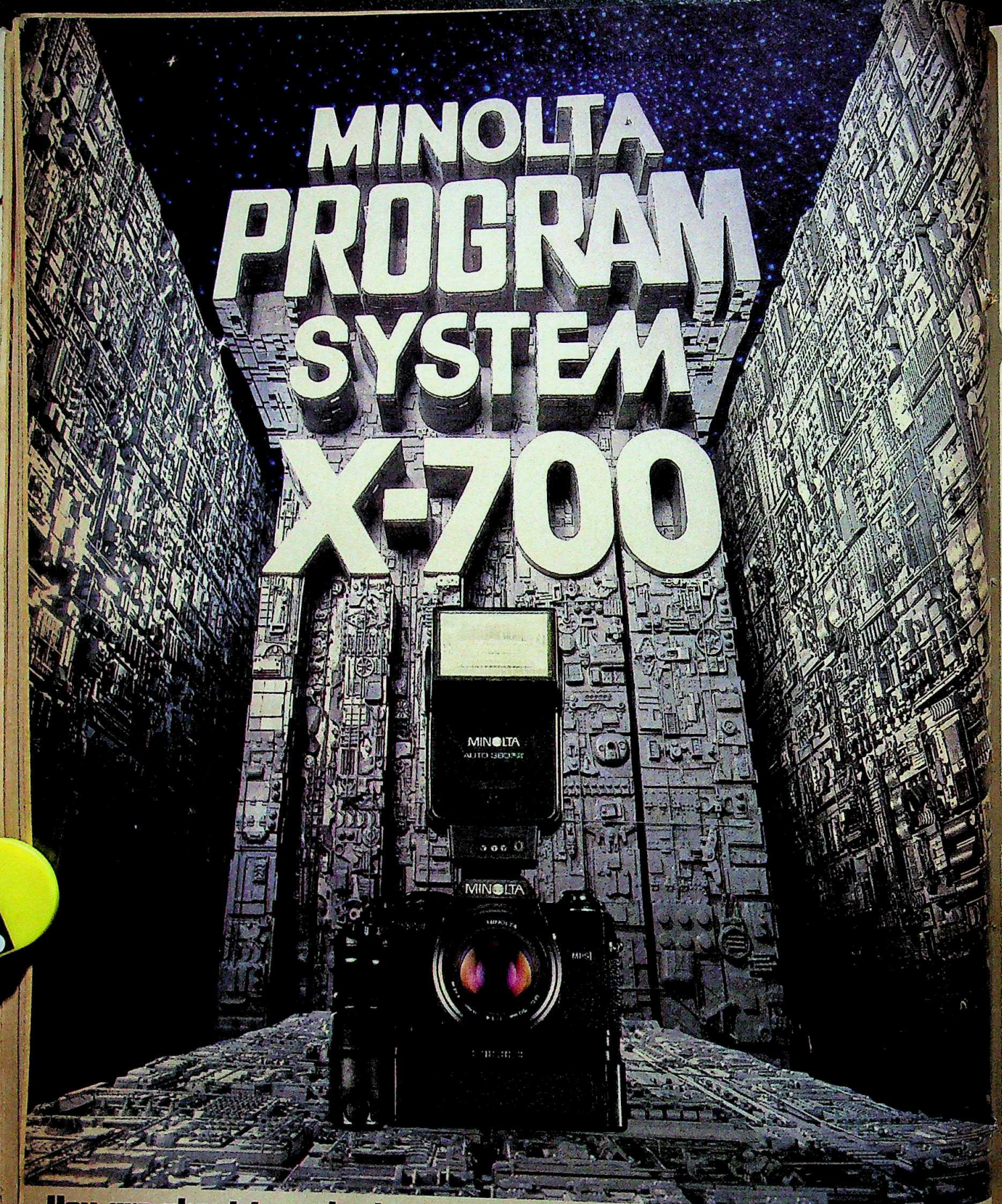

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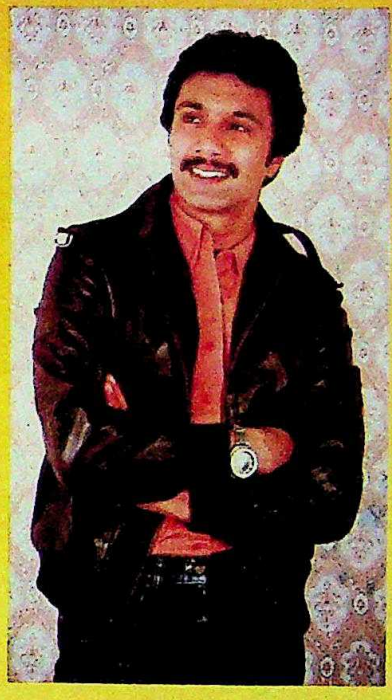

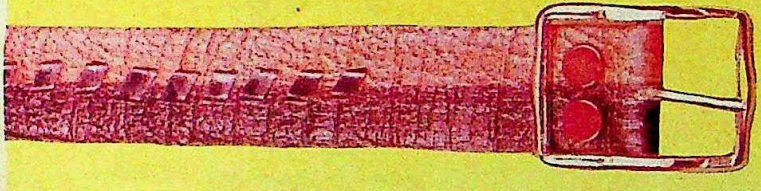

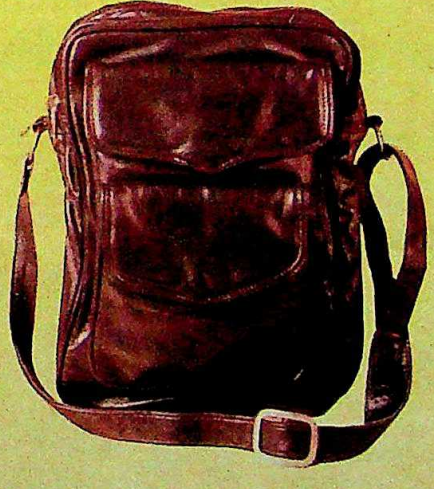

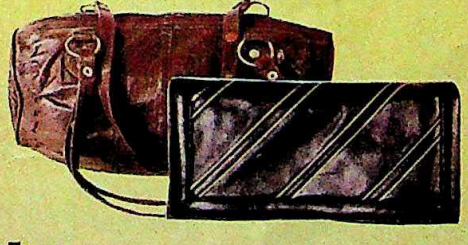

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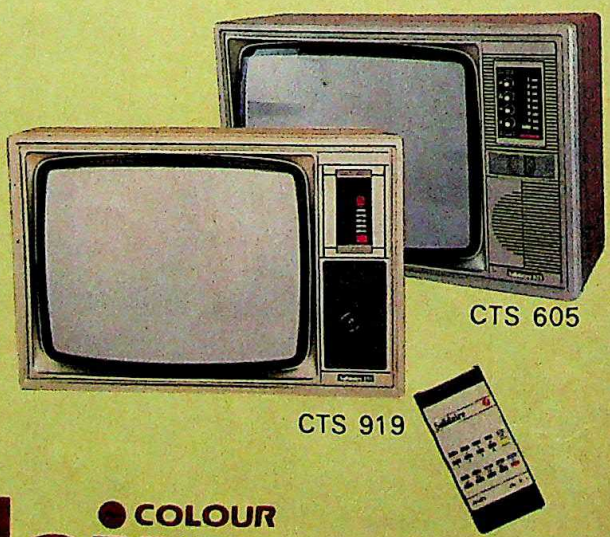

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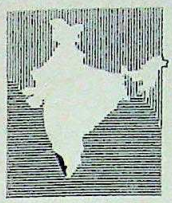
KERALA

Truce Time



PUTTING aside their well-worn brick bats, the battle-scarred veterans of the ruling Congress(I)-led United Democratic Front (UDF) are hesitantly pulling out their faded olive branch for one of the periodic truces that mark the lull before the storm in the coalition. Chief Minister Karunakaran's threat to hold a mid-term election was shot down last fortnight by the more powerful Kerala Congress and Mulsim League constituents of the ruling front. Karunakaran maintained that the idea could be revived but this is unlikely for some time to come.

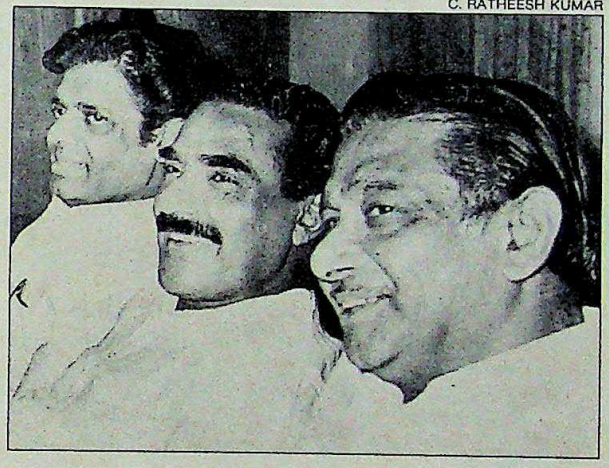
When the leaders of the UDF met in Karunakaran's living-room in his official residence, The Cliff House, after his return from Delhi with the green signal for holding elections in the state, it soon became clear that the Kerala Congress and Muslim League—who have 29 of the UDF's 80 MLA's between them—were in no mood to accommodate Karunakaran in his desire to hold a mid-term poll. Said Tachadi Prabhakaran, a Congress(I) MLA who had a ring side view of the happenings in Cliff House: "The Kerala Congress knew that we would ditch them if we get the support of the Muslim League, so they brainwashed the League who at the last minute turned against us and we had to fight it alone."

Both the Congress(I) and Karunakaran, who were riding a wave following their attempts to cut to size the Kerala Congress in the last few months, now found their credibility at its nadir. Said Arayadan Mohammed, a former Congress(I) minister: "It has been proved once again that the Congress(I) is not being taken seriously by the Kerala Congress and the Muslim League even though, at the moment, we are numerically stronger and head the coalition. The Kerala unit of the Congress(I) can never stand on its feet without the support of these communal parties."

The idea behind Karunakaran's call for a mid-term poll was to begin on a new slate by clipping the wings of the Kerala Congress. At one stage he was even willing to throw them out of the UDF into political oblivion knowing full well that the Marxist-led Opposition would have no truck with them. For this he was counting on the support of the Muslim League, some of whose leaders are known to be closer to him than even his own party's ministers. Said a Congress(I) minister: "In the last three years Karunakaran has given everything the Muslim League asked for. So he knew that they were safely in his pocket, but when he needed their support more than ever before, they dilly-dallied." Leading the statusquoists in the League ranks was E. Ahamed, the industry minister and Muslim League strongman—an ardent supporter of Chief Minister Karunakaran.

The Kerala Congress played its cards

C. RATHEESH KUMAR



(From left) Ahamed, Mani and Abubacker: wrangling

shrewdly. K.M. Mani and P.J. Joseph met Home Minister Vayalar Ravi, who heads the anti-Karunakaran lobby in the state, and made it clear to him that Karunakaran's mid-term poll plan was a ruse for a cabinet reshuffle which would see him dropped from the ministry. Ravi—humiliated all these months by Karunakaran—saw an opportunity to hit back and told the chief minister that if he went in for a mid-term poll, it would be at his own risk. Oommen Chandy—the convener of the UDF liaison committee and protege of A.K. Antony—maintained a studied silence since he knew that the high command favoured him and that the Christian-dominated Kerala Congress would support him against Ravi for the chief ministership.

K.M. Mani then personally went to Malappuram, the Muslim League headquarters, and met Panakkad Sihab Thangal, state president and the spiritual leader of Muslims in the state and bitterly complained about E. Ahamed and his dealings with Karunakaran. Thangal's blue-eyed boy, the Malappuram MLA Kunjalikutty—no great fan of Karunakaran—also prevailed upon him to resist any attempt to establish a Congress(I) hegemony. Sulaiman Sait, MP, and Karunakaran's most bitter Muslim critic, also rushed from Delhi and pleaded with Thangal to resist Congress(I) moves. Mani is reported to have told the Muslim League leaders that if a mid-term poll was to take place the Congress(I) would demand nearly 90 seats in a house of 141 and pointed out that they would have to go along with the Congress(I) terms. Said U.A. Beeran, the Muslim League civil supplies minister: " We could have forged a third front of like-minded parties against the Congress(I) and the Marxists but that would take time." Finally, on the day of reckoning, Mani asked Karunakaran to conduct elections after another six months as the party, with its image at its lowest ebb, could not risk an election.

Karunakaran bowed to the inevitable realising that the party would be left in the lurch. By unspsoken consent, further sabre-rattling in the UDF ceased pending the results of further talks on the issue. Said P.C. Chacko, the dynamic Congress(S) state president: " Karunakaran's insatiable appetite for power and the capacity to bargain for it has eroded the charisma of Rajiv Gandhi in the state. A lot of people keep asking me how Rajiv is tolerating Karunakaran's antics." Karunakaran's rivals in the party—Vayalar Ravi and Oommen Chandy—in private wonder about his clout in Delhi. But Karunakaran nearing 70 with 18 years as state party boss, has more guile and cunning than Chandy and Ravi put together. Shortly after surrendering to the Kerala Congress and Muslim League, Karunakaran left to climb the steep hills of Sabarimala, doubtless to secure the blessing of Lord Ayyappa. A few hours after he left for Sabarimala, his staunchest supporter and Youth Congress state President G. Karthikeyan, MLA, told a press conference: " We should break the shackles that bind us to small communal pressure groups and go it alone to have a political polarisation." The Congress was certainly back to square one with one but for Karunakaran, the tightrope walker extraordinaire, the show goes on.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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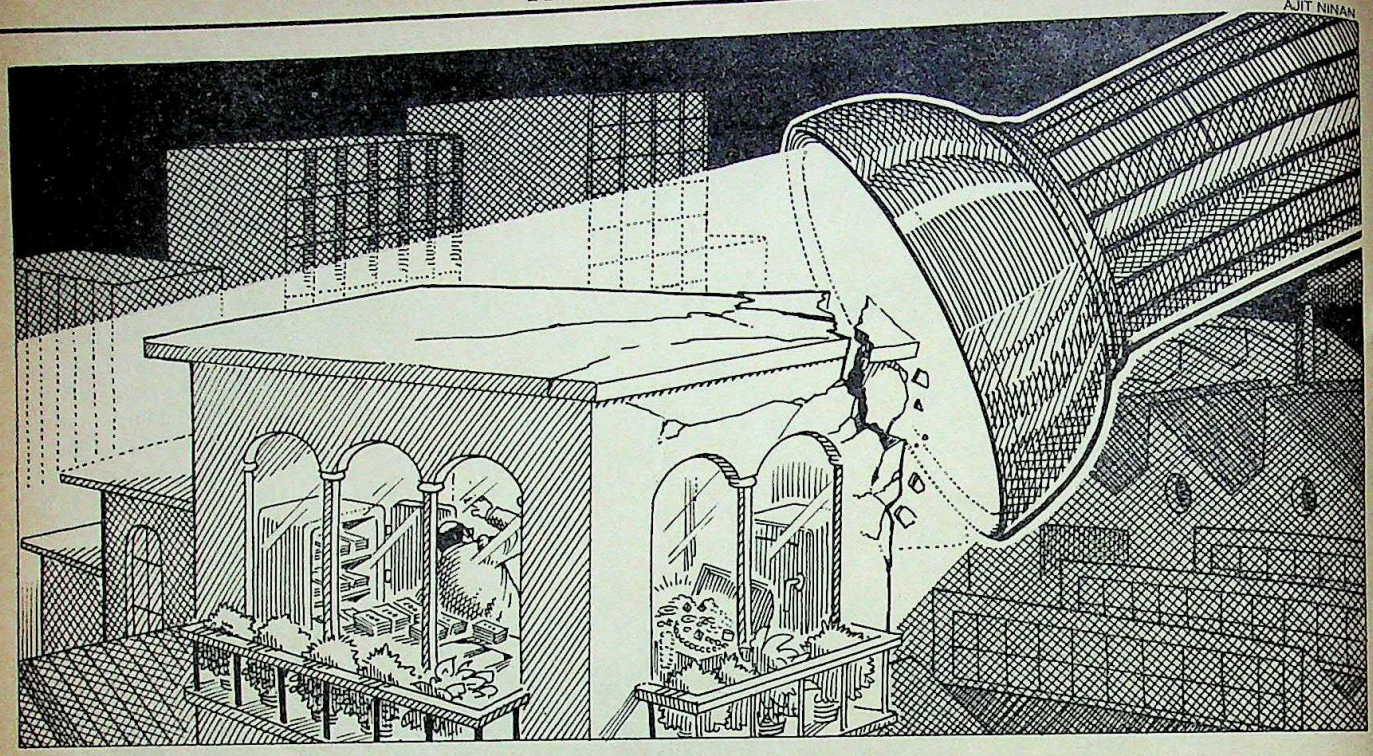
AJIT NINAN



Raiders of the Lost Tax

HARDLY a week went by in recent months without the newspapers carrying startling headlines about government-ordered raids on business houses, trade establishments, and private residences. And the list of people raided on allegations of 'economic offence' read like a veritable who's who of Dalal Street. A jittery business community reacted with dismay when the axe fell on industrial stalwarts S.L. Kirloskar and Rahul Bajaj. Even ordinary, middle class citizens began expressing fear and doubt about their right to privacy and freedom from undue government intrusion. This raised questions about who the raiders are, where they derive their powers from, what protections and rights accrue to the raided, how raids are conducted, who are the likely targets, and whether it is proper to publicise raids on people who have not yet been found guilty. To answer these questions, Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *interviewed businessmen and intelligence officials in New Delhi. Assistant Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA *and Correspondents* JAGANNATH DUBASHI *and* RAMESH MENON *talked to politicians, the raiders and the raided in Bombay and Ahmedabad. Their report:*

BHAWAN SINGH

V.P. SINGH
finance minister

"There is nothing wrong in giving publicity to the raids. After all, it is the public money that is at stake and the people have a right to know. The drive is not aimed at maligning industrialists...."

HARI OM GULATI

D.N. PATODIA
president, FICCI

"The structure of the laws and regulations is so complicated, so confusing and contradictory that it is impossible for a citizen to know whether he is in perpetual violation of some law or the other."

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IT HAS produced fear and loathing, awe and admiration, pious praise and scathing denunciation. Like the French Revolution's guillotine, it pronounces guilt through execution. It has become Rajiv Gandhi's and his Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh's most potent battering ram in their armamentarium of weapons against "economic crimes". In the lexicography of the new anti-corruption culture it is known simply as the raid.

It strikes anywhere and without notice in a blaze of publicity. The distinctions between the innocent and the guilty, the indicted and the accused blur. An industry here, a business house there, a private residence elsewhere. Swarms of raiders from economic intelligence agencies swoop down on them, search their dwellings and offices and bank lockers and make off with "incriminating documents", and oodles of cash and jewellery. The process of law, to determine guilt or innocence, moves into creaky action only later. The overwhelming might with which the Government's raiders can strike at short notice could teach the mobiliser of a guerrilla army a lesson.

When income tax intelligence raided

BAJAJ AUTO

At a Premium

BHAWAN SINGH

RAHUL BAJAJ
managing director, Bajaj Auto

Bajaj himself was intercepted on the way into town from Bombay airport and 'accompanied' to his office at Bajaj Bhawan. There he was interrogated for six hours.

THE AFFAIR supposedly started in August when, during a raid on a Patna dealer of Bajaj Auto Ltd, duplicate books were recovered showing that Rs 12 lakh had been paid to a top company executive. This sparked off a series of investigations into the premium racket in the 33,000 three-wheelers that Bajaj Auto builds every year. The premium on each is around Rs 7,500.

The raid report was sent to the Finance Ministry, but as a matter of strategy, the department kept quiet. They studied the market for five months, collecting information piecemeal. D.N. Pathak, the newly-appointed director (investigation) in Bombay comes from Uttar Pradesh, the state of Finance Minister V.P. Singh, and was obviously brought in as a trusted confidant of the powers that be in a sensitive post. Pathak is known to be a stickler for rules, and maintains a low profile. He coordinated the entire investigation and operation, right from the lists of Bajaj dealers to the detailing of raiding parties. The object: to bust a suspected racket which they believed resulted in the generation of Rs 3 crore of black money every year.

One day before the raid, a deputy director of intelligence visited the Bajaj plant in Pune disguised as a schoolteacher, to check out the various entry points and sensitive locations. The Pune commissioner of income tax was requested in a letter sent in a sealed cover to collect 100 people at his office and also to arrange buses and taxis.

On December 17, 1985, at 7.45 a.m. 285 people in Pune and Bombay fanned out to 65 locations and began an intensive search. One hundred and one search warrants were signed by Pathak. Bajaj himself was intercepted on the way into town from Bombay airport and 'accompanied' to his office at Bajaj Bhawan on Nariman Point. There he was interrogated for six hours.

Sources say that the officers repeatedly confronted him with the books recovered from the Patna dealer and asked him to explain the listed payment of Rs 12 lakh. According to the same sources, Bajaj said that there were heavy premiums in the sale of the three-wheelers but added that he or his company had no responsibility other than ensuring that the machines were supplied according to priority. He also said that they had no control on what his customers did with the vehicles after buying them.

The department also seized over Rs 1 crore from four Bajaj dealers: cash, jewellery, fixed deposit receipts. The dealers include Project Automobiles, Malad, and its associated concerns like Sah and Sanghi and their partners; Automotive Manufacturers Ltd in Bombay and its branch offices in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh; Ranji Automobiles, Ahmedabad; Amin Automobiles also of Ahmedabad.

Ranjan Sanghi of Sah and Sanghi denies that his companies are involved in any premium racket, and uses the same argument as Bajaj Auto that they could not be in the premium racket even if they wanted to, as all the lists are computerised and open for public inspection. "We go strictly by the rules. There is no question of hanky-panky anywhere," says Sanghi.

However, a scrutiny of the documents by department officials led them to conclude that, in one official's words, "A substantial amount of premium is being charged on the three-wheelers. A portion of the premium collected was being pocketed by the dealers. Vehicles were coming back to Bombay and Pune from Hyderabad and Ahmedabad for actual usage although they were booked in those cities." He asserts that three-wheelers were found to be available in Bombay through Bajaj Auto dealers at a premium. "During the searches, in fact, we recovered more evidence which showed that certain vehicles had been booked by the *benamidars* of the dealers and secondly that these vehicles were being allotted out of turn," he adds. With Bajaj denying this vigorously, the case promises to be long and drawnout.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI in Pune

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Navani Builders in Bombay last February they recruited more than 900 raiders for the job. In addition, they requisitioned 125 taxis, 12 BEST buses and 12 private cars to strike with lightning speed at several locations scattered in the Bombay area. The raid lasted three days and covered about 300 premises.

Raids are hardly a new phenomenon. They were used against political targets during the Emergency. In fact, the pecking order among Sanjay Gandhi's coterie of friends was decided on their ability to get someone raided faster than the other. The Janata government, in pursuit of Mrs Gandhi, took a page right out of Sanjay's raid book. In the public mind raids had become a discredited instrument of official goondaism in which politicians punished other politicians or intimidated a recalcitrant businessman into donating to the party's coffers. Rajiv's Government has tried to give raids a new respectability by insisting that they are unbiased, free from political taint, and are used only as a punitive instrument of fiscal policy to flush out tax evaders and forever bury the parallel black economy.

But notwithstanding these pronouncements, the sheer intensity, frequency, and size of the raids conducted during the past year, and their targets—often regarded as the doyens of enlightened capitalist industrialisation—has sent shock waves of consternation, confusion, bitterness and demoralisation throughout the business community.

Perhaps no past raid has produced as many ripples as have the Revenue Intelligence and Enforcement Directorate strikes against Bajaj Autos and the Kirloskar Group of Companies. The Bajaj Group was accused of generating some Rs 3 crore of black money each year as part of a premium racket on Bajaj scooters and autorickshaws (*see box*).

The octogenarain giant of the engineering export industry, Shantanu Laxman Kirloskar, was interrogated by seven DRI officials a week before the Bajaj raids. The questioning started at 6 p.m. on December 6 and ended at 3 a.m. the next morning. His wife was grilled for several hours as well.

A sprightly 82, Kirloskar was still smarting under the treatment meted out to him when he talked to INDIA TODAY. Describing all allegations as "completely false", he emphasised that no formal charges had been pressed against him.

The main allegations against Kirloskar are that his group had made substantial investments abroad without the permission of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Specifically:

► F.H. Schule, GMBH, Hamburg, West Germany, the first major overseas company to be acquired by the Kirloskars, manufacturers of diesel engines in the 3

INTELLIGENCE OPERATION

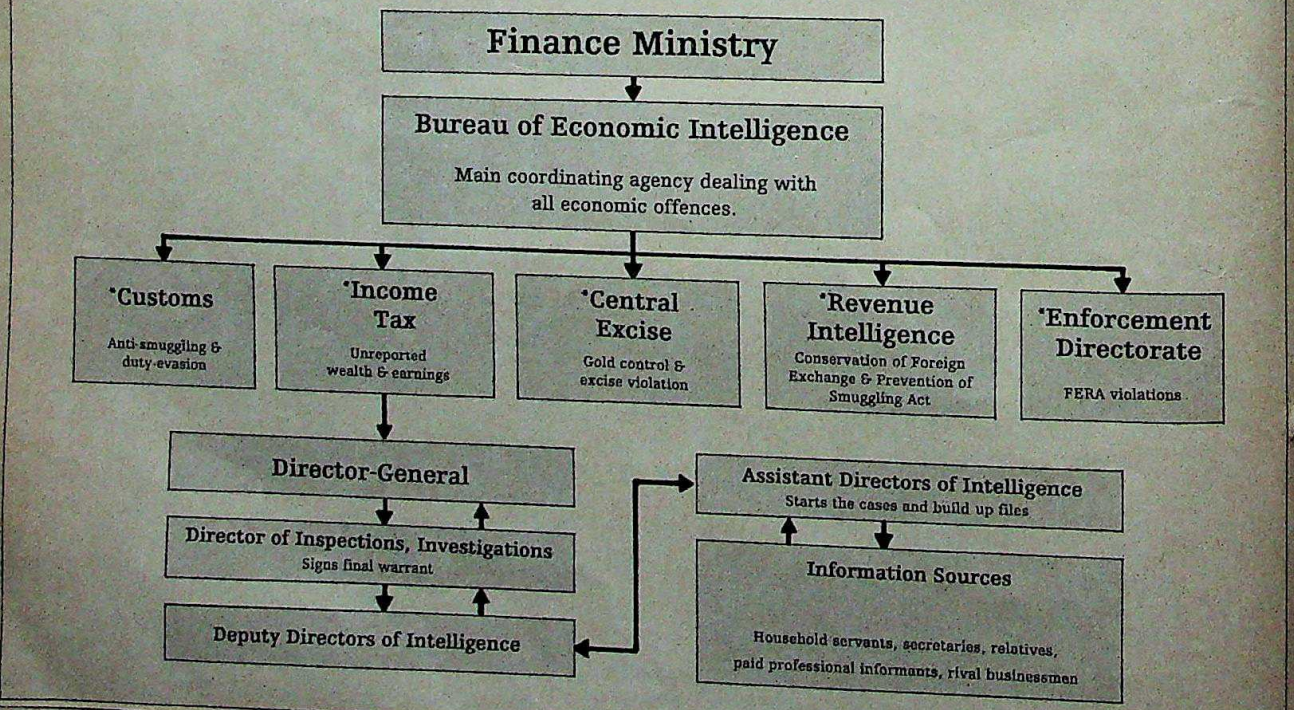
The Hawks

THERE are essentially five government departments—collectively known as economic intelligence agencies—which spook around business establishments, industrial units, private residences, manufacturers' godowns, import docks, and can despatch a swarm of raiders to make that early morning knock on the door with search and seizure warrants.

They are: Customs, Central Excise, Income Tax, Department of Revenue Establishment, and the Enforcement Directorate. They sometimes have overlapping, conflicting jurisdiction and often work without any central coordination. But their overall goal is to ferret out undisclosed assets and income, gold control violations, manipulation of foreign exchange, smuggled goods, and imported goods whose values may have been "under-invoiced" in order to lessen or avoid duty.

While these intelligence wings may vary in structure, chains of command

How big brother watches



*Intelligence operations only. The raid can involve from between 20 and 1,000 raiders depending on the size of the operation.

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HP to 60 HP range and other products like grain processing plants, filtration equipment and packaging machinery. Kirloskar Oil Engines Limited (KOEL), of which S.L. Kirloskar is the chairman, holds shares worth DM 1.9 million (Rs 93 lakh) in F.H. Schule. The company's paid up capital was increased from DM 2 million to DM 4 million (Rs 1.96 crore) in 1974, and at that time DM 2 million was invested in F.H. Schule by a Liechtenstein trust. The DRI claims to have evidence to show that the Kirloskars have created the trust and that the other half of F.H. Schule's equity is thus also owned by the Kirloskars. This has been done in contravention of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act.

S.L. KIRLOSKAR
chairman, Kirloskar Oil Engines Ltd

"The allegations are completely false. There is no under-invoicing involved here. We hammered the price down. When the Government of India hammers down the price, is that under-invoicing?"

► S.P.P. plc is an English company which markets Kirloskar pumps in Britain. The Kirloskars are said to have bought £0.5 million (Rs 87 lakh) worth of S.P.P. shares which were being paid for by another British company by P.M.Engines on behalf of Kirloskar Bros Ltd, of which S.L.Kirloskar is the chairman. P.M. Engines is partly owned by F.H. Schule. The investment of £0.5 million was in two parts: £0.3 million (Rs 52 lakh) financed by a loan from Grindlays Bank, London, and £0.2 million sent to England by havala. The £0.3 million loan was repaid directly from Japan, utilising a commission of £0.23 million

and authority to prosecute, their operations are similar. Though lean at the top they are able to mobilise hundreds of raiders at short notice and spring into action with lethal alacrity.

Typically—as in the case of the Income Tax Department—the intelligence operation would be headed by a director-general based in Delhi who is assisted by directors of inspection (investigations) based in Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras. They, in turn, are served by many deputy and assistant directors of intelligence. Under the Income Tax Act of 1961, a director or chief commissioner is authorised to sign raid warrants.

Raids are not planned overnight. They sometimes take six months to a year of preparation. Income tax cases, for example, are usually started by an assistant director (AD) who is a Class 1, Indian Revenue Service officer with at least five years of service. The AD generally gets his tips and information from market sources, news articles, paid informants, business partners, secretaries, and domestic servants. The intelligence agencies are reported to have as many as 5,000 regular informers in all major cities. Every year, immediately after the budget proposals are tabled before Parliament, the Income Tax Department prepares a list of about 200 companies and 5,000 individual assessees for special scrutiny.

These lists are based on raw information being gathered from informers and are not in themselves a cause for any precipitate action. But once an AD—based on exhaustive interviews with his sources—is convinced that an investigation is warranted he submits the information to his deputy director (DD) who can then authorise a covert operation by paying a spy from a secret fund to penetrate the organisation under surveillance.

If the spy generates useful information the surveillance file is sent to the director or to the relevant commissioner. The beginnings of a raid now start to shape up. At this stage of the game the DD and the AD obtain the official records of the targeted individual or organisation from various departments in total secrecy—in order to prevent the destruction of files or relevant material by a bureaucrat or *chaprasi* who may be a friend of the suspect.

Before authorising a raid, a director must be convinced of three things:

► preliminary facts show that a person has actually earned more than he has shown;

► the suspect's established modus operandi—the real mechanics of how he earns black money;

► a search or a raid must produce illegal cash, jewellery, or incriminating documents.

Only when convinced on all three counts will the director sign a "satisfaction note"—the go ahead for the warrant to raid. As a rule, for every individual who is searched or raided there are at least 50 friends, accomplices, acquaintances or partners who will also be visited, and the director—before he gives the final okay—must be given a dossier on each person to be covered by the raid.

Before the actual raid occurs a top secret logistical operation is launched. Groups of raiding parties are assembled. Inspectors from the local police are requisitioned if they are needed. Locations—often all over the country—are secretly reconnoitered. Information on bank lockers, accounts, fixed deposits, and voucher registers is accumulated.

Until the last minute only two or three top officials will know who is being raided and where the raids are to be carried out. The head of each raiding party—the team leader—is given a sealed envelope containing detailed instructions, addresses, identities of people, and maps that he can open only after he has reached a given destination. He must go into action—timed to the minute with other raiding parties—only after opening the envelope.

The kit of the income tax raiders includes an envelope containing cloth, needle and thread to sew up seized cash and valuables, wax seals, their own personal rubber stamps, and Rs 10 as lunch allowance. The raids may start at 7 a.m. and last until 3 p.m. or longer. Following the search and lengthy interrogations of suspects the investigations wing will issue a report to the proper income tax officer, and there the work of the raider ends.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

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(Rs 40 lakh) due from Ebara of Japan.

► As on June 13, 1985, export earnings of KOEL to the tune of Rs 2.51 crore have not been repatriated to India.

► Kirloskar Industries, Philippines, a joint venture promoted by KOEL, is now under liquidation. Amounts due to KOEL come to $1.16 million (Rs 1.42 crore) and are yet to be repatriated.

► Kirloskar Cummins Ltd (KCL) under-invoiced rod forgings imports from Japan by Rs 2.25 lakh. The difference is said to have been paid to Genemaco.

S.L. Kirloskar was cool when asked about the charges. His answers:

► "We have no connection with the Liechtenstein company which made the investment in F.H. Schule."

► "The allegations are completely false."

► "We export Rs 200 crore worth of engineering goods every year. The Rs 2.5 crore that we are said to have not repatriated are bad debts that occur in any business."

► "There is no under-invoicing involved here. We hammered the price down. It is a legitimate business deal. When the Government of India hammers down the price of its imports, is that under-invoicing?"

Kirloskar said he would not like to say anything more at this stage while investigations were in progress, but emphasised that no charges had yet been preferred. Kirloskar talks slowly but firmly and although he doesn't say so in so many words, is obviously cut up over the treatment meted out to him by the DRI.

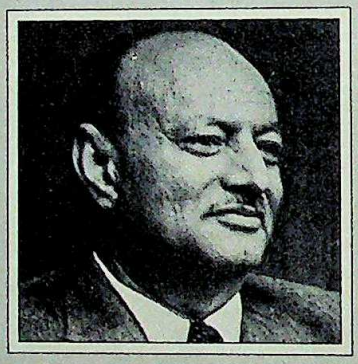
With newspaper stories about the raids on Vijay Mallya, Manu Chhabria, Kapal Mehra still lingering in their minds, the Bajaj and Kirloskar affairs have prompted alarmed cries of foul from the business community. Much of this sentiment is still muted—largely because of fear. But several businessmen confided that there is a feeling that Rajiv and his government are ushering in a raid raj as a "socialist tamasha" to counter criticism that their budgetary and fiscal policies have been too business oriented. "The man on the street," a businessmen said, "gets the impression that the Government is socking it to the big businessman on his behalf."

Whether the Government's motivation is a sinister and underhanded exercise in which the raided are made the scapegoats is anybody's guess. But Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh has made no bones about government playing Robinhood. He has said that the taxes evaded by big businesses are, indeed, "the share of the poor. We're here on behalf of the common man." And Minister of State for Finance Janardhan Poojary has vowed that the "war" on black money will be continued until all black money is unearthed.

A PROMINENT New Delhi businessman was more blunt. "Sure we made black money. All businessmen made black money to meet the demands of political candidates. Do you think they can fight elections on the Rs 1 lakh to which they were restricted. We had to pay the remaining Rs 2 or 3 lakh to make up the difference. Where do you think this came from? We couldn't pull it out of our companies. How could we explain this to our shareholders? This came out of black money." Arguing that it was all very well to now talk of a new culture, the raids were punishment meted out for wrongdoing that occurred two or three years ago when politicians and businessman had a different equation. More pertinently, businessmen ask, why is the Government pursuing the raids so vigorously when it has permitted people to declare concealed wealth by March 1986? "Why not wait and see the results?", they ask.

Jyotirmoy Dutta, chairman, Central Board of Customs and Excise, counters this general feeling by saying that the Government is only looking for what is legally due to it by way of tax, and isn't out to persecute anyone unfairly. But he warns: "Top industrialists and businessmen have made it their habit to delay their payment due to the Government. They have the best legal and accountancy brains at their disposal. They make a mockery of our budgetary exercise."

But the demoralisation that has set in within business circles is genuine. D.N. Patodia, president of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, says that the new Government and its economic reform packages had for the first time created an atmosphere in which government and industry could co-



M.L. WADHAWAN

head of the Bureau of Economic Intelligence

"Our job will be to identify and gather information about economic offenders...We will be the focal point for liaison among the intelligence agencies and a storehouse for all possible intelligence."

THE LAWS

Victims' Rights

DURING and after an income tax raid conducted by the intelligence wing, the raided have several rights and appeal avenues open to them under the law.

► Officers of a raiding party must first produce a search warrant, and the raided have a right to ask them to submit themselves to a comprehensive body search in the presence of independent witnesses—who must be present during a raid—in order to ensure that government agents are not planting any incriminating evidence on the premises.

► The raiders can under no circumstances seize all cash and jewellery they find. If the raided is able to prove on the spot that his valuables have been declared and taxes have been paid, the assets cannot be taken away.

► After a comprehensive search—usually in and around and under every receptacle on the premises—the officers must make a *panchnama*— detailed records and receipts co-signed by the independent witnesses, the team leader and the suspect—before the packets are sealed.

► Under Section 132 (5) of the Income

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operate "in taking the country ahead at a fast rate. Anything that dampens this spirit is indeed unfortunate. The wide publicity that is being given and arrests being made before charges are proved has come as a disappointment. I feel in all such cases advance publicity is totally uncalled for, and arrest is discretionary, not obligatory."

V.P. Singh responded during an interview: "There is nothing wrong in giving publicity to the raids. After all, it is public money that is at stake and the people have a right to know what has happened to this money. This drive is not aimed at maligning industrialists or individuals but to inform and educate the people about unethical trade and business practices. Industry must create an environment in which the Government trusts them. We just cannot ignore a person simply because he has a better name and life-style than others."

But Patodia believes that the Government must do a bit of legal and regulatory housecleaning of its own. "The structure of hundreds of thousands of laws and regulations," he says, "is so complicated, so confusing and contradictory that it is impossible for a citizen to know whether or not he is all the time in perpetual violation of some law of or the other. Indian laws must change and be replaced by fresh, easy to understand language so you don't have to have lawyers to interpret them all the time."

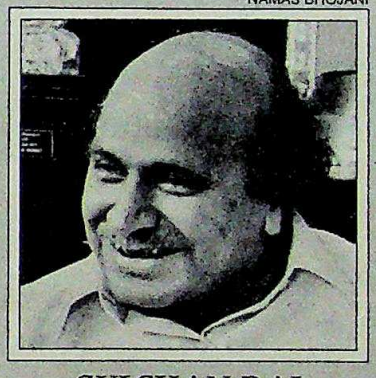
Ashok Mehra, 38, one of the proprietors of Mehrasons, a leading New Delhi jewellery business says he is the victim of excise inspectors who do not themselves know the technicalities of the law they are supposed to enforce. The operating licences of four of his stores were recently suspended, along with those of nine other jewellers, for "illegal transactions" following raids conducted earlier during the year. Soon after this, however, he appealed to the high court and obtained a stay order.

THE MAIN accusation against Mehrasons was that the dealers had less quantity of gold than was shown in the books, the suspicion being that they sold this gold without showing it on the books, thereby generating black money. But, argues Mehra, "The inspectors who came to check our registers and weigh our stocks don't even know the difference between 14 carat, 22 carat and 24 carat gold. So how can they know whether the gold is less or more?" In their Karol Bagh showroom, for instance, excise inspectors weighed the entire stock and found it 3 kg short. But when Mehra convinced them that they were technically wrong they re-weighed it and found 500 grams excess. Then they re-weighed it again and found 300 grams less. All the while, Mehra complained: "They don't let you argue with them or explain anything to them. They simply tell you, sign here or we'll seize it and seal it."

Mehra believes the whole system is arbitrary. "Remember," he says, "our books are constantly inspected. Still, they raided us 10 months ago, and now, overnight they tell us our licences are suspended. We are not even proven guilty or even have a chance to explain. They did not even give us a photocopy of our papers they seized. When we ask them how they can do this without proving us guilty they simply respond, 'we have powers'. We have always paid our sales tax and income tax. We have done nothing wrong. Who will make up for the reputation we have lost and loss of revenue? My children read about it in the papers and ask me what I have done. This is the height of *babu raj*. I had plans to expand my business but I will not do so now. Ultimately the Government will also lose on revenue if businessmen lose confidence and refuse to expand."

The frequency of raids and the attendant publicity has caused not just the business community but also middle class citizens to express fears of their privacy being violated through raids. Several people who talked to INDIA TODAY expressed a common concern. They are wage earners and petty businessmen. Many of them bought houses 20 years ago when land was cheap, or inherited gold and jewellery which have appreciated five-and ten-fold. They face a Catch-22 conundrum, if they declare their assets they may be subjected to a wealth tax that their earnings—on which they already pay regular taxes—cannot afford. Alternatively, if they are raided they can be charged with concealing undeclared wealth and subjected to confiscations and penalties. And many of them believe that the next midnight

NAMAS BHOJANI



GULSHAN RAI

film producer

"My blood pressure went up 200 over 140. I didn't know whether I was going to live or die. I haven't done any crime in my life. I have suffered heavy losses in the last two years."

Tax Act, an income tax officer must issue a report within 120 days on whether seized items will be kept with the department as collateral against unpaid taxes or released to the owner. The officer, at his discretion, may work out a tax and a penalty and release the valuables if the assessee agrees to pay in writing. But he will be reluctant to do so if the liability exceeds Rs 1 lakh. If the owner can prove that the assets have been unreasonably detained beyond 120 days the department will pay an appropriate interest upon returning his cash and valuables.

► An individual who believes he has been unfairly raided can appeal to the high court alleging that the search was mala fide, or submit a writ petition against the search to the Supreme Court. The courts—based on the facts— may declare a search illegal and order the department to return the material, but they will not question the judgement of the commissioner or director who ordered the raid. A court judgement against the department does not mean that the tax case against the individual will be necessarily dropped.

► A final order or assessment made by an income tax officer on the basis of the raid can be appealed to the income tax commissioner or to income tax tribunals that fall within the jurisdiction of the Law Ministry. —INDERJIT BADHWAR

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knock from the intelligence agencies will come at their doors.*(see box)*

But the chances of this happening are slim. As one revenue intelligence raider explained: "The smaller guy doesn't need to fear us. Usually we have instructions to leave personal jewellery under a lakh of rupees alone. We may list it but we don't seize it. The big fish are more important. If an informant comes to me I'd be interested in someone who has quietly accumulated Rs 20 or 30 lakh in the last five years through an established, illegal modus operandi. In a big city like Bombay, for example, we know that most people are earning black money. We get regular information on fixed deposits. If we find, for example, that someone is showing fixed deposits of Rs 2 lakh and has bought two new flats in succession then we would have reason to start making inquiries."

M.L. Wadhawan, one of the most powerful bureaucrats in the Finance Ministry, heads the newly-created Bureau of Economic Intelligence a super-agency which, when fully staffed, will be able to perform—through signing warrants or making requisitions—the functions of all the five intelligence wings that are operating at present. His concern is not with the small fry.

HARI OM GULATI

ASHOK MEHRA

proprietor, Mehrasons Jewellers

"We have always paid our sales and income tax. Who will make up for the reputation we have lost and loss of revenue? My children ask me what I have done. This is the height of *babu raj.*"

"WHEN we are fully operational," Wadhawan says, "our job will be to identify and gather information against economic offenders operating either as a syndicate or individuals on a large scale. We will then collate this information and develop all the legal angles under applicable fiscal laws, plan and coordinate strike actions, and monitor follow-up investigations by all agencies concerned. We will be the focal point for liaison among all the intelligence agencies and a storehouse for all possible economic intelligence."*(see box)*

The bureau, further, will concentrate on the sources where black money is generated, some areas being the hotel industry, real estate and films. While some of the industries under scrutiny have escaped full-scale raids, the film business seems to have had more than its share during the past year.

According to intelligence sources, the Bombay film industry is said to generate about Rs 50 crore of black money every month. Single deals involve as much as 60 per cent of black money. Recently, seven groups of distributors and exhibitors were raided. Among them: Gulshan Rai, Yash Chopra, B.R. Chopra, Subhash Ghai and N.N. Sippy. Says Rai about the raid on his house: "My blood pressure went up 200 over 140. I didn't know whether I was going to live or die. I haven't done any crime in my life. I have suffered heavy losses in the last two years." But he was quick to add that the dozen or so officers who raided him were "very polite and well-behaved ". Recoveries made from Rai's house included Rs 51,000 in cash and Rs 3.4 lakh of jewellery.

While Bombay is highlighted as the raids capital of India because of the publicity given to film stars and producers caught in the dragnet, its real importances lies in its being the financial lynchpin of western India—the most important revenue collection base in the country.

Last year there were 600 income tax searches in Bombay yielding seizures of Rs 3.5 crore. This year there were 1,100 searches with seizures of Rs 15.6 crore. Duty evasion cases shot up from 5,070 (detected) involving Rs 59 crore of evaded duty to 6,124 with Rs 228 crore duty evasions. Last year Bombay customs made 643 arrests and obtained 359 convictions. This years arrests shot up to 847 with 335 convictions so far.

While customs raids and investigations yield a large number of prosecutions because cases are usually made against thugs and smugglers who can be tried in criminal courts, other areas of economic intelligence lead to mixed or poor results. Initial search, seizure and recovery figures given by the Government in the areas of income tax evasion are ultimately rendered meaningless because they are usually litigated in courts of law. And in the majority of income tax cases the courts, in the absence of concrete evidence that a suspect deliberately tried to cheat the Government, decides against criminal conviction.

At last count more than 15,000 Customs and Excise cases were pending in the courts with a total revenue implication of about Rs 3,800 crore. Intelligence agency officials complain that the involvement of courts slows down the pace of prosecutions and the realisation of revenues. They are lobbying intensely for the creation of special income tax courts to handle the cases expeditiously. But as one Delhi industrialist put it: "It's ridiculous to blame the courts. In this country we live under the rule of law. Just because the Government gives you some fancy figures and says these are the money claims pending for the treasury doesn't mean those claims are right or even accurate. As individuals we have the right to use the courts to challenge the powers and claims of the state no matter how deeply they may be clad in today's so-called 'culture'."

Purshottam Choksi, chairman of the Manek Chowk Mahajan Association in Ahmedabad, where excise inspectors sprang raids on the premises of 27 gold and silver dealers and seized Rs 10,000 worth of gold sums it up another way: "It is a good idea to unearth unaccounted money. But we businessmen should not be unnecessarily harassed. So much publicity is given to the raids by the Income Tax Department that the people have started getting the feeling that we are all defaulters and enemies of the nation. After the case is heard, businessmen often get back all that was seized. But no publicity is given to that." With the protagonists standing daggers drawn, neither side is likely to yield. The raid, it seems, is here to stay.

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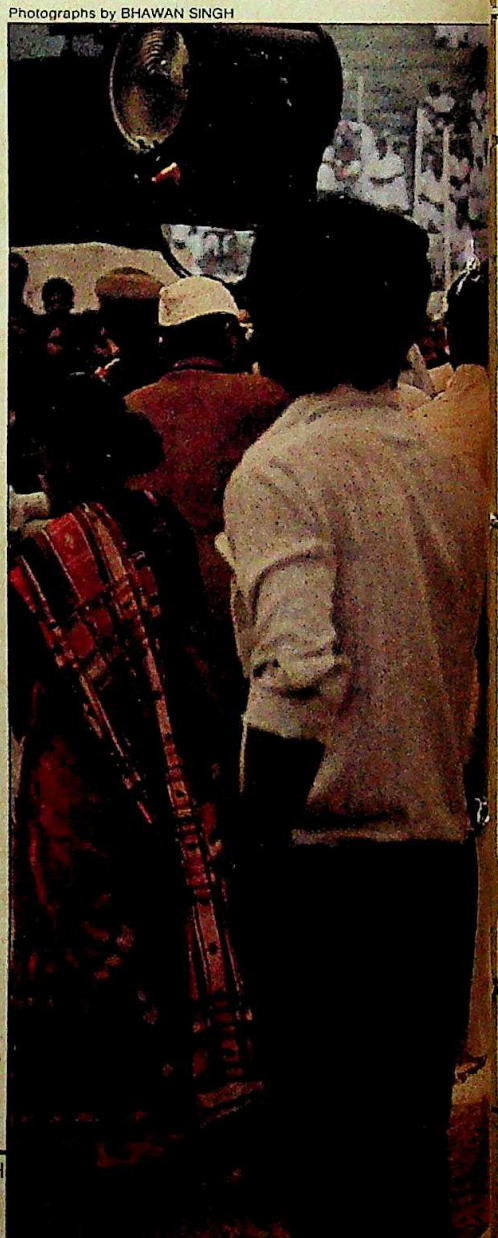
CONGRESS CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

Pomp and Chaos

THOSE who expected something different, now that Rajivji is in charge, went away disappointed. Those who were looking for organisation, discipline, austerity, debate, the lost world of decades ago, went away alarmed. Only the cynics were laughing and told-you-soing. For the Congress centenary celebration, in spite of Congress President Rajiv Gandhi's plain talking, was a tamasha in the great Congress tradition, an extravagant jamboree made up in equal parts of sycophancy, showman-

Rajiv Gandhi greets Congressmen at Bombay; and scuffles at the session: an extravagant jamboree

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH



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ship, indiscipline and disorganisation. A banner on Bombay's Marine Drive, fluttering above the milling khadi-clad legions on a warm December week-end, said it all: "A hundred years ago they were class. Now they are classic."

For three days at the end of 1985, over one lakh Congressmen showed to Bombay just how classic they could be. The party spent a reported Rs 5 crore in proving to the people that they were still the devil they knew. From the tricolour-festooned, hopefully temporary township of Tilak Nagar, where the hungry hoi polloi scrambled for bananas and biscuits, to the historic August Kranti maidan to the hallowed Brabourne Stadium—Indira Nagar in the new lexicon—where unruly delegates were lathi-charged, it was evident that, despite all the invigorating talk about the next century and the new catchwords of pragmatism and efficiency, little had changed.

Even as the garish cut-outs of grandfather, daughter, and son of India's most durable dynasty went up at the crossroads unevenly adorned with winking lights, and as nearly 100 welcome arches swayed uncertainly over Bombay's roads—among them the offering of non-resident investors—it was clear that here was more of the same. Rajiv was everywhere, on posters, arches, banners, glowing at the entrance to Tilak Nagar. His clean, scrubbed face was juxtaposed with chosen heroes of the Congress and the freedom struggle: Subhash Chandra Bose, Maulana Azad et al. One memorable banner proclaimed that Dadabhai Naoroji worked for his country, but Rajiv was working not just for his country but also for the world.

The crowds of delegates streaming into town in the 700-odd buses and the score or so daily local trains arranged for them by a thoughtful administration came to believe that the Congress consisted of only two people, Indira and Rajiv, The Gandhis, including, thankfully, the Mahatma, made up most of the backdrop at the Brabourne Stadium in large paintings. The organisers also went gaga over a gimmick created specially for the occasion: a watch with two revolving, specially treated plates which, twice every minute, synchronised to show a smiling Mrs Gandhi.

Indeed, as the prime minister went about the business of unfurling flags and unveiling plaques, it could have been any Congress bash. For a celebration which was to commemorate the continuing existence of a 100-year-old organisation whose history is intimately intertwined with that of the country it rules, there was a disappointing lack of celebration in the proceedings. On the first day, for instance, at the meeting of the subjects committee at the August Kranti maidan, where it all began 100 years ago, the minutes of the last AICC(I) meeting held in May were, on the urging of the party president, taken as read and passed only a few minutes after AICC(I) members had held them in their hands for the first time.

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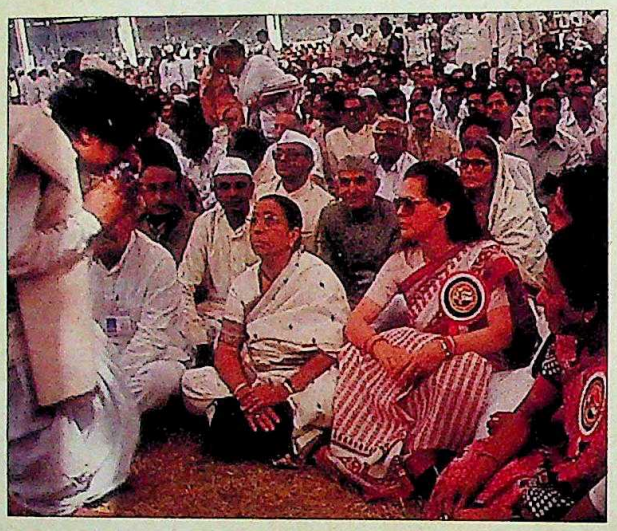
Debate was non-existent; discussion at the hefty premium. It was blindingly obvious that the session was not being taken very seriously by the most powerful people in the Government: even as Human Resources Minister Narasimha Rao went interminably on about how best to apply them in the march to progress, Finance Minister V.P. Singh, Commerce Minister Arjun Singh, Minister for Internal Security Arun Nehru and Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh all sat in the audience. The two Aruns, in fact, walked in together, sat down together, and were immediately mobbed by reporters for a quickie press conference. Not very far away was Amitabh Bachchan, surrounded by his acolytes, grimacing at any photographer who tried to snap him.

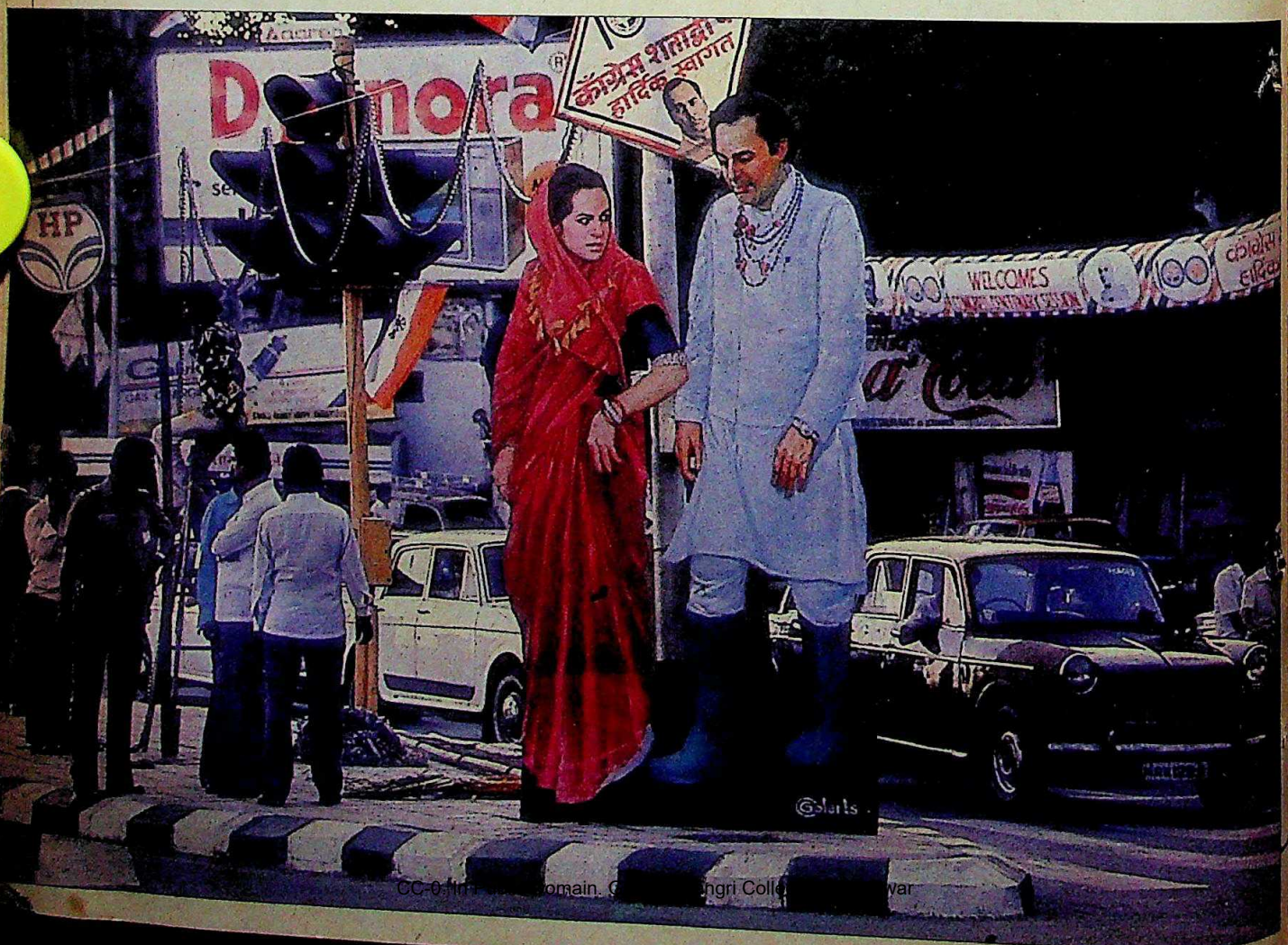
The culture of the personality, and that too one personality to the drowning of everybody else's has for long been a fact of life in the Indira Congress, and if Rajiv wanted to send the message that those days were over then that message was conspicuously absent in Bombay. Said a middling party functionary: "It is only right that we praise Rajiv to the skies. If he weren't there to get us the votes we would be nowhere." Mused Arun Singh: "It will take at least 20 years to get rid of this culture of sycophancy." Not that anybody was trying very hard.

Nobody was trying very hard to be austere and frugal either, in keeping with the party's oft-repeated claim of being a party of the poor. The party had booked 700 rooms in various five-star hotels, including 40 for as many journalists, who were wined and dined at party expense. In shameful fact, none of the 300 MP's, 2,000 MEA's, 25 PCC(I) chiefs and 17 chief ministers cared to take a *dekko* at the racecourse grounds. In the earlier session at Calcutta, the provincial bosses had stayed with the cadres; here they did not even deign to visit them. Ironically, all this was going on even as their leader scolded them in the Brabourne Stadium: "For such persons the masses do not count."

It was saddening that even the persons who had joined the party recently, and who can be said to form part of the youth brigade which is reported to be revitalising the aged machine, were not setting standards. A student leader, Marxist-turned-Congressman lorded it at a five-star hotel. The joint secretary of the Youth Congress(I) also set up camp at a luxurious hotel, though she was put down as being somewhere else. Party functionaries set up as middlemen, putting this industrialist or that bureaucrat in touch with people—for a fee. Members of Parliament who were put up in the Haj House, an incomplete



Delegates greet Sonia Gandhi (left); and cut-outs in a Bombay street: culture of sycophancy



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transit tower for Haj travellers, turned up their noses at the rough flooring and the rickety cots, left their aides behind—most of them came with family and friends in tow — and fled to clementer climes.

So exasperated did the general manager of one hotel become that he locked up his office, gave his khadi-clad clients the key, and walked out. One of the most expensive restaurants in the city was crowded with diners obviously dedicated to austerity by day and Epicurus by night. On the seamier side, a state minister went missing for several hours and was finally traced by anxious security to the red light area—which, in anticipation (remember Nagpur) had heavy bandobast.

Perhaps the hypocrisy could have been pardoned if the organisers had pushed things through smoothly. But despite their best efforts, things went wrong. On the second day of the three-day jamboree, when the Brabourne Stadium received its honoured guests for the first time, there was chaos. People jammed the gates demanding entry, with the police swearing that they wouldn't let them in. Apparently what had happened was that all facilities for checking delegate cards had broken down and the result was people were gatecrashing on the strength of 'special invitee' passes which sometimes even sold for Rs 25 each outside the stadium. In the repeated melees at the gates several people were injured, journalists had literally to batter their way in, foreign diplomats were snubbed, and at least four people sent to hospital.

Later, there was more trouble as the loudspeaker system failed and entire sections implored Rajiv Gandhi in mime to set things right. Towards the end of the morning session, the horde that had been fighting pitched battles with Seva Dal workers—3,000 of whom had spread out at the different venues to keep the peace—managed to break through the human and wooden cordon, swamping the AICC(I) members and legislators in the process—including Sonia Gandhi and Amitabh, both of whom had to beat a hasty retreat—and crowding right up to the dais, even as security guards watched helplessly. The Seva Dal blotted its copybook somewhat at lunch, when its workers— admittedly hungry after a long and tiring stint—polished off the food they were supposed to protect for their leaders.

But the cake was taken by, scenes at the Tilak Nagar residential camp, a sprawling complex, spartan in conception when compared to the five-star retreats of the leaders. Before it began, every care appeared to have been taken so that the

Rajiv helps Frontier Gandhi on stage (right); and asks for replacement mike: plain talking

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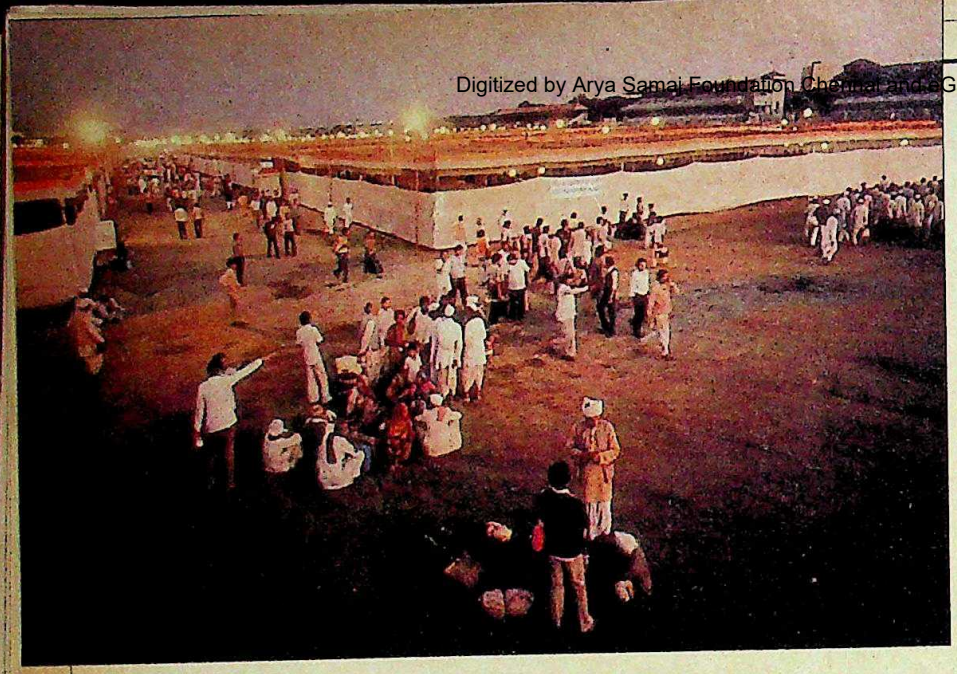

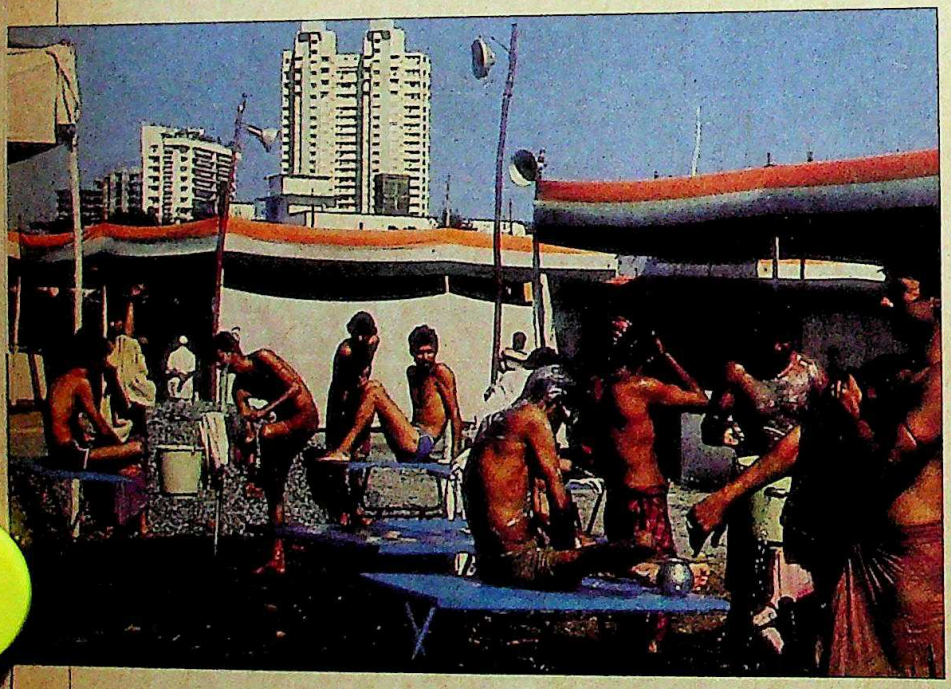

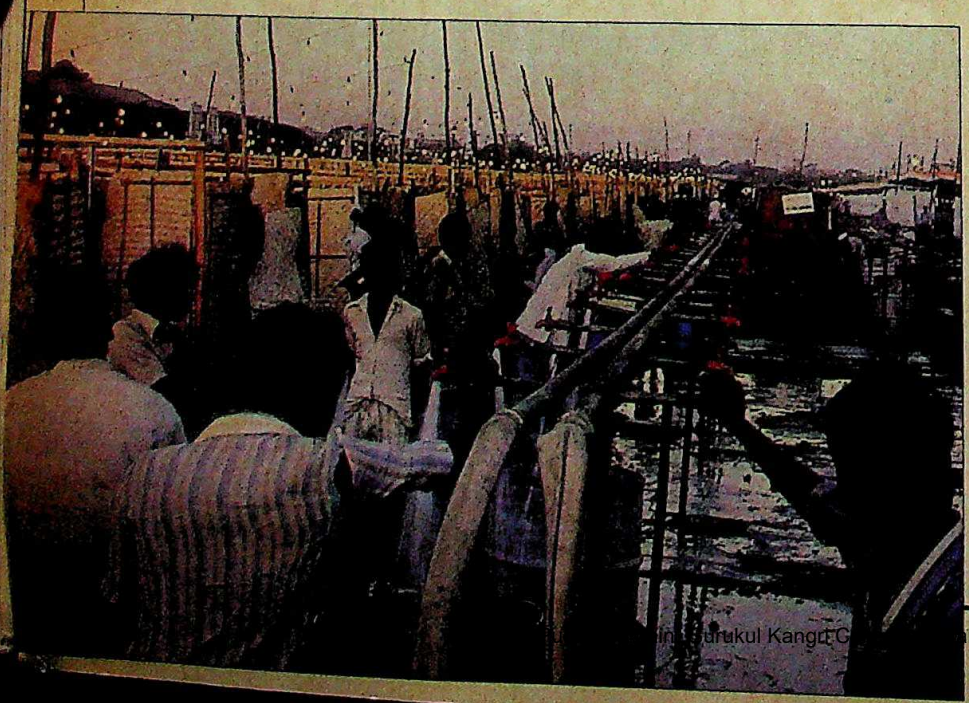

50,000-odd delegates who were to arrive in, among other things, 50 special trains, would have a comfortable stay. The complex was built out of tenting brought down from Delhi in trucks because that kind wasn't available in Bombay, and the cooking was parcelled out among 40 contractors. The food was prudently prepared at venues as far away from the camp as was feasible—into the mill daily went 5,000 kg of flour, 700 kg each of sugar and of potatoes—and was supposed to be given to the hungry delegates in convenient packets.

Soft drinks had been provided free by the company which made them—but were sold at Re 1 each to buyers at the August Kranti Maidan—and the Maharashtra Government's popular Energee, a milk-based soft drink, was handed out free. Snacks were subsidised. The area received one lakh litres of water every hour—the purity was tested four times a day—and scores of wcs had been laid. Said Bombay party boss Murli Deora, who was the guiding spirit behind the preparations: "We took every care to see that Bombay's image as a generous host was not tarnished.

But tarnished it was. At Tilak Nagar, 50,000 delegates had been rather unrealistically expected and when over twice that number arrived, there was confusion. A truck-load of biscuits arrived and was promptly sacked by a ravenous horde which howled that they had received nothing since arrival. While there was enough food to go around, the distribution system appeared to have fouled up and the authorities had to resort to flinging packets out of the back of a truck. Nand Lal of Varanasi complained: "Are we dogs that we have to be thrown our food like this?" Malti Devi of Bihar plaintively added that her group, which had paid Rs 182 each to come to Bombay, had not yet found their MLA who was supposed to get their delegate passes.

Durga Prasad Kesari of Haryana made his feelings quite plain, even as he went about with four-coloured stickers of Mrs Gandhi, Rajiv, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the new darling of the masses, Amitabh Bachchan, pinned to his chest: "There is no water to drink or to bathe in, there are stones in the latrines, and we have to buy food with our own money." In fact, so great was the disorganisation that a volunteer at the besieged enquiry counter,

Camp for delegates at Mahalakshmi Racecourse (top); delegates bathing; and queuing outside the latrines: inadequate arrangements

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on the verge of both apoplexy and laryngitis, spread the good word over the public address system that "our esteemed guests should not ask too many questions of the enquiry people as they are tired".

In such an atmosphere, people like Chandra Kumar of the West Bengal Youth Congress(I), who said that things were satisfactory and they got their food properly, thank you, were few and far between. When asked about the multiplying murmurs of discontent and, more serious, about the growing number of thefts at the township, Deora said: "Small incidents are being blown up. Everything is going well. No problems at all."

There were, however much the organisers might wish them away, and attempts to entertain the party workers didn't assuage feelings. Kishore Kumar, Mahendra Kapoor and Nitin Mukesh sang to a thin gathering, most of whom had gone out to watch a spectacular laser-beam and fireworks display. Vyjanthimala presented a pageant on unity and Sunil Dutt coached the schoolchildren choir. Perhaps it was fitting that so many showpeople were involved in a celebration which had, in the ultimate analysis, more pomp than substance.

—PRABHU CHAWLA and JAGANNATH DUBASHI

CONGRESS(I)

Crisis of Confidence

"WE (Congressmen) obey no discipline, no rule, follow no principle of public morality, display no sense of social awareness, show no concern for the public weal. Corruption is not only tolerated but even regarded as the hallmark of leadership."

—Rajiv Gandhi at the Congress centenary celebrations in Bombay

AS IT steps into its second century, the Indian National Congress is passing through a crisis of self-confidence. Wearing his party president's hat, Rajiv was typically thorough in the clinical precision with which he cut open the innards of the party and displayed the rot inside. But his hour-long speech at Indira Nagar was heard by the largest ever assembly of Congressmen with a certain cynicism.

Within the party, there is doubt if the youthful helmsman has a clear vision of which direction he wants to take the party in. Rajiv's unprecedented indictment of the party he leads may have stolen the thunder from the party's in-house critics but because he had no readymade answers, doubts remained. Said an MP: "He may sound impressive but we still don't know what he expects of us."

The reasons for the party's disquiet are not hard to seek. Some are rooted in the immediate past: the loss of Assam, coming on top of the defeat in Punjab, has started them wondering if the party leaders are not being a little too cavalier of the party's interests even as they avowedly pursue national objectives. Quipped one MP: "What we now intend to do is to sign accords with regional parties in all states and lose all the elections."

Then, the reverses in last month's by-elections and the irrefutable evidence of a sharp drop in the popular vote has members alarmed. Party leaders argue that ruling parties are always at a disadvantage in by-elections but they can see that the real reason for the alarming fall is its alienation from the myriad of com-

Congress(I) Working Committee meeting in Bombay: disturbing trends

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munities. Among them, the Muslims. Their disillusionment in Kishanganj and Bijnore is known well enough but in Bombay Amarsinh Chaudhary of Gujarat and Orissa's Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik argued that an important reason for the party's loss in the by-elections was the alienation of the Muslim vote.

EVEN the Harijans, the party's traditional vote banks, seem to be looking for a voice of their own. Both in Jalandhar and Bijnore, the Bahujan Samaj, a party dedicated to espouse the cause of the Scheduled Castes and with support that cuts across class barriers, took away large chunk of votes. There is no doubt that this has a great many of the members and the party leadership worried. Arun Singh admitted as much though he thought that this was a "disturbing trend" from the national point of view and not just the party's.

Narain Dutt Tewari, Union minister and the party's observer for Assam, argues that the party's defeat in the state came about because "time was too short to explain the party's principled stand". But partymen are worried that the two accords, on Punjab and Assam, which are Rajiv's crowning achievements, seem to have displeased a large section of their vote bank.

Partymen are worried that this alienation is symptomatic of a deeper crisis—of the party's alienation from the poor. Mrs Gandhi had assiduously cultivated the image of the Congress(I) as the party of the poor. Tariq Anwar, past president of the Youth Congress(I), recalls how in a policy resolution adopted by the YC(I) she had insisted that the party's commitment to *garibi hatao* be incorporated.

Many partymen feel that the present image of elitist leaders with elitist problems seems to have stuck. Said one chief minister: "In India one has to walk the middle path very assiduously and there is no doubt that in the past year we have strayed a little to the right." Another MP, listening to Rajiv's address to the subjects committee of the AICC(I) remarked: "He speaks so strongly of the dangers of communal exploitation but does not have a word to say of the economic exploitation of the poor."

Party Working President Kamlapati Tripathi is dismayed at the quality of men coming into the party. Says he: "In my days Congressmen were fired by the spirit of sacrifice. Today, people join the party because they expect something from it." Rajiv also voiced concern over the "brokers of power and influence, who dispense patronage to convert a mass movement into a feudal oligarchy." He went on to add: "They are reducing the Congress organisation to a shell from which the spirit of sacrifice has been emptied."

Nobody, but the power brokers, disagrees with this. The doubts concern an analysis of why this was allowed to happen. Rajiv's statement on the party's crisis skirted the reasons which have brought this about. He did say that Mrs Gandhi "analysed with clinical precision" how the "party had once again been infiltrated with by vested interests who would not allow us to move" but there is little doubt that Mrs Gandhi proved inadequate to the task of tackling these power brokers. Her method of reducing their influence was to concentrate all the powers in her hands while letting the limbs atrophy. Where the correct course of action would have been to let the party's sinews be strengthened by fresh blood from the grassroots, elections were postponed and paper tigers nominated. Election to the party were last held in 1972. Says Tripathi: "There is no doubt that in the absence of elections men motivated by self-interest came to occupy important positions in the party." Tripathi is convinced that party elections are absolutely necessary. "Elections are the only way in which new blood is infused into the party. They are a must even if they result in differences within the party coming out in the open." Rajiv has also repeatedly said that elections will be definitely held. Says the senior most AICC(I) General Secretary G.K. Moopanar: "Rajivji wants the elections to be held immediately so that the representatives of the Congressmen can take charge and build party. After elections Congressmen are more concerned about the party." But Arun Singh feels that not holding the elections is not a "fundamental" problem. He told a clutch of press people as he sat next to Arun Nehru at the historic August Kranti Maidan at Bombay: "It worries me a lot but it is not fundamental."

Congressmen on stage: getting alienated

It would seem that Rajiv shares Singh's perception. Barely a week before the centenary celebrations, he told the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party that the party membership drive, scheduled to close on December 31 last, would at the maximum be extended by one month, but at the working committee meeting at the Seth Goculdas Tejpal Auditorium on December 27, he succumbed to the pressure from PCC(I) chiefs and agreed to extend the period to March 31. Inevitably, speculation started afresh whether the promise of elections would go the same way as similar promises made three times by Mrs Gandhi. One MP, who recalls with fondness his entry into the party as the elected president of the block Congress(I) 14 years ago, commented: "We feel that there are

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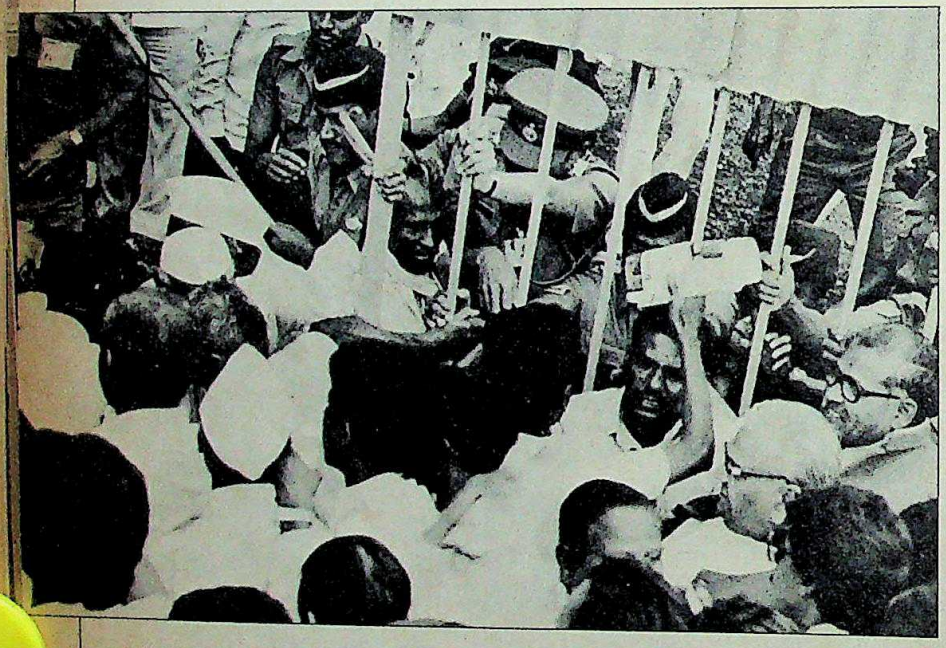
people close to the prime minister who are opposed to the elections."

The failure to throw up leadership from the bottom has affected the quality of middle-level leaders. As a senior MP said: "Where we had a leader of the stature of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, we were forced to do with Abdul Rehman Antulay, where we had Govind Ballabh Pant there is now Vir Bahadur Singh, where there was Pratap Singh Kairon there is now Rajendra Singh Sparrow, where there was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel there is now Amarsinh Chaudhary."

The track record of Rajiv Gandhi in appointing PCC(I) chiefs and chief ministers also does not inspire hope. A problem state like Bihar has an ageing and ineffective, if well-meaning chief minister like Bindeshwari Dubey. Worse, he was allowed to have his say in the appointment of the PCC(I) chief so the singularly uninspiring Dumarlal Baitha rules the roost in the party with no authority or support. Lacking in confidence, chief ministers and party chiefs even avoid meeting partymen. In most states, even the PCC(I) executive has not met once and legislature party meetings are held, if at all, at the beginning of the session. Said one ex-PCC(I) chief of a state ruled by an opposition party: "We have a PCC(I) chief who is in his 60s and who has made a mess of providing opposition to a confused government."

Partymen are also upset with the adhocism in the selection of candidates for by-elections. In the recent by-elections, of the seven seats that the party contested, four were given to candidates who did not belong to that area, of which two were admitted to the party on the eve of the elections. Barely a year ago, S.S. Ray had caused the defeat of the party candidate in Darjeeling for which, old-timers in the party feel, he should have been ostracised. Instead, he was nominated for a seat. Arjun Singh was selected from South Delhi in preference to local partymen. The result was that there were no Congress(I) agents in at least 80 booths in South Delhi.

There is clearly a strong undercurrent of resentment among the "loyalists" in the party—those who had stayed with Mrs Gandhi in her days out of power—against the increasing importance of Johnnies-come-lately. At the CWC(I) meeting in Bombay, West Bengal PCC(I) chief P.R.Das Munshi and ex-Karnataka chief minister R. Gundu Rao clashed openly on this issue. Das Munshi, in what otherwise was a clear attempt at sycophancy, said that the 25-page centenary resolve should separately mention the achievements of Rajiv Gandhi's Government in the last year. At this, Rao got up to say that they are not going into detail because if they did then they would also have to mention the splits in the party and the role of those who left to rejoin later.



Stampede at the gates: reasons for disquiet

Several "loyalists" have been dropped from positions in the Government and the party in the last year, and there have been rumblings of discontent among them. Some reports have even talked of a revolt brewing, and their spokesmen in Bombay let mediamen know that the leaders among them had met to discuss their strategy. But Congressmen will start thinking of leaving the party only if they feel that Rajiv can no longer get them elected. And this is not something that they need to worry about for four more years. Said one MP: "The people gave Rajiv a massive mandate barely a year ago. This is not the time for any revolt."

While the threat of any revolt can best be described as distant, what did emerge from the Bombay sessions was that there is a unanimity of opinion that the party is badly in need of rejuvenation. As Girilal Jain noted in the *Times of India*: "The fact is that the Congress organisation is in utter disarray and must be put back into shape if the party is to enter its second century with the confidence that it will be there to celebrate its second centenary in 2085."

Party leaders across the board agree. Said Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Vir Bahadur Singh: "The party needs to be strengthened. Rajivji has given a clear programme and if the party and state government do not implement them then people are going to punish us." Added Ashok Gehlot, Rajasthan PCC(I) chief: "We need to develop effective district and block level leadership. All of us must return from our urban comforts to the villages." Those running the party from Delhi see the need just as acutely. Says Arun Nehru, the political supremo in the party: "So far we have been busy setting the Government right. Now we will concentrate on the party." Adds Sitaram Kesari, party treasurer: "The party organisation has not grown because we have been too busy."

What is not clear is how the task will be gone about. Rajiv gave no indication of this in his speech beyond saying: "The Congress will be reorganised and revitalised. It will gather in its fold patriots of all sections and all communities, it will be the shield of the oppressed and the sword of the poor." For Rajiv to admit the rot in the party was achievement enough but it is a measure of the bankruptcy of ideas in the party that whereas his admission should have been the clarion call for others to expand on the theme and suggest solutions, nobody took the bait. The party will dutifully wait for directions from the top but there was no evidence to suggest that even those at the apex know what they should do.

—AJAY KUMAR and PRABHU CHAWLA

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CONGRESS CENTENARY

Missing an Opportunity

LIKE many others, and for varied reasons, I am not a member of the Congress(I) but that does not forfeit my claim to a little of the glory that the great national upsurge, synthesised by the Congress Party, has bequeathed—being one of the privileged people who participated in the epochal Independence struggle.

Time has taken its toll yet there are many veterans amidst us who still preserve the shine of their battle shields. They may not be amongst the hierarchy of the ruling party but they are there to belie the claim that has been made in Bombay, of the Congress(I) being "a party that brought freedom to the country...." No, the Congress(I) is a different species altogether. It was born out of a bitter factional struggle that was caused not by any ideological or programmatical differences, but by issues that were wholly personal. The controversy regarding the heritage apart, an obsessive preoccupation with self-glorification has made the Congress(I) miss an opportunity at a time when the collective strength of the nation could have presented a credible hope and vision for the coming decades. The lengthy Bombay resolutions, couched in a partisan idiom, do not invoke faith. The exercise demonstrates that the rulers are neither willing to learn nor to adjust despite their shrinking base.

The Bombay session accepted the prime minister's alibi for the party's rout in Punjab and Assam, once again postponed the party polls that have never been held and repeated the incredible pledge of 'garibi-hatao'—while in the background quite the opposite policies are being practised.

As Congress(I) men return to their homes and villages they carry with them the glamour and glitter of the session, but none of the inspiration that would, once again, build the symbiosis between the masses and leaders for which the parent Congress was so famous.

The Congress sessions of yesteryear used to inspire faith and transform lifestyles and outlooks, even of those who stood on the side as spectators. The "Congress culture"—as it came to be called—was a thoroughgoing struggle against obscurantist beliefs, and it symbolised the unity in diversity on which our national unity was based.

Gandhiji did not try to contain the gigantic mass upsurge within the conventional precepts of a party structure. The Congress was a wide platform with the capacity to coalesce and synthesise various shades of socio-political outlooks. A partisan celebration contradicts this—the very concept that could help, once again, in getting all shades of patriotic polity to collectively assert themselves against the baffling and complex challenges to our unity. But this has not been done despite the traumatic experiences of Punjab and Assam.

> **"This occasion should have been utilised by honestly telling the country that formidable challenges cannot be met—even by the country's largest party—singly."**

No rhetoric can gloss over the fact that despite all the approving noises made by the official media, there is a mounting sense of frustration and discrimination in the country. The elitist pursuits have split the nation in an unfamiliar way. The renewed "commitment" on part of the Congress(I) is neither going to reduce unemployment nor offer solace to the landless or slum-dweller. Only, for some days the people were presented a glittering spectacle on the television.

Nations—like purposeful individuals—do not celebrate anniversaries merely by "cake cutting" or group "happy birthday" tunes. This occasion should have been utilised by honestly telling the country that formidable challenges cannot be met—even by the country's largest party—singly. Only a collective assertion by all the children of the revolution can safeguard and further the legacy of the great Mahatma.

The nation has paid heavily for the politics of confrontation. It is a mercy that this phase has ended and the futility of such policies has been realised. Some difficult problems have been sorted out with remarkable courage on the part of many. This refreshing outlook should now be ingrained in our politics and made a basis for building a widely shared consensus pertaining to the nation's integrity and social transformation.

The centenary offers a unique opportunity to launch a determined nationwide struggle for achieving the "socio-economic Swaraj" that alone can consolidate our unity in real sense. It is futile to expect that socially left-out sections would have a vested interest in unity or in development. Any objective analysis of the Punjab and Assam crises tells us that an unemployed and frustrated youth gets easily mobilised by communalist or chauvinistic slogans. The socio-economic condition has reached such a pass that it can be tackled only by a collective assertion. The need for the revival of a broad national platform to evolve and pursue both short-term and long-term programmes and policies is urgent. This does not negate the party system, it provides an institutional framework for resolving differences and determining common denominators to vital national issues.

Rajiv Gandhi, even in personal terms, is missing an opportunity to carve a place for himself in history. The accords were lauded by the entire country and improved his popularity rating. This should encourage him to build a political environment wherein parties and individuals may rise above narrow interests and assign the nation's interests a higher priority. Though belated, even now his party can set an example. Only then can he expect a response from all patriotic elements to unitedly address themselves to tasks of unity.

Such a clarion call would also reverberate across our political boundaries. After all the entire South Asia had responded to Gandhiji. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan is a living monument of the era that had founded the inspiring "Congress culture" under Gandhiji's leadership. The epoch had succeeded in unifying a diverse nation; repairing its self-esteem and restoring its courage and potency.

The nation has already paid heavily for propagation of personality cults; compromising norms of public life and placing party and individuals above the nation. Let this be the turning point.

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MODI INDUSTRIES LTD.

MODINAGAR

SPEECH OF THE CHAIRMAN SHRI K.N. MODI TO THE SHAREHOLDERS AT THE 52ND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD AT MODINAGAR ON MONDAY THE 30TH SEPTEMBER, 1985

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the 52nd Annual General Meeting of your Company.

Economic and Political Environment

Our country went through a traumatic experience in the unfortunate and tragic assassination of our beloved Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi on October 31, last year. It is said that great men always rise to occasion irrespective of the magnitude of

HIGHLIGHTS

1. New Era Ushered in by Shri Rajiv Gandhi
   a. A new progressive era ushered in by the Prime Minister Hon'ble Shri Rajiv Gandhi through fiscal policy, broad banding of licenses, reduction in corporate tax structure etc.
   b. He has brought in political stability through the Assam accord and famous Punjab accord now ratified by one and all.
   c. The import of technology should be liberal and it should stimulate the local industries.
   d. Industry will welcome a competitive market. We should, however, be cautious about the dumping of goods and commodities by foreign Companies.
   e. Under the new dynamic and progressive Industry Minister with a new structure, the schemes for industrial applications will be processed rapidly.

2. Some Pointers
   a. The progressive policies can be taken advantage of only if infrastructural development is not neglected.
   b. Any modernisation requires rationalisation of manpower as well as retraining. Industrial laws to be oriented towards this.

3. Points Relating to Your Company
   a. Power for Steel Division to be made available adequately and economically.
   b. The imposition of 10%. Excise duty on Vanaspati, common man's cooking medium, needs to be reduced to give relief.
   c. Your Company's Paint Division is collaborating with M/s. Schaepman and will offer international quality industrial paints.
   d. Actively involved in the Bihar Sponge Iron Project for captive utilisation as well as supply of this critical raw material to others.

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the gravity of the situation. At the hour of great national tragedy, this country had a good fortune of getting a new dynamic and able Prime Minister in Shri Rajiv Gandhi.

With the assuming of the new responsibilities of this great nation, our Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi is ushering in a new era in the history of India. From the first day itself, Shri Rajiv Gandhi has demonstrated his statesmanship-like quality. He has brought in a new environment in the political and economic environment of this country. His progressive outlook has not only stimulated all the sections in this country but also international interest.

He has demonstrated an astute acumen towards the bottlenecks faced by the country in its industrial progress through the various measures like the Union Budget presented recently and various other industrial and trade policies like Broad banding of licenses, reduction in taxes etc. One can definitely feel the changing environment and a pragmatic business outlook being infused into the policies of the Government.

His keenness to modernise various traditional industries like Textiles as well as induct latest technology in those areas which affect people at large like communications and other service industries are indicative of the trend of future India.

His nation building tasks have been in the form of new look at the educational policies, formation of human resources development ministry, formation of programme implementation ministry etc.

Under the new dynamic and progressive Industry Minister with newly structured Industry Ministry, all the schemes and procedures for industrial applications etc. will be processed much faster.

The import of technology has to be liberal and such that it stimulates the local industries which we have developed for the last 40 years. Industry will welcome a competitive market. We should, however, be cautious about the dumping of goods and commodities by foreign companies.

On the political front, he has brought in political stability through the Assam accord thereby solving a long pending problem in the Eastern Borders of the country. Now famous Punjab accord which has been ratified by one and all as demonstrated by the recent polls.

In this environment of stimulating industrial environment and progressive policies, it is the responsibility of every one in trade and industry to respond in the most positive manner to fulfil the ambitions of this great nation.

Some Pointers

a. The progressive policies which have been brought in can be taken advantage of and the industrial growth thereby raised only if the important aspects of infrastructural development are not neglected. If we have to achieve the growth rate of 7% then that of power has to increase at the rate of 15%. Broad banding has to be allowed in such a way that industries are able to take full advantage of this in the raising of their capacities.
b. Any modernisation requires rationalisation of manpower as well as retraining them in newer skills. Those people who can not be accommodated in the newer technologies, be developed in such a way and provided resources so that they can become self-employed.

Points relating to your Company

We find that in the operation of Steel Division of your Company, power becomes one of the most critical bottlenecks. We have severe power cut resulting in loss of production.

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Your Company has made several representations and is continuously doing so at various levels of Government both at state and centre for continuous supply of power to ensure optimum production in the Steel Division. The discrimination and the allocation of power to Electric Arc Furnaces vis-a-vis other industries has to be done away with by the U.P. State Electricity Board.

We are facing a high cost economy brought in by high interest rates and undersized production units which do not yield economies of scale. This has resulted in a price rise affecting the economy. The present rate of 10% Excise duty on Vanaspati is affecting every common man, since Vanaspati is an universal cooking medium. The reduction of this Excise duty will to some extent reduce the price and give relief to common man.

The Paint Division of your Company has entered into a collaboration with M/s. Schaepman who are one of the world's leading industrial Paints Company's. This will result in the company's ability to produce international standard paint used for industrial applications.

In keeping with the Corporate objectives of your Company of entering new areas, your Company has been actively involved in the Sponge Iron Project in Bihar. This Project will use the latest technology and have very big potential. In addition to captive utilisation, the project will also help other Steel Mills in the supply of this critical raw material.

Your Company has always looked after the welfare of the people to the best extent. We have also strived to increase productivity. The benefits of such productivity are shared between the workers, the consumers and the shareholders. The workers have been made conscious not only of their rights but also of the responsibility. It is unfortunate that a small section of workers have resorted to go-slow tactics in the Steel Division. While we believe in taking full care of the employees, such irresponsible action will not go unheeded.

Working Results

The audited account of your Company and the Directors' Report for the year ended 31st March, 1985, have already been circulated to you. With your permission, I take them as read.

During the year, as mentioned in the Directors' report, your Company made a net profit of Rs 3.16 crores after providing for depreciation of Rs 2.76 crores.

The working results of your Company for the current year are very encouraging in comparison to the last year.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Central Government, the Government of Uttar Pradesh, the Financial Institutions and the Banks for their continued and active support. I am also thankful to my colleagues on the Board for their guidance and counsel. Last but not the least, I wish to place on record the deep appreciation for the dedication, efficient and loyal services rendered by the Executives, staff and the workers at all levels and I earnestly hope that the environment of cordial and harmonious relations will continue.

I would like to thank the Shareholders of the Company for taking a keen interest in the progress of the Company.

Thank you.

Modinagar
30th September, 1985

K.N. MODI

Note: This does not purport to be a record on the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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Dream Boat

A WHITE elephant is anything but an elephant. It can be a boat. A luxury launch, to be precise, going by the exotic name of Zaria. And it's now lying chained in a creek at Nagarjunasagar while the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) is at its wits' end what to do with it. Or how to pay back the Rs 44-lakh loan it took to buy the 1,000 H.P. dream boat. Everything had seemed hunky-dory when

The luxury launch: in troubled waters

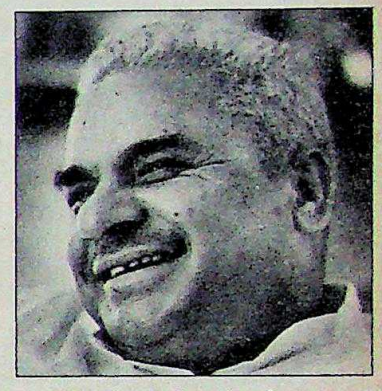
two APTDC officials went to USSR in 1982 and bought the 65-seater launch, for 36-hour joy-rides on the Krishna river between Nagarjunasagar and Srisailam as part of APTDC's package tour. But alas, things are not what they seem. First, the actual cost of Rs 35 lakh shot up to Rs 60 lakh with the various duties and taxes. Then the officials realised that the monster drinks up 166 litres of diesel in an hour and costs Rs 3,000 an hour to maintain. The joy ride itself, at Rs 300 per trip, found few takers. So after some 20 trips, mostly free, the launch is in the creek and the APTDC, in the red.

Light and Dark

THE MIDDLE class may be rising and at last coming into its own. But at whose expense is it doing so? In West Bengal at least, it is the state electricity board. For instance, everytime a *babu* switches on his TV set to watch *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* or *Hot Tracks*, he cheats the state electricity board of just so much revenue. As a report submitted to the state Cabinet said recently, he just doesn't pay his electricity bills. So the SEB loses a whopping Rs 10 crore of revenue every year and government officials—bureaucrats, secretaries and what have you—top the list of defaulters. Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, on hearing about this state of affairs, promptly told the SEB to cut off the connections of all defaulters. But this is easier said than done. Since most of the government quarters have power lines drawn from nearby administrative offices, the options are: calculate how much power each employee uses, provide individual meters, or cut their connections and plunge the offices too in darkness. Right now, the SEB is considering neither.

Lethal Charm

HARYANA Chief Minister Bhajan Lal must be the most charming politician this side of the Beas. The way his political opponents succumb to him is almost like moths falling to a flame. And what Bhajan wants, Bhajan gets. Recently, the wily chief minister's charm was again at work, this time though on a comparatively unknown quantity—an academician. The scholar was none other than Dr S.C. Saxena, who as director of Panjab University's Regional Centre at Bhatinda had petitioned in 1982 to the Supreme Court against Lal's allegedly irregular land allotments to favoured politicians, judges, lawyers and journalists. Almost overnight, Saxena had made it to the mofussil pages with the zeal of a crusader. Two years later, he is in the news again but for different reasons. Saxena has withdrawn his petition, and now heads the Haryana School Education Board. Now what was that about how to win friends and influence people?



Bhajan Lal: wily charm

Loose Noose

WORDS have an uncanny power all their own and they can make, mar, heal or kill, as the Karnataka police discovered to their chagrin last fortnight. Even as the cops were rejoicing and doing themselves proud by celebrating the centenary of their corps, there were some "audacious" and "notorious" types who were rolling around with mirth. Reason: they had just been let out of detention by the high court and a special advisory board because their detention orders had been hazily worded and forgot to describe them as criminals. The 12 had been arrested along with three others some time ago under the state's own version of the NSA. But the high court and the advisory board, while hearing their habeas corpus petitions in camera, found several loopholes in their detention orders and let them off. A perplexed Home Minister B. Rachaiah has now called for an examination of this "failure" of the law, which goes by the rather labyrinthine title of Karnataka Prevention of Dangerous Activities of Bootleggers, Drug-Offenders, Gamblers, Goondas, Immoral Traffic Offenders and Slum-Grabbers Act, 1985. With a name like that it is not even easy to remember what the law is all about, let alone the detention orders.

Rachaiah: word play

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ORISSA

Temple Loot

FOR THE God-fearing in Orissa, Sulaiman Kalapahad is a familiar name. A figure of myth and legend, he is said to be a Brahmin who turned his back on religion and ever since, goes around breaking and stealing idols of deities. So last fortnight when the magnificent 12th century idol of Garuda (Vishnu's eagle) was found missing from the Gundicha Temple of Puri, the devotees promptly blamed it on Kalapahad. But the facts of the case have set the police wondering if the thief does not actually have his roots in some alien country rather than Oriya folklore.

The rare black laterite idol, which stood three feet tall on a 12-feet rock pillar and weighed all of 50 kg. The police were informed as soon as it was found missing but by then it was already too late. An extensive search of the area yielded no clue and police dogs on the trail stopped at a Puri railway station platform. According to Puri district Superintendent of Police Anadi Sahu, it could be the handiwork of some burglars hired by some professional idol-lifters' gang who removed the statue sometime in the early hours of November 3.

Director-General of Police (DGP) B.K. Panigrahi said: "We have issued a national alert, combed areas in Calcutta with the help of the West Bengal police and now we have sought the assistance of Interpol through the National Central Bureau to track down the gang." By last week, the Crime Branch had taken over the investigations and Panigrahi said assuringly: "If we are able to catch even one person, we can bust the whole gang, which certainly has international connections."

The Garuda idol was the fifth to be stolen from the Puri area in the last three months. The earlier four were precious brass idols, including one of Radha from Gopal Math and another of goddess Durga from the Pipli temple. The police recovered two of them — the Durga and Radha idols — by sheer chance. The first was found lying in a drain and the robbers were trying to sell off the second one when the police got a tip-off and seized the idol.

Eastern Press Agency

Brass idol of Radha: precious find

According to district police chief Sahu, one of the two suspects, Jagannath Patra, had been arrested while the other, Dharnidhar Sahu, is absconding. Two Italians have also been detained but they gave no clues. The police feel that the operation could not have been possible without the help or complicity of the temples' *ijaradars*, considering the nature of the thefts and the size of the idols.

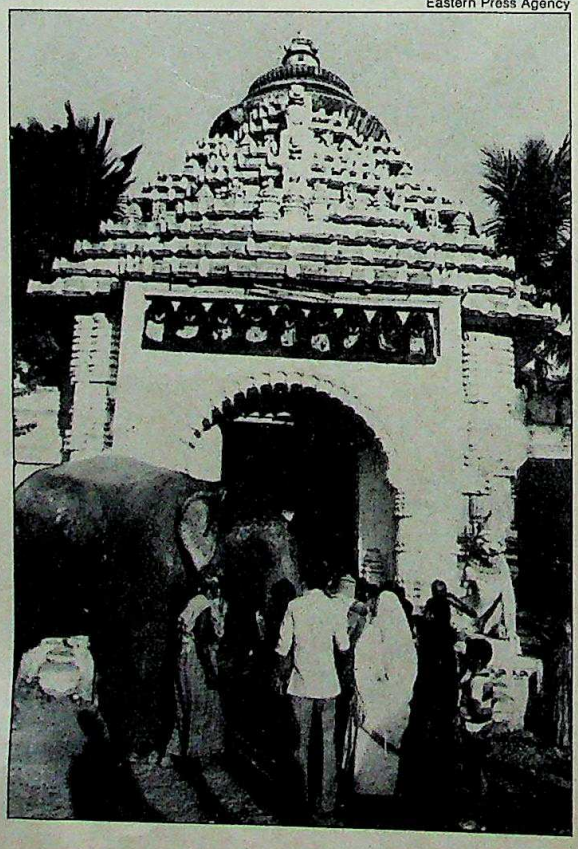
Whoever the culprits may be, the fact remains that of late there has been an alarming rise in idol thefts in the state. With its 5,000-odd temples—1,000 in Bhubaneswar alone—the state is a haven for thieves and smugglers. The figures for this year have been unusually high with the main target of the thefts being Puri where at least 20 cases of idol-lifting are registered every year. Says Sahu: "Black granite idols, a craze outside the country, are spread over a 50-km area in Puri, totally unguarded. These are examples of beautiful craftsmanship and easily fall prey to smugglers."

The situation has become so serious that DIG (Crime Branch) Shankar Sen was compelled to alert all district police chiefs to deploy homeguard jawans to keep a watch on all important temples, besides carrying out a census of temples and idols and maintaining photo files on each of them. Says DIG Sen: "Our main problem is that there is no special force to deal with this problem." The police have recently opened an idol theft cell, but this is understaffed and overworked and has yet to make any headway.

A secret report prepared by the police for 1965-70 had identified foreign tourists and private collectors as the likely culprits. A police officer disclosed that some senior state officials were also involved and the police prepared secret dossiers on them. But predictably these files vanished from the police record room and the officers retired peacefully.

Gundicha Temple: increasing thefts

Eastern Press Agency



Police records show that at least five shops, besides some private museums, are suspected of dealing clandestinely in stolen idols. According to the records, there were three known outlets in Calcutta for these idols and at least 16 identified "outsiders" who frequented these areas and dealt in antiques. The number of such dealers and outlets has increased recently and Sen says optimistically: "We will soon lay our hands on the culprits."

How soon this comes about is yet a matter for hope and conjecture. But all the police reports and studies point to a definite pattern: the increase in idol thefts relates to the increase in tourist traffic. Tourism brochures call tourists "our honoured guests". But if the guest is of a dubious variety, it falls to the host to be extra careful about his valuables. —FARZAND AHMED

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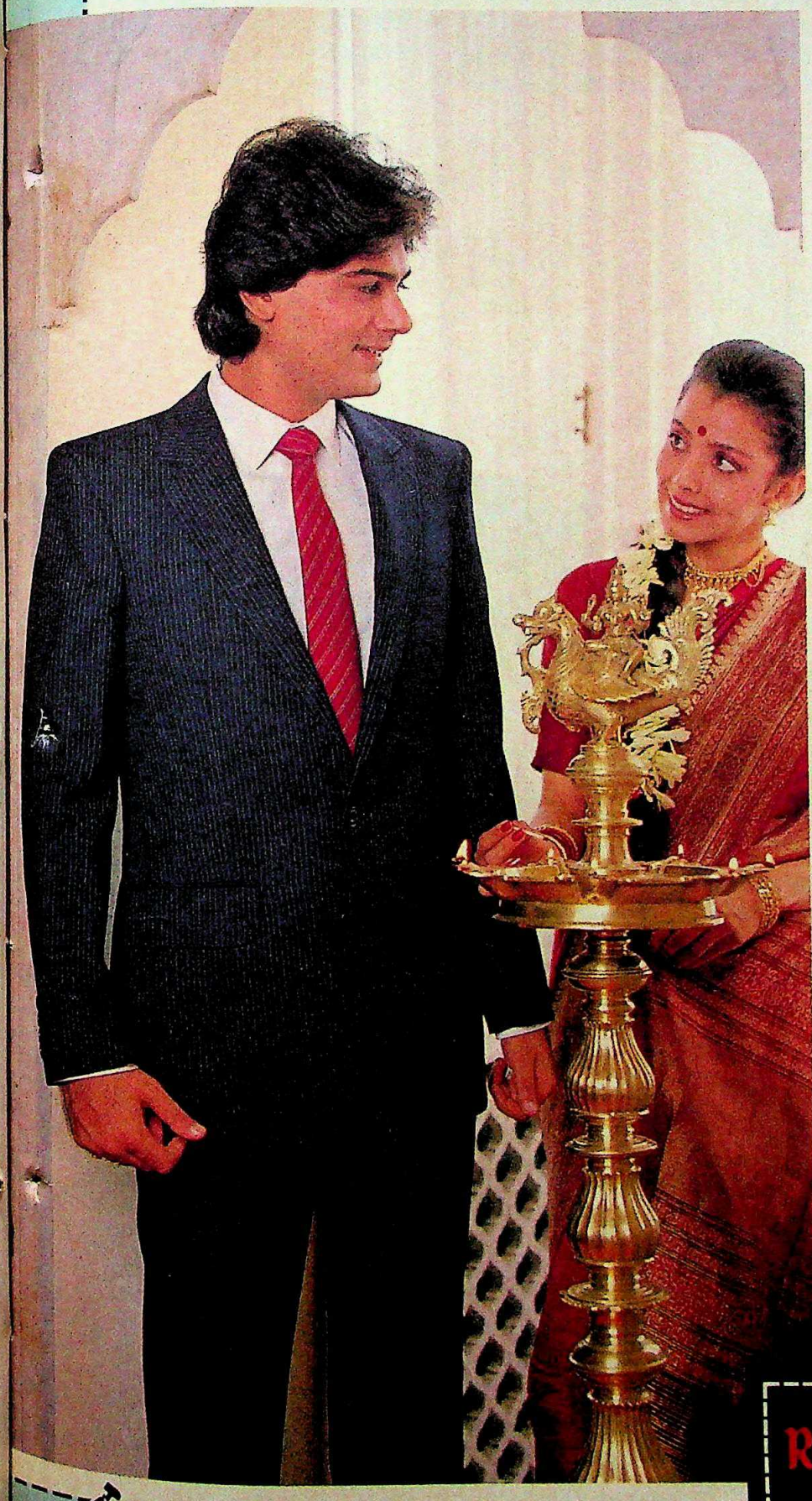

EVER SINCE I DISCOVERED RAYMOND'S READYMADES IT'S GOODBYE TO DELAYS.

Trousers
•
Safaris
•
Shirts
•
Suits
•
Blazers

Raymond's Mens Wear

Location courtesy: The Taj Mahal Hotel, Bombay.

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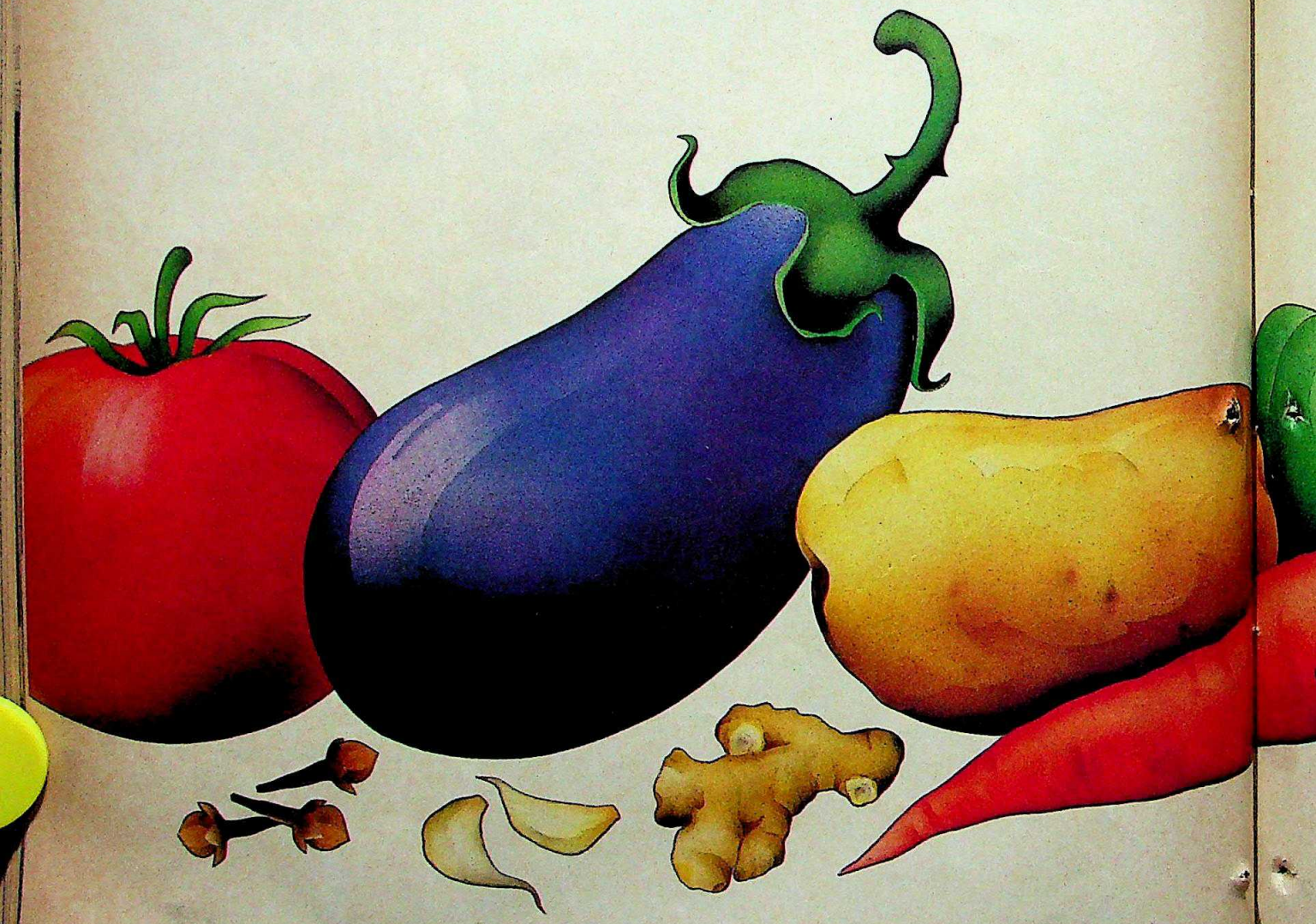
From the snow-clad mountains the north to the sea-washed ores of the south, India is a land surprises. If you travel across e country, you will find diverse stoms, food and languages.

One of the main fears we have about travelling is whether the food we are used to will be available. But eating the same food you eat at home defeats the purpose of travelling. When you are on holiday, give yourself up fully to the adventure. Try a new dish every day. When in Goa, try the mouth-watering Vindaloo; in Bombay, the Parsi Dhansaak; Resham Kababs in Delhi's walled city; the 'Misti Doi' of Bengal, not to speak of the crisp Paper Dosas of the south. And should you want your usual



How to travel all over India still be able to

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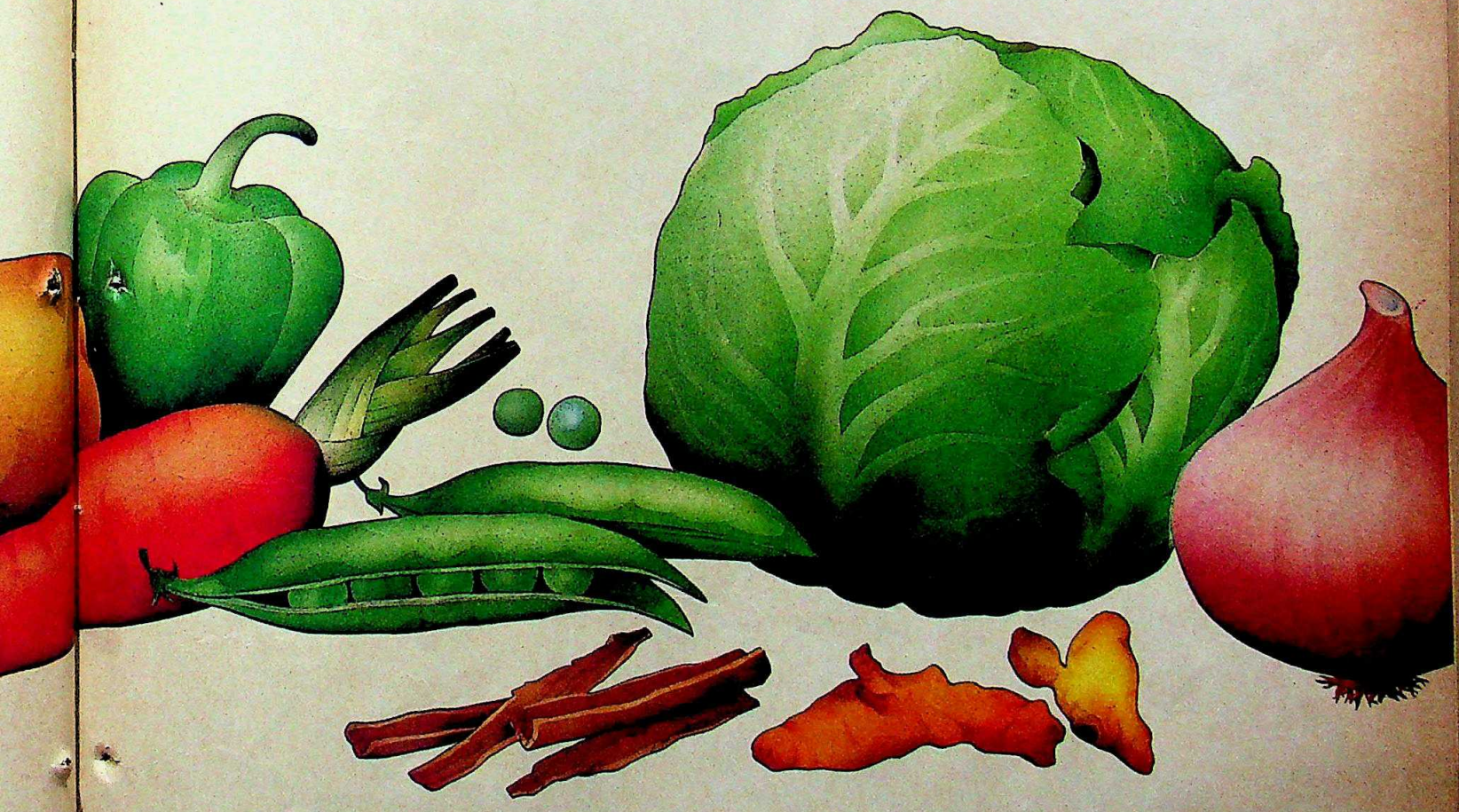
fare, you will not be disappointed as this is available everywhere.

Travel is an adventure that naturally includes strange lands, different peoples, exotic experiences and strange customs. What you get out of the experience depends on how you approach it.

A healthy curiosity will do what travel is meant to, i.e. enrich the mind.

Department of Tourism
Government of India

Discover India
Discover yourself



without your mother and taste her cooking.

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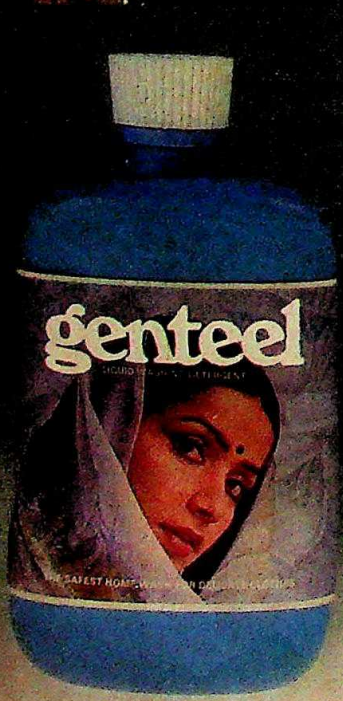
Genteel Liquid Detergent

Loves your woollens as much as you do.

Before you soak your woollens in harsh detergents or give that lovely silk saree to the laundry– think Genteel. Genteel woos the dirt out of fabrics gently but thoroughly. Leaves behind a fresh perfume no brand can match. Thousands of women now trust their good clothes to only Genteel.

Now with a new look, for you.

Wouldn't you like to be a Genteel woman too?



The safest home wash for synthetics, silks, woollens and blends.

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Shilpi DM 5/85

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A NEW ARRIVAL

LOHIA Machines, which has had fairly serious problems in getting customers to accept its 100 cc scooter (there have been 3.5 lakh cancellations of bookings, out of the total of 21 lakh that were booked), has now revived its fortunes with the introduction of a new 150 cc model. Customer demand has shifted so rapidly within a month of the new model being introduced that 90 per cent of the total production is now of 150 cc scooters, and the spate of cancellation of bookings has come to a near halt.

The company is meanwhile expanding its capacity for both nylon and polyester filament yarn following the Government's decision that all producers of these items must instal a minimum capacity of 15,000 tonnes. So the combined capacity of the two plants in Lohia Machines will go up from 9,000 tonnes to 30,000 tonnes. However, various other producers are expanding in similar fashion, and a massive glut in the market could be the end result of all this activity.

SUCCESS STORY

FINANCE Minister V.P. Singh may be upsetting a lot of industrialists but he is probably the only minister in Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinet to get a note of congratulation from the prime minister on the performance of his ministry. This followed the last performance appraisal of the ministry, done by the prime minister.

Singh was able to show that he had achieved some 95 per cent of the goals that he had set for the first half of the year, including the setting up of a new economic intelligence bureau, the tax collection record, decisions following from the new textile policy, an "integrated strike" on tax evaders and so on.

STUMBLING BLOCKS

MOST of the problems coming in the way of better industrial productivity have little to do with the Government or government policy. This is the indirect lesson to be learnt from a productivity survey conducted by the National Productivity Council's Productivity Board for Industrial Machinery. Thus, 53 per cent of the companies surveyed felt that demand was the biggest stumbling block, 34 per cent had a problem with raw material availability, 25 per cent were saddled with outdated plant and equipment which resulted in excessive breakdowns, and 11 per cent felt that machine availability was a limiting factor. But government did enter the picture for some companies; 40 per cent said there was a problem with the poor infrastructure and 26 per cent of the companies were sensitive to government policies.

NEW HORIZONS

THE DCM group is making a foray into cement. Shriram Fertilisers & Chemicals is setting up a two-lakh-tonnes-a-year cement plant at Kota, Rajasthan, in technical collaboration with the French firm Lafarge. The project is expected to go on stream by the end of 1986. Loans from the financial institutions will cover some Rs 13 crore of the project's Rs 18 crore plus bill, the remainder being met by the company.

Shriram Fertilisers has a ready raw material for cement in lime-rich sludge, over a half million tonnes of which has accumulated as a byproduct at the factory complex at Kota, posing a pollution problem. The venture itself is expected to be the precursor to a much bigger cement project by Jay Engineering Works, another DCM group firm.

AMBITIOUS AIMS

GARMENT exporters are setting their sights high. The Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) reckons that garment exports can touch the Rs 2,500-crore mark in five years, up sharply from the expected figure of Rs 1,100 crore or so in 1985. Government officials have requested the council to explain its optimism, and the AEPC has now pointed out that exports have grown at a fast clip in the last two years, most of them to countries that do not impose import quotas. Indeed, export targets have had to be jacked up after the initial goals were crossed, and exports have more than doubled in the last five years. But the AEPC projection hinges on the Government ensuring that exporters get raw materials at international prices and granting various other incentives to make it possible.

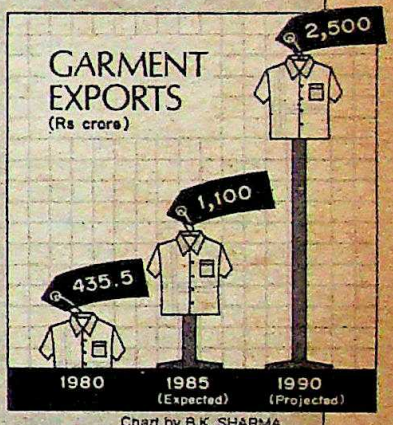

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

REPORT CARD

FOR COMPANIES to poll their employees on what they think of the organisation they work for is unusual enough, but for a public sector corporation to do so can only be called revolutionary. Yet that is precisely what the state-owned Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) has done. In 10 days in October, BHEL asked some 68,000 employees across the board in 12 of its units to respond to 11 issues—including whether they were proud to belong to the organisation, how they rated it against other companies, their salaries, job satisfaction, and working conditions. Around 79 per cent of them ticked off one of three boxes—0 to 1 (negative response), 2 to 3 (average) and 4 to 5 (positive). Among the top scoring issues: pride in the organisation. At the bottom of the totem pole (average) were working conditions and perquisites, with executives below the manager level expressing unhappiness about these. A company official attributes this dissatisfaction to the higher aspirations of younger executives, and BHEL officials claim that they are not worried by this. The poll, the brainchild of former chairman K.L. Puri, is being extended to the remaining 6,000 employees in BHEL's Jhansi and Jagdishpur units, and possibly to BHEL's customers.

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ESCORTS

Surprise Ruling

THE VERDICT came as a bombshell. London-based corporate marauder Swraj Paul hadn't quite expected it. Escorts Chairman H.P. Nanda was caught unawares. And the legions of businessmen and media pundits who had for months followed the twists and turns of the Erle Stanley Gardner-like Case of the Frustrated Takeovers were taken by surprise when it was finally handed down.

Last fortnight, the Supreme Court in a sweeping judgement in effect re-established the rights of the financial institutions to exercise their equity muscle, put Nanda on notice that he was at the mercy of the institutions—and kept Swraj Paul at bay from Escorts. For the next three months at least, Paul cannot get Escorts to register his 7 per cent stock, which was acquired more than two years ago by 13 non-resident firms under his control in Britain.

The five-member bench of the Supreme Court cleared the Government, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the LIC of wrongdoing in the Escorts case. The court also turned down the Escorts argument that Paul's companies had violated the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) by investing in shares without prior RBI permission. Instead, it said that the RBI had the discretion to grant retrospective sanction for this, and held that subsequent RBI clarifications on this were valid.

In a surprising twist, however, the court also ordered the RBI to reconsider in three months whether it should have permitted Paul's companies to invest in the first place. Its rationale: Punjab National Bank (PNB), through which Paul's investment funds were routed, had defaulted in its job of monitoring his share purchases. So the ball is in the RBI's court, and all sorts of issues which the Supreme Court did not delve deeply into could be raked up in the RBI investigation. Indeed, there were already stray indications that both Escorts and DCM, in which Paul's firms have acquired a 11 per cent stake, would jump at this opportunity to press home to the RBI a host of alleged irregularities in Paul's investments. So Paul cannot yet romp home, not by a long shot.

Certainly, the 181-page judgement has serious ramifications for the corporate sector. Though the rights of the institutions were not up front in this case, the judgement has overturned an earlier Bombay High Court ruling in Escorts' favour (INDIA TODAY, December 15, 1984) which had said that the institutions had no right to dismiss nine of Escorts' 15 directors. Corporate analysts and industrialists are quick to recognise the problems that can arise from the latest ruling. What, for example, should be the role of the Government when it is itself an affected shareholder? Venu Srinivasan, managing director of the Madras-based Sundaram Clayton says: "What the Government should do when it is itself the shareholder is still unclear — whether it should behave like any other shareholder or should intervene in case of mismanagement." As if to allay such misgivings, Finance Minister V.P. Singh told journalists that the Government had no intention of destabilising managements with a good track record.

That sounded as if the Government was holding out an olive branch, and the action quickly hotted up. H.P. Nanda winged his way to Bombay where he would have an opportunity to exchange views with the financial institutions. With 52 per cent of Escorts stock, they are the company's biggest shareholders and have a majority on the Escorts board. More important, the Supreme Court allowed H.P. Nanda and eldest son Rajan Nanda to continue as managing directors till the next board meeting. The board appointed them to their posts last May, but at the emergency general meeting the LIC called last June, the Nandas withdrew a resolution on their remuneration. Instead, they went back to the board, which then proposed that their appointments run till the Supreme Court decided on the Escorts case. So it would make sense to sue for peace with the institutions.

HARI OM GULATI

The judgement has put H.P. Nanda at the mercy of the institutions, but it looks as if they will support him.

The Nandas however decline to talk to the press and H.P. Nanda would not go beyond saying: "I have no comments to make. The highest court in the country has given its verdict and we must bow to it." For all that, it was evident that Nanda's Bombay trip had paid off. A few days later, the board met and ratified the Nandas' terms for another five years.

If that pointed to which way the wind was blowing, there was more evidence that the institutions did not intend to arbitrarily ease out those at the helm of companies. They lined up behind the DCM management at the company's annual general meeting last fortnight. An investment company had gone to the Delhi High Court seeking a stay on the AGM, claiming that DCM had refused to register a hefty 21 per cent of company equity, including Paul's 11 per cent. The court declined to interfere, but appointed an observer to attend the AGM. Subsequently, the re-election of three DCM directors, including a representative of the institutions (they have an equity stake of around 40 per cent), was challenged by some of those whose shares were not registered. This included Paul's broker Harish Bhasin. Put to vote, the resolution was lost: the institutions threw their weight behind the management.

The well-spring of this brouhaha is of course the judgement, and it is a remarkable document. Before getting down to the nitty-gritty, it wearily dwells on the mountains of evidence presented, testily

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castigates Paul and his broker Raja Ram Bhasin & Co for not putting in an appearance in court and takes a dig at the PNB for putting itself in "such a hapless situation". Later, the judges lash out at both Paul and Nanda. If Paul's remark to newspapers about the then Reserve Bank governor was quoted correctly, it was "saucy, rude and impudent". A salvo is fired at Nanda for his "duplicity" in holding discussions with the financial institutions while he was filing a writ in the Bombay High Court.

Finally, it picks on Nanda for the company's proposals to issue Rs 35 crore in equity and debentures for its motor cycles project, and repay its dues to the institutions ahead of schedule. The former would have pared the institutional holding in Escorts from 52 per cent to around 29 per cent, while the latter would have freed Nanda from a loan agreement which gave the institutions the power to put as many as six directors on the board. But the equity and debenture issue involved allotting 20 per cent of the shares on a rights basis to shareholders, on condition that no single shareholder would be allotted more than 100 debentures and 500 equity shares. What that meant was that the LIC would get just 500 shares even though it owned 30 per cent of the stock. But the ceiling would not apply to the promoters and directors of the company. As for the second, the court implied that repayment of the loans may have not been a sound financial decision. The money for this was to be raised from the debentures which entailed interest of 14 per cent, whereas the institutional loans involved only 10 per cent interest.

HARI OM GULATI

The court has asked the RBI to review its permission to Swraj Paul's companies to invest in the shares.

MEANWHILE, the big question is the forthcoming RBI investigation. Escorts and DCM are certain to raise issues that the Supreme Court did not take up on the ground that they were outside the scope of the writ petitions. Among them:

- Whether Paul or his brokers used local money to buy shares, something that would be illegal because he remitted funds on a repatriable basis. If local funds were used, Paul could repatriate them with the money he sent from Britain.
- Whether Paul's brokers had bought shares after May 2, the Government's cut-off date for an overall non-resident investment ceiling to come into operation.

On both matters, there may be many unanswered questions. In the first, there is an unaccounted 130,000 pounds (Rs 19.63 lakh). Paul remitted this amount in late January 1983 from the London branch of the PNB to a PNB branch in the capital to open a non-resident account in his name. But the London branch disclaimed knowledge of this, and the PNB's letter to the RBI on Paul's remittances makes no mention of this. It was later clarified to the court that the money was used by the Caparo group of companies to buy shares, but Nanda's lawyers had argued in court that this was irregular. The money was for Paul, not his firms, to spend on shares, they said.

But Paul dismisses all this, arguing that Nanda's lawyers have sought to cash in on a confusing situation. Says Paul: "There has been a lot of confusion over our remittance of £130,000 (Rs 19.63 lakh) in January 1983. PNB had made a mistake in not filing a return on the remittance with the RBI. Taking advantage of this, Nanda's counsel argued that the shares were bought with Indian and not non-resident funds. This is not true."

On the second point, Escorts lawyers produced brokers' notes showing that shares had been sold to one of Paul's investment firms as late as August. Paul had claimed that his investments were made before the ceiling was announced (INDIA TODAY, October 15, 1983).

Similar examples were cited in court, and Escorts lawyers strung all of them together to suggest that the RBI did not apply its mind fully to the facts of the case.

Nonetheless, the Supreme Court did not buy their line. It ruled that the RBI had after all applied its mind. The question then is: why has it asked the RBI to reconsider the entire issue? Is there a contradiction here between its clearance of the RBI and the investigation it has ordered? The judgement is silent on this matter, but an interested observer says: "By directing the RBI to re-examine the matter, the Supreme Court seems to be admitting that the RBI did not apply its mind—the very point that Escorts was arguing in court." The point may be pressed before the RBI. What is important is that the court has stated that the RBI can cancel the previous sanction or impose any restriction and conditions it wants to if it discovers irregularities. But will the RBI confess its sins if it finds that it erred? There is no ready answer to that.

Where does all this leave Paul? If the RBI finds that the law was violated in any way by Paul's companies, Paul stands to have his Rs 13 crore in investments in Escorts and DCM impounded by the Government. Paul reckons that he has lost Rs 10 crore in interest and exchange rate losses. While he can appeal to the courts if the RBI rules against him, that may mean prolonged litigation, and his cash would be further blocked.

Still, this scenario may not unfold. The RBI could plump for Swraj Paul. If that happens, the argument that registering Paul's shares would be illegal would no longer wash. The Nandas would be compelled to register Paul's shares, as would DCM. And though Paul has repeatedly declared that "there is no question of a take-over", the Nandas would be in hot water. On balance however it looks as if the issue is still wide open. But Paul seems to have struck a curious note when he answered a question on his options after the judgement: "Now I do hope that the fight has finally ended." Did that indicate that he was wearying over the nearly three-year-long battle? The conclusion may be premature, but it does provide food for thought.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

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FISCAL POLICY

Easing the Burden

FOR UPBEAT reactions, there haven't been many to surpass those that greeted Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh's Long Term Fiscal Policy (LTFP) unveiled last fortnight after months of nail-biting suspense. Budget-baiter Nani Palkhivala said it was a sound, lucid and historic statement. Tarun Das of the Association of Indian Engineering Industries called it "a remarkable document" while his chief Ramesh Maheshwari said it had several "outstanding features". V.P. Punj of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations said it would help long-range planning and strategies and tax expert H.P.Ranina said it would help companies which wanted to diversify and set up new units. S.P.Acharya, president of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) said it would provide for an orderly environment for business. And Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry President D.N.Patodia saw it as a welcome step towards open budgeting.

There were the dissenters, of course. Maruthai Pillai of the All India Manufacturers Organisation felt that the section on corporate taxation hadn't fulfilled industry's expectations and corporate taxes should be reduced five percentage points. S.S.Kanwar of the All India Manufacturers Organisation lamented that there was no incentive for the new entrepreneur, while *The Times of India* said editorially that the policy evaded the central issue in fiscal reform, that is, using taxes to stimulate investment rather than raising resources.

But even these views were generally couched in language that otherwise welcomed the LTFP. And that, considering the context, was really no surprise. Although it leaves a great many details to future formulation, the policy statement unambiguously lays down the direction of the Government's fiscal thinking. It confirms the liberal trend established in the budget last March when a series of incentives was unveiled for the individual taxpayer and businessmen, and awkward, unnecessary fiscal legislation was done away with.

The LTFP makes it clear that the Government isn't interested any longer in the old *mantras*. The word 'socialism' is conspicuous by its absence. The concept of a direct assault on poverty has been replaced by opting for a trickle-down strategy. The emphasis is on growth, on efficiency, on eliminating, as far as possible, the corrupting influence of discretion in the application of tax laws. It confirms the Government's new approach of increasing tax collections not by raising rates but by making the structure simpler, through better compliance and, above all, by levying tax at rates that are generally judged to be "reasonable". In a sentence that sums up the new philosophy, the document says: "We must ensure that the long-term fiscal policy creates an environment conducive to rapid growth in production and employment, so that the burden of poverty can be reduced."

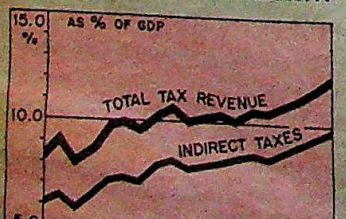
Specifically, among its measures, the policy lists:

- Personal income tax rates will remain unchanged for five years, though the finance minister may levy a temporary surcharge to meet unforeseen contingencies; inflation will be compensated for by adjusting tax brackets suitably;
- surcharge and surtax on corporate tax will be abolished from April 1, 1987, a measure that will reward efficient companies and those which are able to generate high profit on a low capital base;
- the investment allowance, which one tax specialist describes as the "single most potent tax incentive", will be replaced by a new scheme enabling corporate taxpayers to deposit 20 per cent of taxable profits with the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) from fiscal 1986-87 for future purchase of plant and machinery, and abolition of minimum tax provisions;
- a new provision aimed against the creation of black money in property deals. The Government will through random sampling acquire metropolitan property worth more than Rs 10 lakh within 30 days of its changing hands at a price 15 per cent in excess of that declared;
- the introduction, after due study, of a modified value added tax, 'Modvat', to ease multiple taxation of inputs;
- a promise to replace quantitative restrictions on imports with properly structured tariffs; and
- the establishment in future of an appellate tribunal to handle all litigation over customs and excise duties.

Though there are always two sides to an argument, there's no doubt that in some places at least there is sound logic at work. The figures show, for instance, that as tax rates have fallen, income tax collections have risen sharply; over the first seven months of the current fiscal year they are an unprecedented 25 per cent ahead of last year's collections. The abolition of the minimum tax provisions are, in the same spirit, no longer necessary after the end of the investment allowance. Says Patodia: "Theoretically, this will enable companies to retain resources for further expansion." Modvat would eliminate

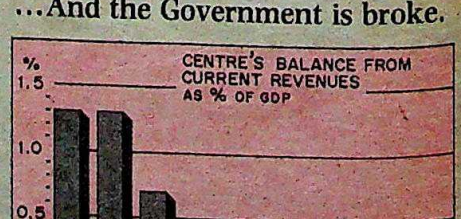
Chart by B.K. SHARMA

Tax revenues have risen...



...But so has non-plan spending...

...And the Government is broke.



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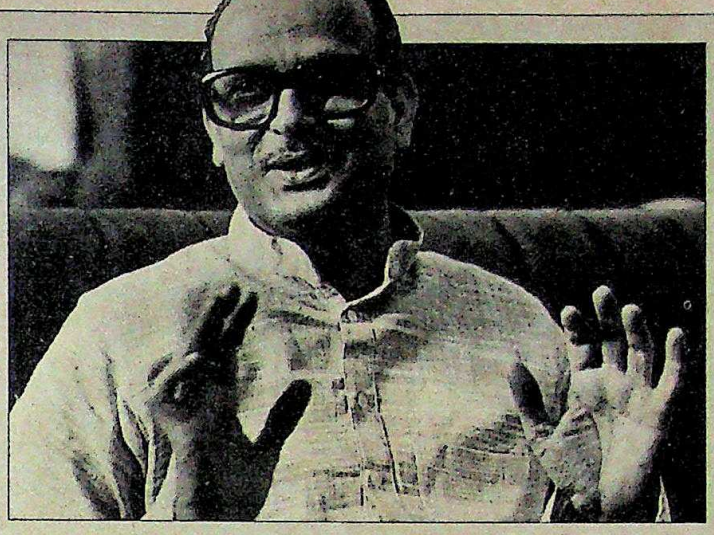
multiple indirect taxation, though, as P.M.Sinha of Hindustan Lever Ltd points out, it will be no great advantage unless it also incorporates sales tax.

Granting this innovation, tax lawyer O.P.Vaish regrets that the policy hasn't even addressed the problem of multiple taxation of companies. Citing a hypothetical example, he says that when a subsidiary company declares a profit, that profit is taxed. It is taxed again when the subsidiary remits it to the parent company and again when it is paid out as dividend to shareholders.

The biggest controversy is, as expected, over the replacement of the investment allowance. By instituting a new and in many ways similar scheme, the finance minister hasn't exactly disappointed private industry which was hoping, probably wishfully, that he would both lower tax rates and continue the allowance. Taxes have, indeed, been lowered with the abolition of surtax and surcharge (though the rates remain unchanged) and the investment allowance has been replaced with the new IDBI deposit scheme. But strong views have been expressed. Raunaq Singh of Raunaq Enterprises feels that the investment allowance generates cash while the new scheme will lock up money with IDBI at a lower rate of interest—10 per cent—than available on the market. But ASSOCHAM Secretary-General D.N.Saxena argues: "If the choice was between lower tax rates and the investment allowance, we prefer the lower tax rates."



V.P. Singh's new fiscal policy very succinctly lays down the direction of the government's fiscal thinking, to create an environment conducive to rapid growth in production and employment.

UNDERLYING this line of thinking is the practice of companies to use the investment allowance as an instrument of tax planning, maximising investment in assets rather than profitability. It isn't clear as yet whether the 20 per cent deposit will enable a corporate depositor to draw a tax benefit in the year of the deposit or not, but in the long run it would provide a more easily monitored incentive. Sinha believes that the new scheme will make for more cautious investment plans, contributing to a better capital-output ratio which is notoriously low in the Indian context.

For a government document, the LTFP is a very candid and clear statement. Yet, it does leave some areas unexplained. How, for instance, will the house purchase scheme work? Official sources say that it will be completely random, that a computer will at random select properties to be bought by the Government which will then acquire it at the declared price plus 15 per cent and promptly auction it. The Government expects that a buyer who has declared the right market price will make a 15 per cent profit and will be free to buy the property back from the Government. But there is considerable cynicism among legal circles on just how this will work out.

Nor has the LTFP been very clear about its attitude towards black money. As of now, it is possible for an individual to make a declaration of his hitherto unaccounted income or wealth in his next return (for the fiscal year ending March 1986) without the tax department reopening his past accounts. But, as tax accountant Ajay Behl asks, "Will the Government want to know the source of this additional income or wealth?" The implication is clear: if the source is demanded, individuals may not be willing to make declarations since that would implicate the whole network. But, if individuals don't make declarations the huge stock of black money—recently estimated at Rs 38,000 crore—will remain beyond the reach of the exchequer.

Will the LTFP work? Even government economists associated with its formulation are keeping their fingers crossed. With so many of its provisions left unformulated—mainly in indirect taxes such as customs duties and excise—there's no way of knowing. But more than that is the burden of past policies that the LTFP simply cannot shed. Tax revenues have gone up, but then so has Government's non-plan spending, and as the LTFP makes abundantly clear, the Government is simply not paying its way.

Where, then, does that leave the Seventh Plan, a leviathan which requires nearly Rs 130,000 crore of funds from the Centre. With Defence, subsidies and interest payments at 10.9 per cent of GDP equalling roughly the Government's total revenue receipts at 11.2 per cent of GDP in the 1984-85 revised estimates, development spending cannot be financed from current revenues. So where will the Seventh Plan be financed from? The LTFP says: "The long-term answer must lie in reducing our reliance on borrowings by increasing the balance of current revenues and internal resource generation by public undertakings."

Neither is likely to be easy: deficits and borrowings have become an inalienable part of the budgetary process, and there is nothing to suggest that the public sector will suddenly jump out of its skin and become profitable. Since he isn't willing to tap agriculture, the finance minister's hope lies in buoyant revenues. That may be true of direct taxes, but they yield less than one-fifth of the total tax revenues. Perhaps the current drive of raids will persuade businesses to be more conscientious in paying excise and customs duties but indirect taxes have never been buoyant without higher rates. So, if the finance minister does run into a budgetary squeeze, if money simply isn't forthcoming, he may be left with no alternative but to return to the annual guessing game of hiking this levy or reducing that. As long as he refrains from touching direct taxes, there will be some stability. But indirect taxes affect prices and prices in turn influence corporate fortunes. The future isn't as secure as the LTFP would like to make out.

—SUMAN DUBEY with PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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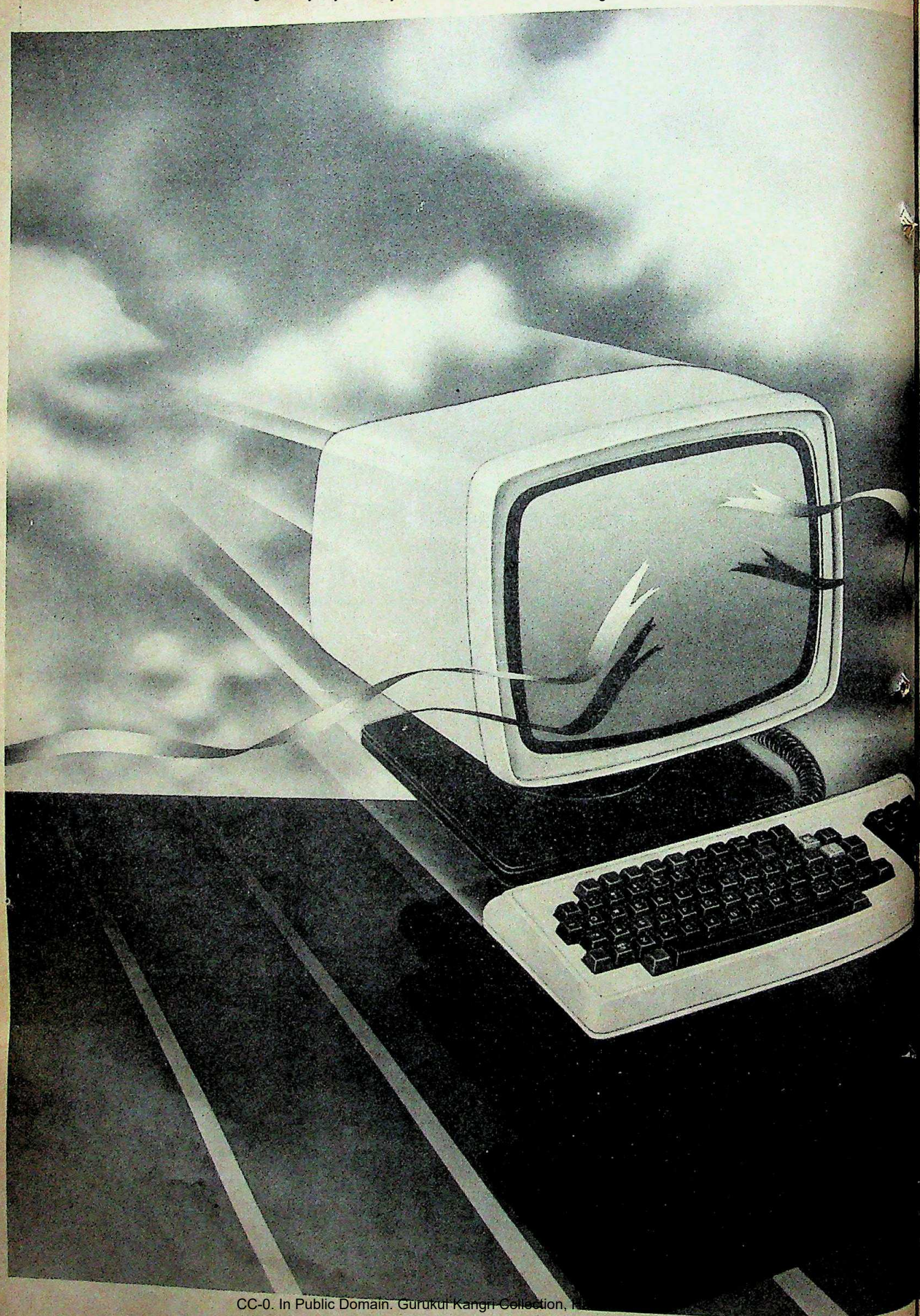

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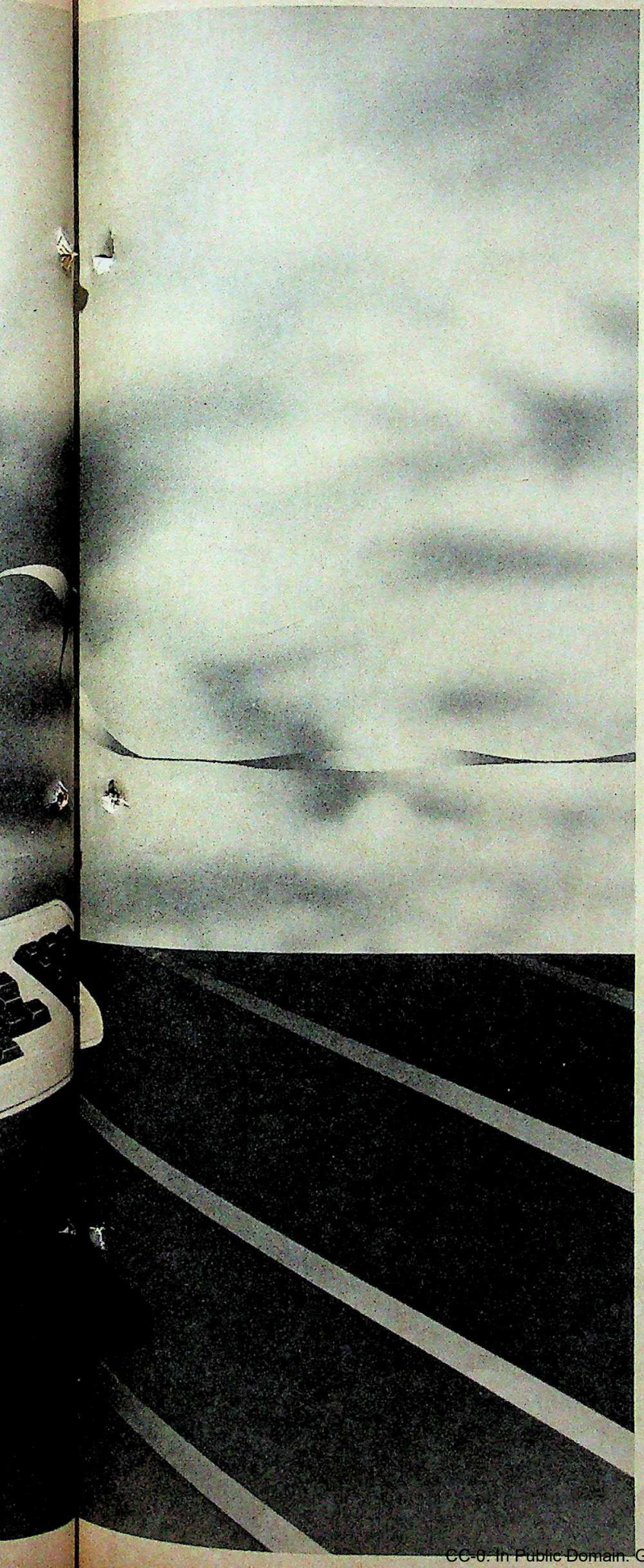

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TOURISM

Bracing for a Boost

A SMILING sun beams out of double page colour advertisements in 30 magazines exhorting people to hit the road, to move out and travel. This media blitz splashing the slogan 'Discover India, discover yourself' across the country is the Tourism Department's way of convincing the people of the virtues of national integration. The message clearly is that tourism enriches the traveller and educates him about the country's diversity, its people, customs and food habits. From January 1986 a slightly different message—"the Festival of India never ends"—will be beamed out overseas through advertisements in the international edition of *Time* magazine.

Tourism is all set to get a much-needed shot in the arm. These ad campaigns are but one thrust of the multi-pronged drive to boost tourism—domestic and international—to encourage Indians to travel within the country and to lure larger number of foreign tourists to India's shores. Additional Director-General of Tourism Ramesh Chandra readily admits that the domestic campaign has strong overtones of national integration. Since the prime minister himself authored the idea of using tourism to cement national unity, the Rs 50-lakh campaign has got off to a nippy start. But the efforts to get more foreigners to India is straight business. Waiting in the wings for its January launch is the Rs 1-crore *Time* magazine campaign. Separate campaigns with a budget of Rs 78 lakh aimed specifically at the European market are also planned. This would popularise India as a summer destination and also counteract the adverse publicity as a result of the violence of 1984 which forced the cancellation of many booked tours to India. These campaigns would hardly have been possible had the Department of Tourism budget for promotion and publicity not swelled from Rs 5 crore to Rs 13 crore.

The job of designing a campaign for the domestic market was entrusted to Rediffusion, the advertising agency which produced the controversial advertisements in the Congress(I)'s election campaign a year ago. For a start, the agency took a fundamental look at the reasons why fewer Indians travelled for leisure. Some interesting findings which emerged were that there is:

- a basic inertia in the people,
- a lack of knowledge about worthwhile places to visit within the country,
- the fear that travel involves a temporary change in food habits,
- an apprehension that a holiday away from home proves expensive in the absence of adequate facilities for budget tourists.

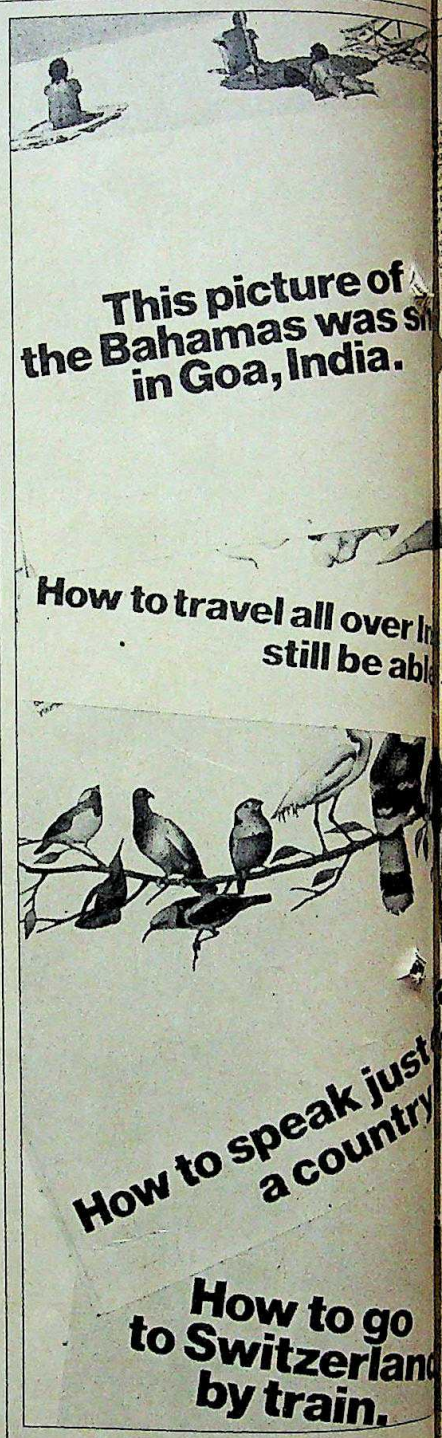
The domestic campaign aims at changing these perceptions. The first ads, says New Delhi Rediffusion Branch Director H.V.Subramaniam, tackle phobias about strange places and different food. From April 1986 new ads will be aimed at those who are least predisposed to travel. The message is simple: that "touring is not just pleasure but an emotional experience." Example: one ad signs off with the following line: "At Ellora, my child learnt that stones could talk."

All this is fine, but marketing experts in the industry question the wisdom of positioning these ads in glossy magazines. The people who read these magazines in any case do not need to be motivated to travel. "These ads need to be placed in Hindi and regional language newspapers if the intention is to get large numbers of domestic tourists on the move," said a tourism expert.

To enable large numbers of Indians to move out, Director-General of Tourism Nitish Sengupta says work is underway to provide infrastructural facilities in three main areas: budget accommodation, roadside amenities and inexpensive tour packages by the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), state tourism corporations and Vayudoot. "Every day 11 million Indians travel by train. If we take even a fraction of these as tourists we have quite a number," he said.

Package tours are now being offered by the ITDC and Vayudoot. In cooperation with the state tourism corporations of Himachal Pradesh and Meghalaya and the Kumaon and Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigams, the airline sells reasonably priced four and five day packages from Delhi to Dehra Dun, Mussoorie, Rishikesh, Hardwar, and others to Nainital and Ranikhet at around Rs 799 per head including air travel to and fro. Vayudoot General Manager Harsh Vardhan hopes these packages would take off in a big way. Students pay just Rs 300.

On another front similar low cost holidays are being offered by many state



This media blitz splashing the slogan 'Discover India, discover yourself', is the Tourism Department's way of convincing people of the virtues of national integration...

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...marketing experts question the wisdom of positioning these ads in glossy magazines. The people who read these magazines in any case do not need to be motivated to travel.

tourism corporations and the ITDC which has special packages for students and senior citizens, with rates as low as Rs 25 a day. This has enabled the corporation to fill some of its empty hotels in out-of-the-way locations. ITDC Managing Director Rajan Jetley, claimed that the youth packages had proved a big success: "We have moved about 10,000 youth so far and we are having to turn down people because we have no room in our hotels."

WITH a great boom expected in the demand for budget facilities, ITDC has been told to reorient its energies to opening up new areas to tourism and entering places where the private sector hotel companies fear to tread. "The hospitality industry is best left to the private sector," says Chandra. Apart from renovating and upgrading its existing properties and building only one or two new ones, for example, at Bombay, the corporation will in future build only budget facilities in collaboration with state tourism corporations. Six such properties were under construction at Guwahati, Puri, Ranchi, Itanagar, Bhopal and Pondicherry.

But the problem of filling the existing five-star hotels—those owned by the ITDC and other chains—remains. Hence the "Festival of India never ends" campaign and the European campaign to draw tourists in the summer months May and June when hotels report their lowest occupancies. To make the summer package attractive Air-India, Air France and Swissair have agreed to offer a 15 per cent discount on regular air fares, while hotels in India are chipping in with a 25 per cent cut on room rates and travel agents with a 20 per cent discount on ground transportation. "We are happy that some attention is being paid to consumer-oriented tourism marketing abroad," said Ghulam Naqshband, managing director of Sita Travels.

But, cautions Sengupta, "things won't work unless the Government reviews the visa policy to make it easier for genuine tourists to come to India." Even official delegations suffer the indignity of delayed visas. People attending conferences in India face the additional harassment of getting special clearance from the Home Ministry. Delegates to the Federation of International Youth Travel Organisations (FIYTO) conference in Delhi in October got their clearance barely a few days before the conference began. The Home Ministry which is the clearing authority, does not realise that because of the numbers involved, conferences are a big, lucrative but very competitive business. Bureuacratic hassles such as the one faced by FIYTO can kill a country's reputation as a conference venue.

Visas apart, the second obstacle in the way of increased tourist traffic is lack of adequate capacity on Indian Airlines' domestic network and also on airlines operating to India. "While legitimate interests of Air-India should be protected it should not appear to take a dog-in-the-manger attitude." With this in mind, the Government recently overruled Air-India's objections and has allowed foreign charters to land directly at Goa and Trivandrum. The first chartered DC10 planes of the Lufthansa subsidiary Condor started flying in to Goa this winter, and 26 charters have been cleared for Goa. Trivandrum is expected to follow suit. There are plans to run direct services to the Gulf from Goa and an Air-India service from Hyderabad to Saudi Arabia has begun.

A new and belated move is also being made to encourage travel among south Asian countries by lowering air fares. The regional airlines met recently in Karachi to discuss reduction of intra regional air fares and the same topic is expected to come up when the South Asia committee of PATA (Pacific Area Travel Association) meets in New Delhi this fortnight. For many years Indian Airlines has opposed all moves to make it reduce or even prorate air fares for international travellers but as Sengupta pointed out, "in the overall interest Indian Airlines should agree."

Sengupta is confident that if these hurdles are pushed aside, if the capacity to handle more traffic increases, visas are relaxed and the notoriously slow business of getting past immigration and customs is speeded up, Indian tourism will boom. "I am confident of getting 2.5 million tourists by 1990," he says. Earnings of Rs 3,000 crore a year from tourism are "well within our reach" if these impediments are removed.

From today's perspective, these numbers seem the stuff of fantasy. India was supposed to host one million visitors by 1980 according to a plan drawn up in the early 1970s. In fact, thanks to the introduction of the visa restriction, and problems in Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab and adverse publicity due to calamities and violence, the total tourist arrivals at the end of 1984 were only 852,000 and tourism earnings about Rs 1,300 crore. At best 1985 will only match that figure. It's going to be a long haul.

—RAMINDAR SINGH with PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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BANKING

Wheeling and Dealing

THE PLOT is as riveting as a murky Arthur Hailey financial thriller: A mighty but tottering bank, large-scale and systematic fraud, powerful politicians, black marketeering bankers, corrupt businessmen, obscure financial deals, payoffs, sex, and an unrelenting and crusading member of Parliament.

The uproar over Johnson Matthey Bankers'—now widely known as the "JMB Affair"—is one of the most explosive scandals to rock the City of London. Its principal characters: Asian millionaires—trading tycoon Abdul Shamji and Pakistani shipping magnate Mahmud Sipra. Teetering on the periphery have been a number of other high profile Asian businessmen. Coming in the wake of the notorious Rajendra Sethia rumpus—which was Britain's biggest bankruptcy—the fortunes of Asian businessmen seem to be under a black cloud in the UK repeatedly caught under the harsh media glare. It has, in the process, earned Asian businessmen an undeserved reputation—of being dubious wheeler-dealers rather than an industrious, enterprising lot.

At the hub of the scandal is Johnson Matthey Bankers'—the international bank and bullion dealers which was saved from a £248 million (Rs 433 crore) collapse by a controversial take-over by the Bank of England last October, and now finds itself where no bank would want to be: on page one of the newspapers. The often ferocious campaign against the bank has been led by the audacious and indefatigable Brian Sedgemore, the Labour MP for Shoreditch and Hackney south. Sedgemore, a former barrister and one-time columnist for the irreverent satirical weekly *Private Eye*, has put on a bravura display in Parliament, alleging fraud and malpractice in many corners of public and private life, calling for the resignation of the chancellor of the exchequer and the chairman of the Bank of England. At the heart of the affair are alleged to be a series of entrepreneurs who have been named and maybe even villified under cover of parliamentary privilege which has provided Sedgemore protection from libel laws. Much of his damning evidence and withering comments have been reserved for Shamji and Sipra.

Heading the list of charges of extensive fraud were Abdul Shamji and his Gomba Group of Industries (INDIA TODAY, July 31, 1984). Shamji has been described in the House of Commons as an "acquaintance" of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, "friend" of Norman Tebbit, the abrasive chairman of the Conservative Party and a probable future prime minister and "erstwhile friend" of Norman Lamont, minister of state for defence procurement. Shamji's Gomba operations in the UK owed JMB £21 million (Rs 36 crore) which made him its third largest debtor. Unable to recover the amount, the bankers appointed Price Waterhouse, the firm of noted accountants, to be receivers and managers of Gomba. In addition, some £40 million (Rs 69 crore) was owed to other banks including Punjab National Bank by Gomba's subsidiaries and associates.

The property-based empire of Abdul Shamji started in the early 1970s when he fled the rampaging troops of Idi Amin in Uganda and claims to have arrived in UK "virtually penniless". But within six months he had struck his first deal moving a consignment of whisky and cutlery to Zaire. He soon went on to buy properties, hotels and such quintessentially British landmarks as three London theatres—The Gerrick, The Duchess and The Mermaid. He also had an indirect stake in Britain's most famous stadium—the Wembley. His own pet project was a Scottish truck plant—Stonefield Vehicles. Operating from an elegant address in Park Lane, Shamji ran his immense empire of vehicles, hotels, commodity trading and components with a turnover of £40 million, hobnobbing with the most powerful figures in the land.

Shamji banked with JMB for about six years. And as financial experts point out, trouble was never far away. In one deal in June 1984, for instance, the J.M. Jewellry Corporation sold a factory and large quantities of jewellery and watches to a US company, Strongsay. Shamji and his son-in-law Munir Walji, negotiated the deal and the finance was arranged through JMB. However on December 30 last, when a second tranche of $11.8 million (Rs 14.4 crore) in payment for the jewellery became due, a new JMB administration refused to make the money available and so Strongsay defaulted.

More damaging than Shamji's inability to pay his dues was Sedgemore's allegation that Shamji had provided Ian Fraser—JMB's former chief loan negotiator—with a flat in Mayfair where he kept two mistresses. Calling Shamji a crook in the hallowed precincts of the House of Commons, the MP loudly asked: "What I cannot understand is why this luminary of the conservative firmament is not in a remand prison awaiting committal for trial for fraud." Sedgemore also alleged that Shamji attempted to "buy him off".

Sedgemore said that Shamji thought that Victorian values were about "bribery, corruption, fraud, and tarts for bankers". Shamji who has kept a resolutely low profile during all these accusations emerged once to talk to newsmen to defend himself. He told journalists: "When I saw the newspaper headlines I had to ask my son what this word 'tart' meant. He knew, but he ran from the room in tears rather than tell me." Shamji, with his firsthand experience of a demented Idi Amin, said he found Sedgemore's behaviour worse than Amin's—"because he is an educated man living in a civilised world, yet he behaves worse than Amin. Amin had the power of the army and no one could touch him. This man can attack and no one can touch him because of the privilege of Parliament."

The Guardian

Much of Brian Sedgemore's damning evidence and withering comments have been reserved for Shamji and Sipra.

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Shamji also openly challenged Sedgemore to shed his cloak of parliamentary immunity. He taunted: "If he has the guts, let him come out and say these terrible things outside Parliament. Let him say that I'm a crook, that I'm corrupt and should be in jail. I'm no crook and I can prove it. He has nothing to support what he says."

Shamji's protestations have not stopped JMB from swinging their receivers into action. Knight, Frank and Rutley (KFR) have been given the job of finding the buyers for a range of properties which was part of Shamji's UK empire. These include:

► instructions to sell the Duchess and Gerrick theatres. The Mermaid theatre has not been included in the list so far;

► KFR have been instructed to find agents for other properties. These include the entire St George's estate in London's Pimlico which is estimated to embrace over 500 individual residential, retail and office accommodation;

► KFR has also been asked to find a buyer for the 64-bedroom Rathbone Hotel in London's West End;

► also on sale will be a 7,000 sq ft handbag factory in Blackburn and a secondary retail investment in North End Parade, Fulham, comprising around 20 shop units and flats. The agents will also be seeking a tenant for Gomba's own leasehold offices in London's Park Lane.

Side by side, the Punjab National Bank which badly burnt its fingers in the Rajendra Sethia bankruptcy resulting in a shake-up in the higher echelons of that bank, once again found itself locked into another Asian with bad debts. Bank sources were cagey about the precise sum involved but Ashok Bakshi, its London office manager, told INDIA TODAY that the secured loans with Shamji were much smaller than in the Sethia affair. The bank is evaluating Alford House on Regent Street through receivers, and is confident it will recover its loans. Meanwhile, Shamji has twice moved the courts to prevent JMB receivers from annexing his property, both of which have been rejected. But sources close to Shamji say that he will be able to pay back the £21 million in its entirety.

Even as Shamji was battling Sedgemore and the receivers, JMB's biggest debtor, the flamboyant Mahmud Sipra—whose shipping and film companies owed $70 million (Rs 85.8 crore)—vanished without a trace for some weeks. In the early stages when the scandal burst, it was alleged that Sipra was one of Sedgemore's informants but that did not seem to stop the implacable Labour MP from charging in the House of Commons that "the number of frauds Sipra has perpetrated is infinite," adding: "He does nothing else but commit fraud." Although no fraud charges have been brought against him so far in UK courts against his El Saeed Group of Companies, Sipra has been slapped with a perplexing maze of lawsuits.

► He has been accused of "old fashioned piracy on the high seas and overwhelming greed" by a district judge in October last year during a $1 million lawsuit brought against him by Dow Chemical and Manual International— a steel wholesaler over a cargo of steel which was not delivered to the people that owned it. Sipra is still waiting to hear the result of his appeal.

► Last July a New York judge awarded a Liberian shipping company $1.6 million in damages against Sipra and two companies in his empire—Bulkferts and WKM Ship Management Service Inc. The Liberian company—Transatlantic Bulk Shipping—claimed that Sipra chartered its vessel in September last year but stopped payments after just seven weeks.

► In August an Iraqi Government agency, State Organisation of Chemical Industries, sued Sipra and another company Sipravon Gulf and Paper seeking $4.6 million (Rs 0.56 crore). The Iraqis claim that Sipra agreed to ship 6,000 tonnes of wood and instead delivered just 2000 tonnes while obtaining payment by presenting bills of lading for cargoes that were not delivered.

► In yet another huge claim an Iranian company, Iran Carton is seeking damages totalling $6.35 million (Rs 0.77 crore). The Iranians say that a Sipra-controlled company, Maritime Americas Ltd, agreed to ship paper products to Iran and obtained payment under letters of credit issued by Bank Melli but failed to deliver the full cargo.

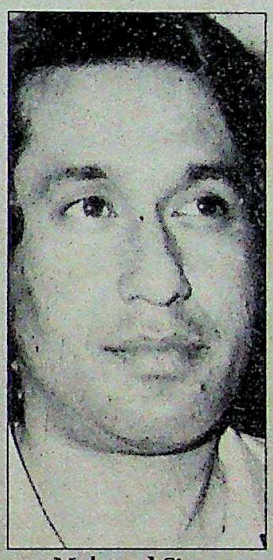
And as Sipra was found untraceable amidst the controversy in the House of Commons, Sedgemore alleged that "he had done a bunk for Karachi". Last fortnight, clad in a cool pathan outfit and brash as ever, Sipra appeared on the BBC "Money" television programme shot in his Lahore home. Asked about the allegations of Johnson Matthey Bankers' staff being involved in shady deals in Nigeria, Sipra replied: "It's common knowledge that anyone doing business with Nigeria would in some way or the other be involved in irregular currency movements in and out of the country." But he denied that any of his ships had ever called at a Nigerian port. He also categorically denied all the allegations made against him by Sedgemore, refuted the allegation that he was running from the law, insisted that he was in Pakistan just for a holiday and promised to be back in the UK by Christmas. But even as Sipra was sounding off, London's fraud squad swooped down on two of his houses in fashionable Mayfair and Regents Park and seized a "carload of documents".

Whilst Sipra's shipping empire appeared to be sinking and Shamji was making fighting talk of making an outright payment of his £21 million debt to JMB, other Asian businessmen involved in dealings with JMB were also being dragged into the scandal. The most prominent of

HARI OM GULATI

Abdul Shamji

Sipra's shipping and film companies owed Johnson Matthey Bankers Rs 85.8 crore making him its largest debtor while Shamji's Gomba group owed Rs 36 crore.



Mahmud Sipra

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them were the Pahoomal Brothers of Bombay who fled to Singapore after allegedly attempting to defraud Johnson Matthey Bankers' of £7 million (Rs 12.20 crore) before its collapse last year. The Pahoomal Brothers—Vinod, Narendra and Mohan—arrived in England in 1979 and set up a clutch of off-shore companies in Guernsey. One of them was allegedly Lexham Sales Ltd exporting factory equipment and Mercedes car spares to Nigeria. The fraud centred on the smuggling of massive sums out of Nigeria in exchange for bogus imports. Fraud squads tipped off about the existence of forged documents began to investigate but JMB allegedly tipped off the suspects and also refused to reveal the names of those sheltering behind the off-shore company. The brothers allegedly fled to Singapore even as arrest warrants were being issued in their names.

Incriminating evidence has also piled up against Pakistan's Imam Brothers—Amjad and Azam—whose brother-in-law is Mahmud Sipra. After Sipra himself, the Imam Brothers are JMB's second biggest debtors estimated at £35 million (Rs 61 crore). Amjad allegedly paid a bribe of £5,000 in cash to an assistant manager of JMB, Michael Flawn. The latter was suspended after a cashier recognised the notes. Companies linked to the Imam Brothers had allegedly been borrowing sums far in excess of the value of their security. As if all this were not enough, names of several Sindhi businessmen, including Arjandas Hiranand Melwani's, have cropped up in the affair.

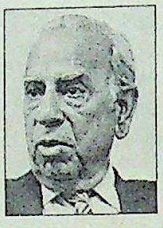
Meanwhile, in his enthusiasm to clean up this web of corruption, Brian Sedgemore himself got into trouble in Parliament and was suspended for five working days from the House of Commons after he refused to withdraw an allegation against the Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson who, he said, was "perverting the course of justice" in the JMB affair. The suspension hardly seemed to have had a chastening effect on him. Last fortnight he unearthed a new scandal involving the Lloyd's insurance market in which, mercifully, no Asian businessmen have been implicated so far. But thanks to Sedgemore, the reputation of Asian businessmen has taken a severe denting in England. Some people believe that he may have gone too far and are waiting for him to fall flat on his face, but until then a large number of people will continue to believe that the City of London is stuffed with men who collect old masters, young mistresses and bad debts.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

BUSINESSSPEAK

PRAKASH TANDON

Consumer Consciousness



Prakash Tandon has become something of a management pundit. He was still working his way to the top of the ladder in Hindustan Lever (then, as now the country's largest consumer product company), the Government launched planned development with heavy industry at the core of the programme, and consumer goods relegated to a minor role. Tandon was the first Indian chairman of Hindustan Lever, then chairman of the State Trading Corporation and Punjab National Bank, and finally the head of the National Council of Applied Economic Research which made him a respected voice in matters economic. Now, when the Government is placing consumer goods nearer the centre of its industrialisation programme, it has turned to Tandon, 74, to head an advisory group set up last month to provide a long-term perspective for the development of India's consumer industry. Tandon spoke to Senior Editor T.N. NINAN *on his new task:*

SOME two decades ago, we in Hindustan Lever started a business in preserved foods, and introduced Hima dehydrated peas after arranging with farmers to grow the variety of peas that we wanted. The Government then decided that this was a luxury and slapped a heavy duty on such peas: so our packaging cost was more than the cost of the peas themselves. The product failed.

That was the time when the Government placed overriding emphasis on heavy industry. This did increase our savings rate and we developed a heavy industry base. But the fact is that today there is no demand for steel even though we are producing only 8 million tonnes. And a good part of the demand is for steel to be used in refrigerators, cars and other 'luxury' products, not for bridges and things of that sort.

So India ought to enter a new phase of economic policy. So far, the Government has taxed most consumer goods as luxuries. At the same time, the annual smuggling of goods into India is estimated at between Rs 5,000 crore and Rs 6,000 crore: It is ridiculous that you can make a quick trip to Singapore and bring goods back home and still find it cheaper than buying a domestic product. You can pick up a seven cubic foot double-door refrigerator from any store in Paris for the equivalent of Rs 4,500 but in India such a product costs Rs 11,000.

In the US during the inter-war years, the economy grew not because of high savings but because of hire purchase. We in India should do the same. We simply have to develop and feed the markets for wage goods, whether it is clothes, consumer durables or housing. The average worker in Hindustan Steel got Rs 24,000 last year, and in the multinationals in Bombay, the average wage is Rs 40,000. When we have a serious housing shortage, why can't we keep back a part of the wages and give the worker a house.

At the same time we have to develop stimulants for raising quality and reducing prices. You will notice that no one mentions the price in advertisements. We have to introduce legislation for this, we have to encourage competetion, help develop consumer protection societies, and ask the public sector to become the pace-setter in becoming more consumer conscious.

There is also a lot of money in rural markets. Companies like Brooke Bond and Lipton developed rural markets for packaged tea and Wimco did it for matches. But the Government partly destroyed all this: in vanaspati, for example, they introduced price control so that rural marketing became unviable and the company had to drop it. The Hima peas case also shows that the Government was not interested in developing quality products.

Things are now changing, and the Planning Commission is trying to develop a consumer revolution by promoting healthy demand. In effect, demand in the market is now forcing the pace of change.

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East meets East

Fabric from Wintex.
Yarn from Japan.

Wintex®

100% polyester sarees and dress materia

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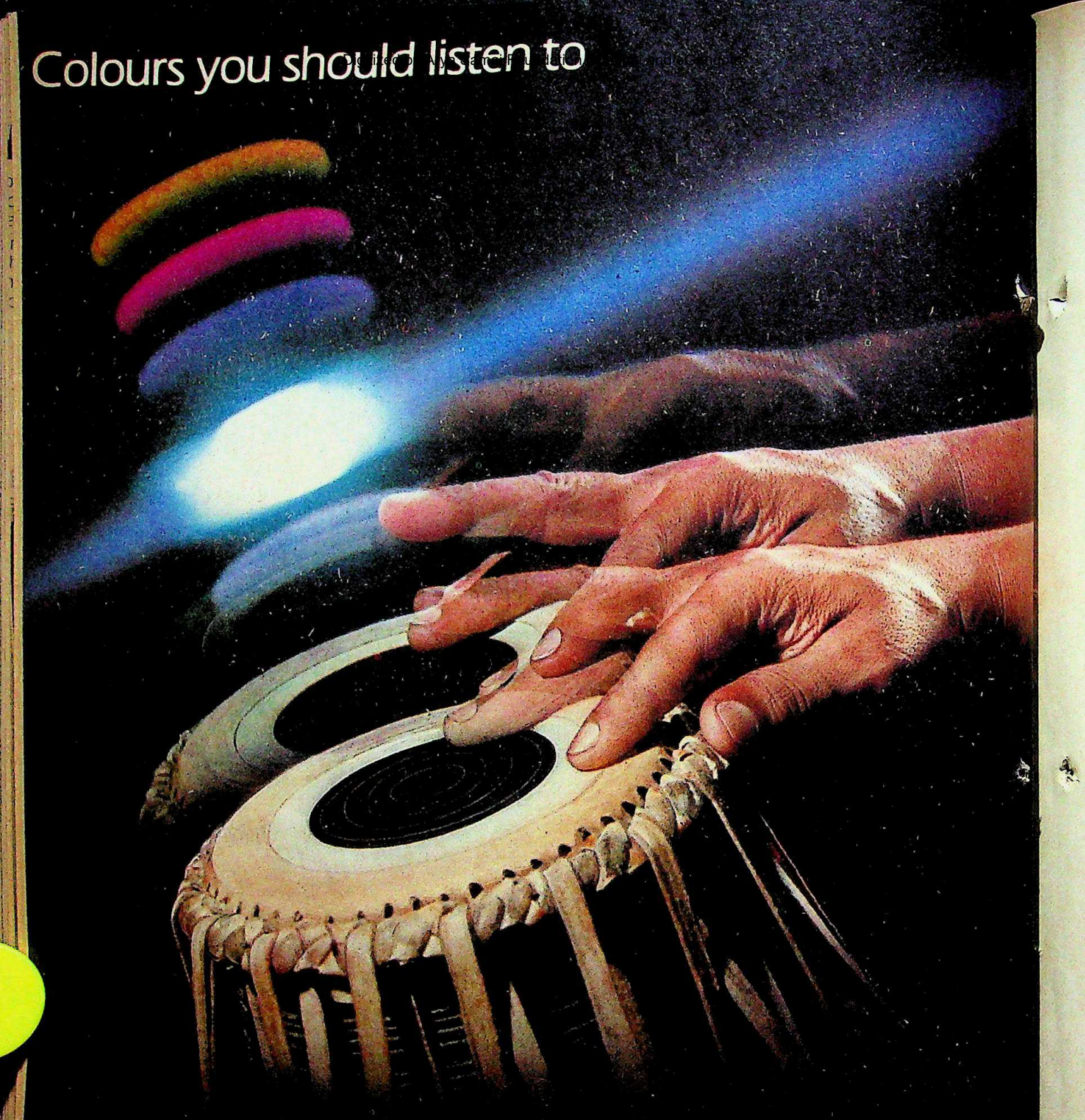
Colours you should listen to



Warm, pleasing yellows. Soft, soothing greens. Deep, mystic purples. Colours you've never heard before.

At Colour-Chem we make them sing. In the widest repertoire of shades and hues in the world of pigments and dyes.

In that subtle refinement of tone called quality control.

That constant striving to excel, which is R & D.

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You'll recognize Colour-Chem colours. And they'll sing for you. Whether you're in the textile, paints, printing inks, rubber, plastics or leather industry.

Just stay tuned in to Colour-Chem. You can't go wrong.

Colour-Chem

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194, Churchgate Reclamation, Bombay 400 020.

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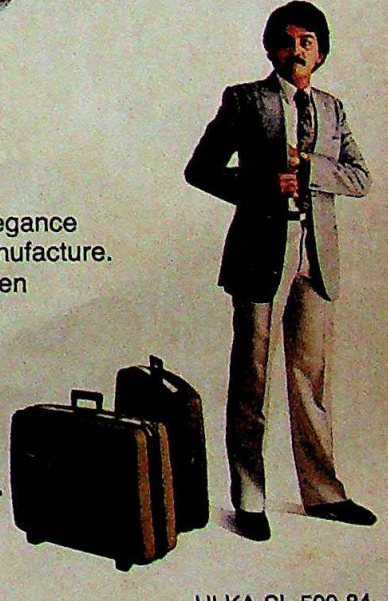
Let's not exaggerate.
Safari is not a romantic trip.
It's the no-nonsense luggage that gets around.

You've seen the airport loaders. Hurling your luggage around in fiendish delight. The railway coolies are equally enthusiastic about roughing it up.

So choose the luggage that manages to land on its feet in the worst conditions.

Safari. The sturdy luggage built to take a lot of beating. You may admire the silky elegance of its insides. But never forget the toughness hammered into it at every stage of manufacture. The pilfer-proof six lever vault lock never gives in. The buckle-down flap protects even the crease of your clothes.

Safari. It survives.



safari

The luggage that knows its business.

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ULKA-SL-500-84

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"Amsterdam, The Hague, Leiden, Bussum. Where do I go from here?"

"Oh! Anywhere you please. After all, it's 'Holland-on-the-House'."

Make Holland your first point of arrival or departure on a direct intercontinental flight... and you've got it made! And how!

This smashing opportunity is brought to you exclusively by the Holland Promotion Foundation. Available till 31 March 1986.

Live it up!

Your first night accomodation in a superior tourist class hotel and a continental breakfast come free.

Roundtrip transfers by KLM motor coach between Amsterdam Airport and the Central Railway Station in the city—that's free too!

Take into account the other discounts that you get!

On domestic flights.
On car rentals.
On entry fees into museums.
On antique hunting tours.
On canal cruises.
On the spicy late-late shows at the Lido!

Come to Holland with an open heart... and watch us win it over!

Contact your travel agent, or call us at:

Ahmedabad 77677, Bangalore 28703, Bombay 221013, Calcutta 441221, Cochin 39165, Delhi 343998, Goa 2298, Hyderabad 36042, Jalandhar 76088, Madras 86356, Patna 25437, Pune 61358, Kathmandu 214895 and Dhaka 250357.

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The Reliable Airline KLM

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SHRIRAM FOOD & FERTILISERS

On the Firing Line

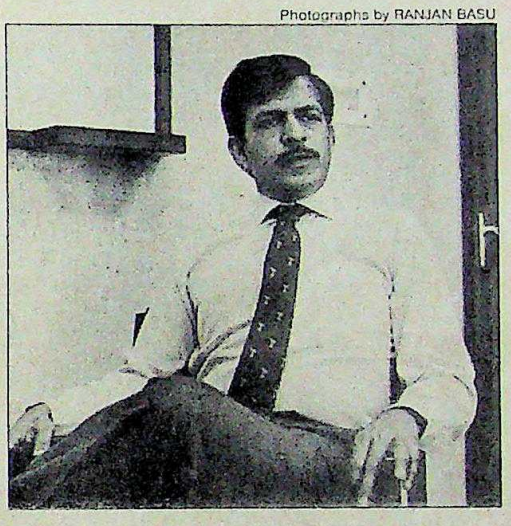
BARELY six months after he took over as Deputy Managing Director of DCM, 40-year-old Siddharth C.Shriram has been fielding questions from a hostile press, gone into a huddle with Delhi Administration officials more than once and is fighting furiously to salvage the badly beaten image of his company. Worse, he faces the unpleasant prospect of having the Delhi Administration wield its scalpel on what is probably one of the DCM group's biggest money-spinners.

What has brought Shriram on the firing line is a leakage of oleum early last month at the Delhi-based Shriram Food and Fertilisers (SFF) factory. Oleum, a highly volatile chemical, was piped to the neighbouring public sector Hindustan Insecticides Ltd (HIL) for the manufacture of DDT. The 15-minute leak from a tank at the Shriram plant resulted in vapour clouds rapidly spreading to the thickly populated neighbourhood, sending residents into a tizzy. Some 700 people had to be hospitalised for eye and respiratory irritation, though most were out the next day itself. There was however one casualty—lawyer Charanjit Singh Walia, who was at the Tiz Hazari courts some 7 km away, died the next morning in hospital. At the plant itself, three workers and two officers were affected.

The human tragedy apart, the leak has proved a disaster for the company in more ways than one. With an official committee looking into the plant's safety, unpleasant questions are being raised on that front. DCM may also face demands for compensation from victims of the disaster, a few of whom have filed claims. It is not quite clear exactly how much the damages will amount to (the courts have asked for supportive medical certificates before taking any action), but the damage could be substantial.

Shriram: bowing to the inevitable

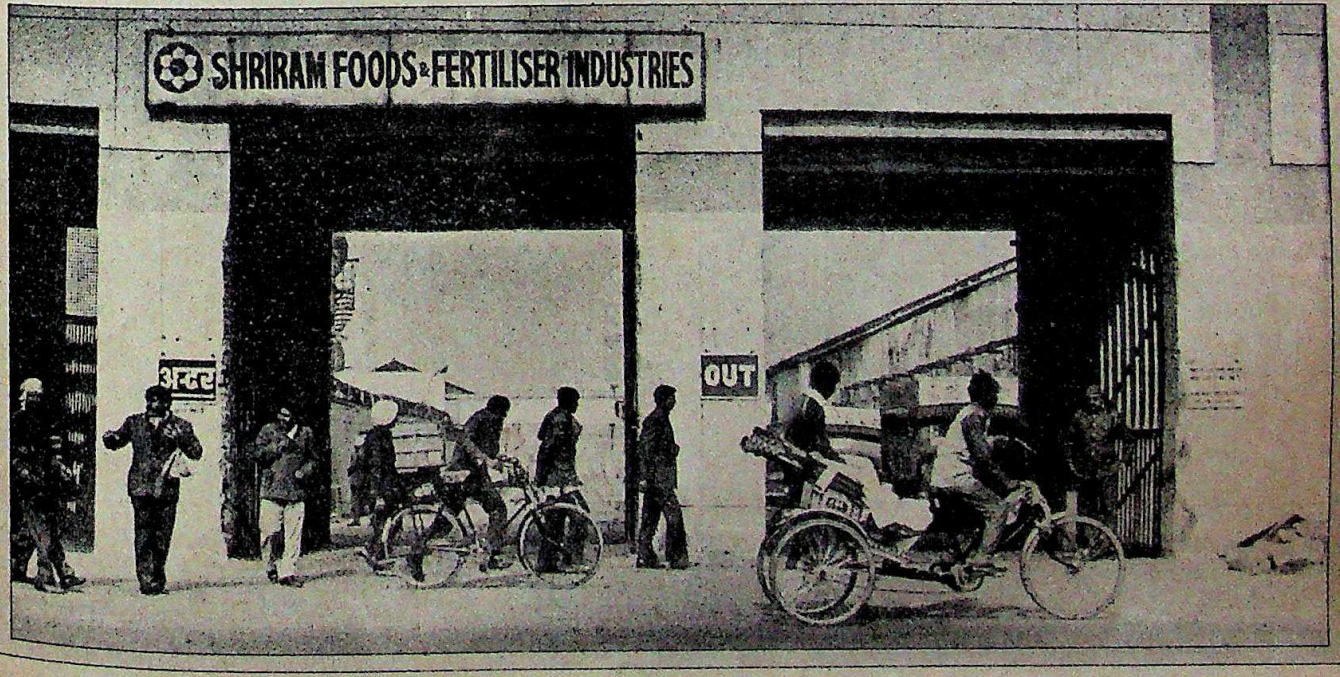
Photographs by RANJAN BASU



Of more immediate concern is the closure of the SFF factory. That means a revenue loss of Rs 50 lakh a day, plus wages for the 1,700-odd workers who are marking time, though the management may not foot the wage bill indefinitely. Last fortnight, the Delhi Administration seemed bent on closing and relocating the chlorine and sulphuric acid plants at the factory. SFF produces a range of chemicals and vanaspati, and its Rs 180-crore sales contributed almost a third of DCM's Rs 529-crore sales turnover last year. DCM itself made lower profits on an increased turnover last year, and anything that affects the company's lucrative factory in the capital will obviously be reflected in coming balance sheets.

Moreover, downing the shutters of the two units would disrupt the

The management is willing to relocate the plants, but the bill for this will run to a hefty Rs 30 crore to Rs 55 crore. The company also stresses the point that when the present factory was set up 40 years ago, the site was almost in the boondocks.



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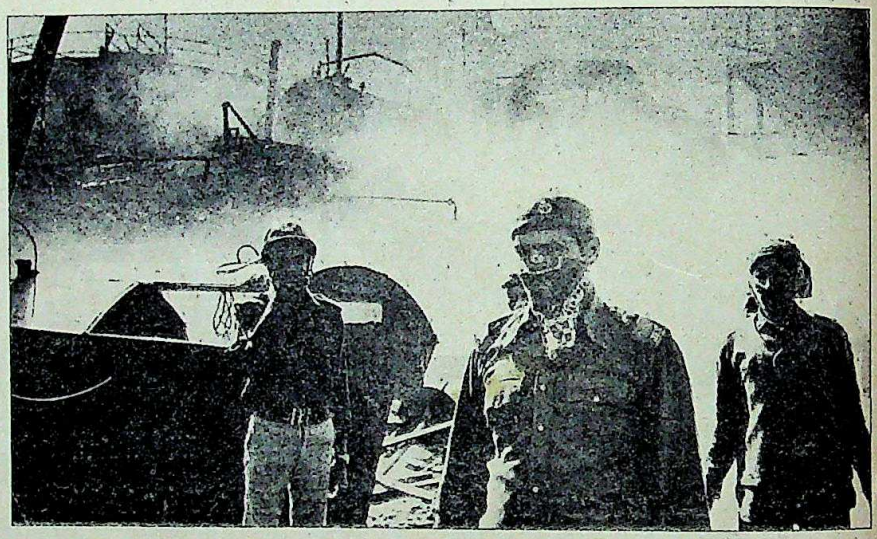
linkages in an integrated factory. Sulphuric acid is required for the manufacture of superphosphates, hydrogen for vanaspati and chlorine for stable bleaching powder. Claims Siddharth Shriram: "We are the largest stable bleaching powder manufacturer in the world. We have contracts with buyers abroad and they are screaming. We may lose this business." The factory also feeds Delhi with over 60 per cent and the country with 10 per cent of their vanaspati requirements. The market is now flooded with vanaspati, but if the factory continues to be closed for long, that could change—and buyers may switch to other brands.

Certainly, the factory's closure has had many more immediate downstream fall-outs. With supplies of oleum and chlorine cut off, the neighbouring HIL has gone the Shriram Foods way. Trucking in raw materials is more hazardous and expensive. So the DDT plant is lying idle, as are its 769 workers, and the insecticides company is losing over Rs 3 lakh a day. Warns General Manager B.N. Chatterjee: "The Delhi unit is one of the more profitable units of Hindustan Insecticides. If it is closed, HIL may suffer great losses."

The administration could serve notice on it to move to a less congested area, but the management is keeping its fingers crossed. Last year, it shelled out almost Rs 40 lakh to revamp the plant in the wake of Bhopal. That money may now go down the drain. What company officials are hoping is that the unit will be allowed to stay put if it switches to less toxic raw materials.

ALL THAT is well enough, but what was becoming increasingly clear last fortnight was that the Shriram factory management cannot escape responsibility for its present woes. Oleum is stored at the factory in three tanks: a 10-tonne process tank, a 58-tonne storage tank and another 10-tonne delivery tank. The management has various theories on what happened that fateful day, though it has not been able to test these since the accident site has been cordoned off by the Administration. But according to one top management surmise, the accident stemmed from a pin-hole leak that developed in the process tank on the morning of the accident. The staff was ordered to empty the contents of the process tank into the storage tank, which was already full. So the oleum had first to be emptied into the delivery tank, and instructions to this effect were given.

However, the staff started emptying the process tank's contents into the storage tank, which therefore began overflowing. This continued for a full 15 minutes. And it is here that the unfolding of events turns foggy. A magnetic level recorder is supposed to provide some sort of warning of an overflow, but whether this occurred and was heeded or not is not clear. In any event, the overfilling may have put excess weight on the steel structure that supports the tank. The structure collapsed, though this could also have been due to earlier corrosion (oleum is a combine of sulphuric acid and sulphur trioxide).



Oleum leak at the factory

A committee set up by the administration is expected to provide clearer answers to what went wrong, but the accident seems to have been avoidable. The structure was last inspected in February last year, and the management could perhaps have checked more frequently on whether the supporting structure was corroding. What is evident is that the management did not expect an accident at the oleum plant. Shriram admits as much.

The issue that is now up front is the safety of the plants. Environmentalist N.C. Mehta and Dharam Singh Kaushik, general secretary of the Indian National Trade Union Congress-affiliated DCM Chemical Employees Lokhit Congress Union, have gone to the Supreme Court on precisely this matter. Paradoxically enough, a committee set up by the court gave the company a clean chit, although Mehta very vociferously condemned the factory's safety measures. But Shriram insists "our attitude to safety has been very positive".

The Delhi administration has now veered around to the view that though the chlorine and sulphuric acid operations will have to move because they pose a hazard to the surrounding community, the vanaspati unit can continue — if it substitutes an electrolysis process to manufacture hydrogen for the chlorine process now used. In fact, some in the company had favoured moving out the chlorine unit because it was too near the capital, but this was disfavoured by others who maintained that investing substantial funds to relocate and create the same production capacity made no economic sense.

The management now seems to have bowed to the inevitable. It has publicly stated that it is willing to relocate these plants (though not the profitable vanaspati unit), even though they have been written off. But the bill for this will run to a hefty Rs 30 crore to Rs 55 crore. Who will fork out the cash? DCM officials have repeatedly stressed the point that when the present factory was set up around 40 years ago, the site was almost in the boondocks. What happens if 10 years after shifting, the management is asked to relocate again because residences and offices have sprung up around it? Such questions are relevant, and there are no ready answers to them. But in the tangled talks that were on, what was becoming increasingly clear was that labour does not want the factory to shift because over 800 workers may lose jobs, while the Delhi Administration does. The final solution may come from the Supreme Court, but which way the court would jump was anybody's guess.

—VIDHU OHRI

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BLADE INDUSTRY

Sharp Conflict

COURTROOM wrangles, cut-throat fights for markets and sharp practices: the blade industry has seen them all. So the newest entrant to the controversy-rocked industry is leaving nothing to chance. It has mounted an unprecedented security drive that would do a firm of bullion dealers proud. Imported machinery was guarded round the clock when it landed at Bombay and hauled away to the plant site in Rajasthan by three convoys of heavily guarded trucks. The company hired an investigative agency to vet the backgrounds of job applicants at all levels—the chief executive officer personally interviewed candidates for shop-floor jobs—and kept a fake marketing plan within easy reach of most at its New Delhi office (the real 150-page document was tucked away in a safe).

These are an astonishing set of precautions, but not the only ones by far. The firm booked newspaper advertisements for its public share issue in the name of its advertising agency, handing in the ad copy to the newspapers minutes before the deadline. "I've been thinking of sweeping the office for hidden electronic devices," adds Michael Braybrook, chief executive officer of Indian Shaving Products (ISP).

ISP is the joint venture set up by the Calcutta-based Poddars and Gillette of the United States. The company is gearing up to launch stainless steel razor blades in the Indian market this March under the 7 'O Clock label in conjunction with an Indian name. That has already triggered off a storm in the industry, and company Chairman Saroj Kumar Poddar says :"It's not a normal business situation. We are assuming the worst."

They certainly are. For even before ISP's blades hit the market, the fur has been flying in and out of court. ISP crossed swords last fortnight with some 25 individuals before the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Commission on an unfair trade practice charge. The case is still pending, but it climaxes a series of earlier legal battles that ISP and Gillette have been furiously fighting. Gillette put blade industry heavyweight Harbans Lal Malhotra (HLM) in the dock on patent infringement charges in the Delhi High Court (the case has been resolved) after the latter applied for a compulsory licence to manufacture the US firm's products. Gillette also faces a challenge from the Bombay-based Everkeen Blade Company which has applied to the registrar of trade marks to strike off the Gillette brand name from the register, arguing that it has not been used in the country for 20 years. ISP staved off another challenge from a small Wiltech India shareholder on its brand name (the shareholder has since appealed to the Supreme Court) and faces a similar legal joust this month with a consumer society in the capital.

Braybrook and Poddar: on guard

The joint venture set up by Poddars and Gillette of the United States is gearing up to launch stainless steel razor blades in the market and this has triggered off a storm in the industry.

ISP and Gillette officials see in all this an orchestrated pattern. The Government took over five years to sanction their project, and a Gillette official blamed the Malhotra's for the delay.

With a market share of over 70 per cent, the Malhotras have reigned supreme for years, and now rank as the second largest blade manufacturer in the world (HLM produces some 1,600 million blades a year). Rivals like Wiltech India—a joint sector firm promoted by Britain's Wilkinson Sword and an R.P. Goenka company—have so far not been able to cut substantially into HLM's market share. But the Poddar-Gillette venture could be another matter altogether. Gillette is *numero uno* in the world and the 7 'O Clock label is well known in the subcontinent.

HLM officials, however, tell it differently. As they see it, HLM had made a small headway in foreign markets by exporting blades to some 55 nations. Says a company spokesman: "This was not to Gillette's taste. So Gillette wanted to gain entry into the Indian market." The Malhotra's have also hotly contested in legal proceedings the charge of having infringed Gillette's patents, and say that the Poddars and Gillette have only themselves to blame for project delays. The US firm had sought a financial stake in proposed Indian joint ventures in the late '60s when the Government disfavoured this. Moreover, ISP sought to import second hand machinery, and so the Government had stalled its import. ISP's desire to use a foreign brand name complicated matters further. The finance ministry has not cleared ISP's brand name and Gillette has therefore not shelled out its 24 per cent contribution to the Rs 5-crore project. Finally, it is argued, the suggestion that HLM is wary of competition does not hold water—the Malhotra's did not stand in the way of a Karnataka Government undertaking joining hands with Wilkinson, with which they had an agreement.

It is true that the Government turned down ISP's foreign collaboration application on numerous grounds, including the foreign brand one. But there is some evidence that a hybrid brand name has received full official sanction. Also, the ISP share prospectus clearly states that Gillette has sunk money in the venture. Some of the other arguments may not stand up to scrutiny either. In any event, Saroj Poddar is quick to rebut the second hand machinery charge. Says Poddar: "Only some of the castings are old. Before the machinery was shipped we had to produce a certificate that it was not second hand. Indeed, the Indian customs said that the castings were new."

What emerges from this point counterpoint is that the battling could turn cut-throat in the months ahead, even though Gillette's patent rights are due to expire in a few months. It remains to be seen which of the two protagonists in the latest blade brouhaha has the final edge.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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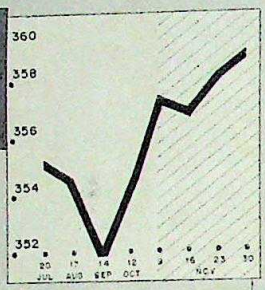
THINGS are quiet on the price front. Though wholesale prices rose marginally, the consumer price index continued to drop. A rise in money supply—largely due to procurement credit—was balanced by a 4 percentage point fall in commercial bank credit. The foreign trade situation is alarming with imports growing and exports plummeting. Share price growth has steadied and gold prices have dropped.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data to which regressions are fitted.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
1.27%p.a.

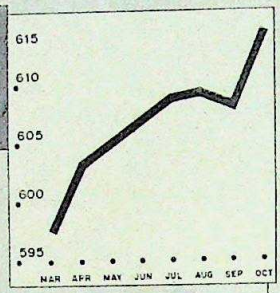


Wholesale prices, after having fallen to a zero rate of growth, increased marginally between August and November.

Consumer Price Index

1960 = 100

Current Trend
2.85%p.a.

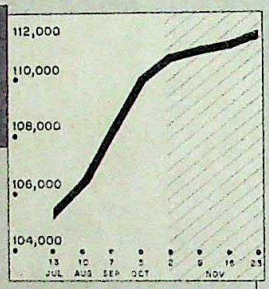


Consumer price growth fell from 4.3% in August to 2.9% in October. But the 1% growth between September and October was above the trend.

Money Supply (M3)

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.37%p.a.

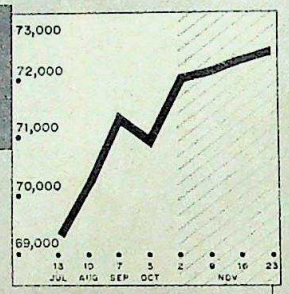


Money supply has been rising steadily—from 16.2% in October to over 17% now, largely due to the growth in RBI credit to the Government.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
13.06%p.a.

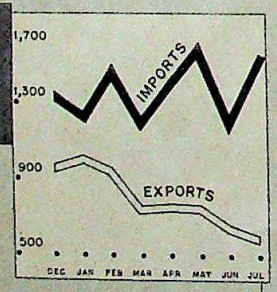


In contrast to M3, bank credit has been severely tightened, its growth rate having fallen by more than 4% between September and November.

Foreign Trade

Rs Crore

Current Trend
12.7%p.a.
IMPORTS
7.61%p.m.
EXPORTS

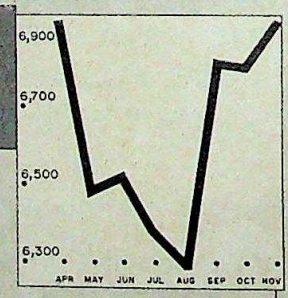


While imports rise at almost 13% a year, exports have been dropping alarmingly at 7.6% per month. The July trade gap was Rs 953 crore.

Foreign Exchange Reserves

Rs Crores

Current Trend
19.1%p.a.

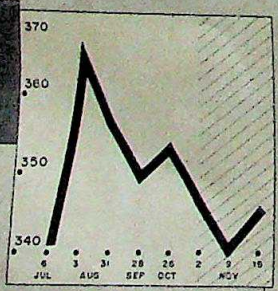


The rise in foreign exchange reserves is due to capital flows. With the trade gap increasing, capital flows alone cannot help.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
28.79%p.a.

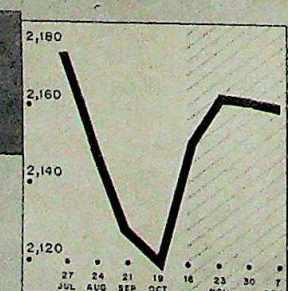


By mid-November, the massive bullishness subsided and prices rose by 0.55% a week—an expected growth rate in a buoyant market.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 100 gms.

Current Trend
-1.2%p.a.



In spite of the festival season, gold prices have continued to drop. Between end-July and early December prices fell by 0.6%.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Items with maximum growth in November 1985

	%Growth
Diary Products	15.41
Sugarcane	15.24
Tapioca	13.05
Mustard Oilcake	9.73
Wheat	8.39
Bananas	7.9
Tea	7.08
Onions	6.68
Vanaspati	6.22
Groundnut Oil	6.0
Solvent Extracted Oil	5.88
Cashewnuts	5.62
Art Silk and Artificial Yarn	5.45
Ground Oilcake	5.31
Eggs	5.13
Atta	5.0
Barley	4.34
Groundnut Seeds	3.98
Urad	3.82
Betel Nuts	3.31
Gingelly Seed	3.26
Gingelly Oil	2.46
Cars	2.41
Mustard Oil	2.08
Khandsari	1.96
Logs Timber Bamboo	1.42
Meat	1.42
Ghee	1.36
Gur	1.34
Turmeric	1.25
Coal	1.11
Synthetic Fibres	1.1
Rubber	1.08
Cycles	1.07
Polythene Moulding Powder	1.05
Rape and Mustard Seed	1.05
Board	1.02
Machine Tools	0.96
Milk	0.90
Cigarettes	0.89
Silk and Artificial Silk Fabrics	0.84
Furnace Oil	0.84
Jute Textiles	0.82
SKELP	0.82
PVC Compounds	0.79
Soda Ash	0.79
Steel Structurals	0.76
Sugar	0.76
Limestone	0.76
Diesel Oil	0.74

Of the 139 series considered, 88 of them with a total weight of 66.465 had a positive growth & 50 of them with a total weight off 19.82 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1985	1984
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, November	130.6	122.0
Saleable Steel		
Thousand tonnes, November	665.9	586.0
Cement		
Thousand tonnes, November	2624	2573
Crude Petroleum		
Thousand tonnes, November	2487	2343
Call Money Rate		
Percent, November	10.0	10.0

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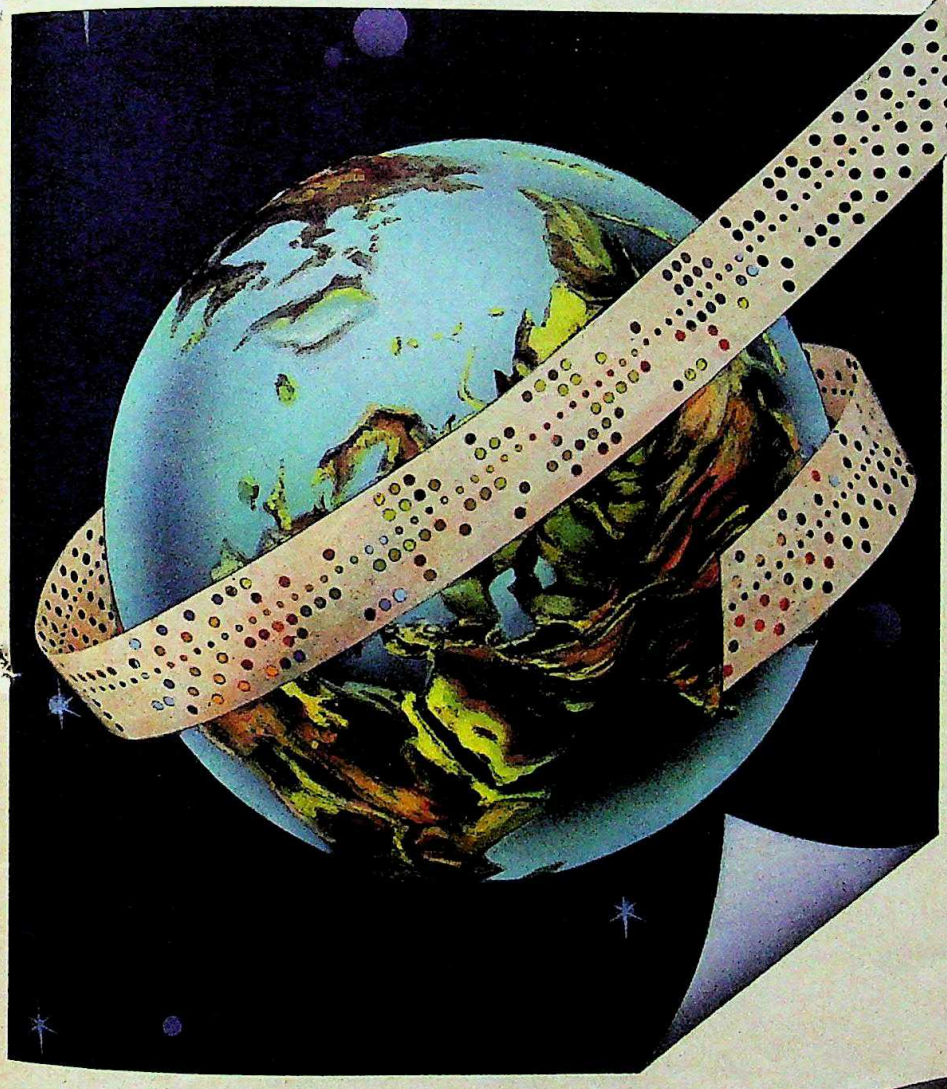

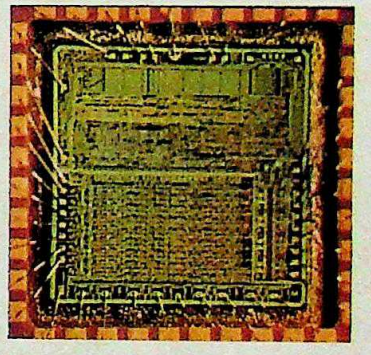

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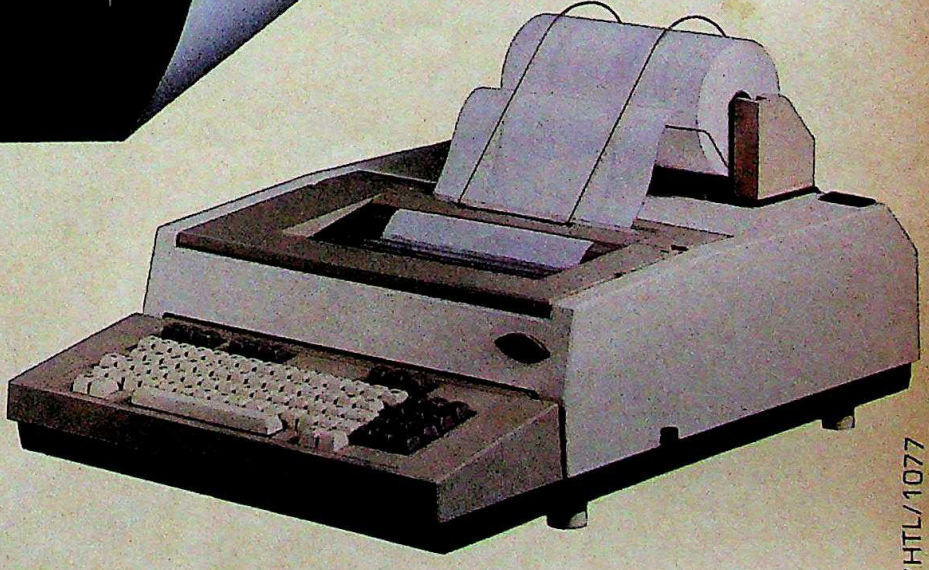

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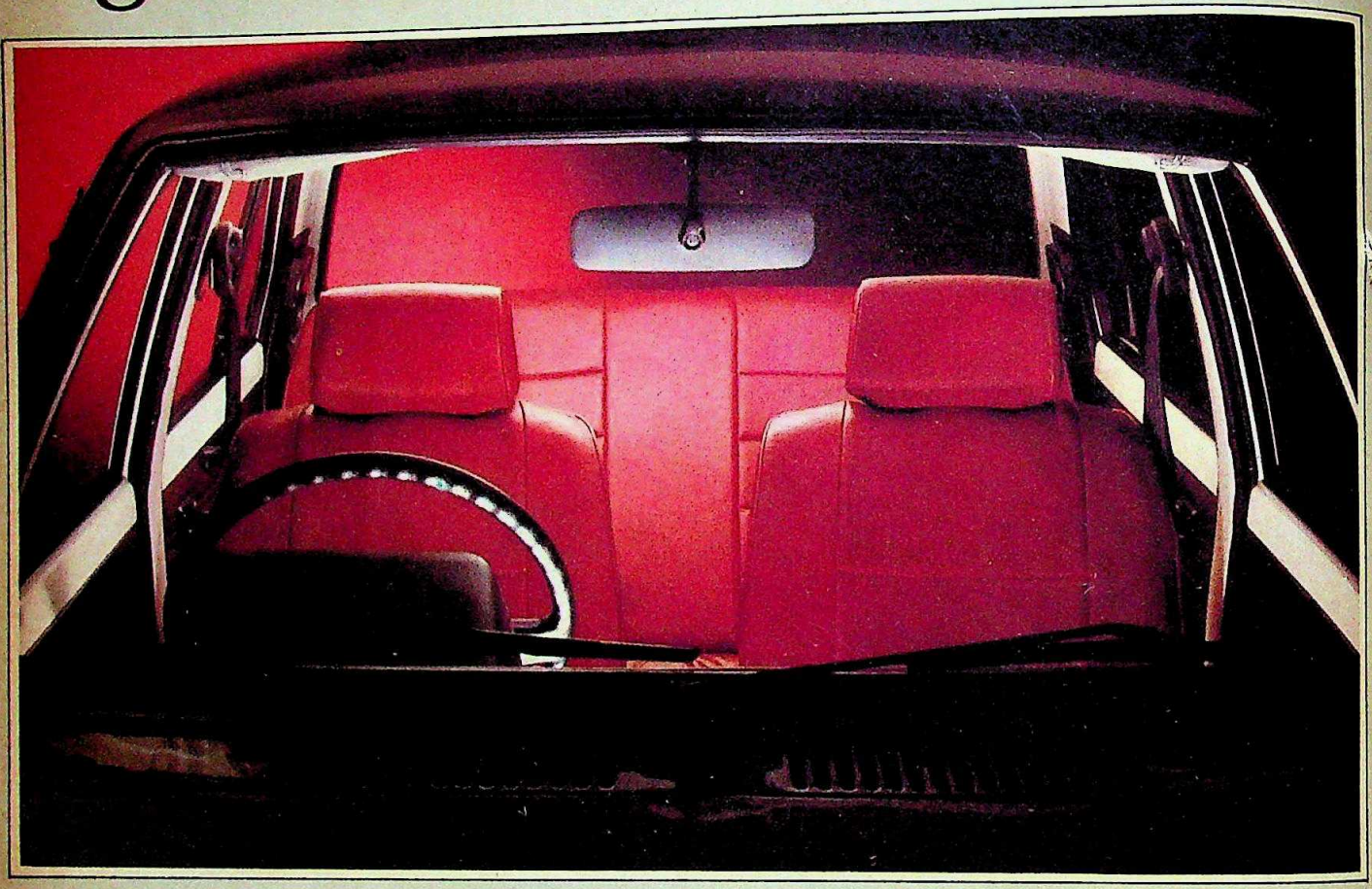

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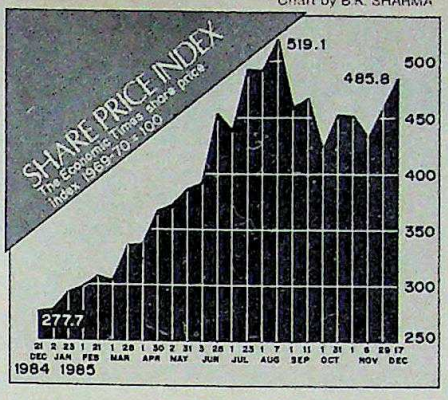
THE MARKETS

Spirits Soar

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



THERE hasn't been a year like 1985 for the stock-markets. In some cases, share prices rose more during this last one year than they did during the whole of the previous decade, and *The Economic Times* share index shot up from 277.7 at the end of last year to 487.6 last fortnight. New capital issues met with unrestrained success as the number of investors soared. Even dud shares seemed on occasion to take on the hue of a blue chip. And it was clear that investments in corporate capital during 1985 had been more rewarding than in real estate, and gold or silver: once again an unprecedented development.

There is little doubt that this boom was fuelled by the advent of Rajiv Gandhi and his new policies. Though the market had initially received the new government without great ado, the Union budget changed all that and market optimism suddenly shot up. This was despite the fact that the capital gains tax still applied to share transactions, and there were no tax concessions that applied specifically to the investing community. These factors were overlooked in the general optimism.

The budget was followed by a series of other decisions that buoyed the market further: the concessions to the cotton textile industry, the reduced taxes on polyester, customs duty concessions for automobiles, a fresh push for the electronics industry, the raising of administered prices for steel and cement and the reduction of the levy quota for both the cement and sugar industries.The delicensing of some areas of pharmaceuticals, the broadbanding of industrial licences in more and yet more areas and the raising of the qualifying floor for the MRTP Act from Rs 20 crore in assets to Rs 100 crore have also contributed to the boom in the market. So if the stock-market hasn't been through a year like this one, neither has the economy seen such bursts of activity when the Government came out with one favourable announcement after another.

The only damper was provided by the efforts of the market authorities and financial institutions in August and September to try and rein in the runaway optimism. But soon both gave up this attempt and quickly shifted to trying to cheer up the market and lend a hand to the bulls. The financial institutions, initially sellers, turned buyers, and the market authorities relaxed the trading margins and shifted scrips from the cash trading list to the forward trading list after initially taking some steps in the reverse direction. There was some nervousness over the contents of the long-term fiscal policy, the raids on leading companies and the arrests of well-known businessmen. But for all that, 1985 will go down in the books as the year of the stock-market.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1985 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 17.12.86	Change on Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	59.00	29.00	40.50	1.50 –
Associated Cement	610.00	385.00	401.00	3.00 –
Atlas Copco	70.00	37.00	64.50	6.50 +
Associated Bearings	785.00	425.00	777.50	102.50 +
Bajaj Auto	2075.00	855.00	1870.00	50.00 +
Baroda Rayon	492.50	281.00	420.00	20.00 –
Bata India	88.10	48.00	70.00	4.50 +
Bayer	480.00	305.00	440.00	75.00 +
Bharat Forge	95.00	35.50	77.00	8.00 –
Birla Jute	104.50	51.70	96.50	0.25 +
Blow Plast	122.00	36.50	110.00	2.00 +
Blue Star	89.00	33.00	88.00	3.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	156.00	66.00	84.00	3.00 –
Brooke Bond	83.00	47.50	61.50	0.50 +
Ceat Tyres	290.00	180.00	245.00	5.00 –
Century Spinning	1530.00	810.00	1465.00	70.00 +
Chloride India	91.00	56.90	84.25	5.25 +
Citurgia	85.00	32.25	54.00	6.00 +
Colgate	318.00	147.00	170.00	nil
Cyanamid	90.00	33.00	68.00	2.00 –
DCM	74.00	18.00	50.00	7.50 –
Dunlop	48.75	22.30	43.00	nil
Elecon Engg.	108.00	54.00	82.00	2.00 –
Escorts	102.00	49.87	80.00	5.50 –
Food Specialities	215.00	86.00	182.50	7.50 +
Garware Nylon	63.00	24.50	59.00	3.00 +
Glaxo	79.00	24.00	64.00	4.00 +
G.E. Shipping	36.50	14.25	25.00	1.75 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	857.50	537.00	855.00	22.50 +
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	53.75	85.00	10.00 +
Hindustan Lever	125.00	51.25	117.00	7.00 +
Hindustan Motors	123.25	37.50	121.00	9.25 +
Indian Dyestuff	390.00	267.50	330.00	2.50 +
Indian Explosives	73.50	33.00	70.25	4.00 +
Indian Hotels	135.00	76.00	115.00	7.00 +
Indian Organic	141.00	50.50	88.00	nil
Indian Rayon	141.00	66.00	133.50	0.50 +
Indrol	265.00	90.50	247.50	7.50 +
Ingersoll-Rand	365.00	162.00	330.00	5.00 +
ITC	65.50	29.00	47.00	1.00 +
J K Synthetics	118.00	52.75	105.50	6.50 +
Kinetic Engineering	380.00	128.00	260.00	10.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	780.00	502.50	650.00	27.50 –
Lakme	200.00	74.00	156.25	2.50 –
Larsen & Toubro	193.00	72.00	188.00	13.00 +
Lipton	58.50	26.50	42.00	1.00 +
Lohia Machines	85.00	42.00	64.00	4.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	102.00	48.00	73.00	1.00 +
Motor Industries	875.00	321.25	812.50	70.00 +
National Organic	590.00	240.00	585.00	95.00 +
Nirlon	73.00	37.75	63.00	1.00 +
Orkay Silk Mills	207.00	65.00	125.00	2.00 +
Peico Electronics	99.00	38.40	82.00	4.00 +
Premier Auto	645.00	322.00	557.50	10.00 +
Ranbaxy	127.50	49.00	104.00	10.00 +
Raymond	120.00	59.00	86.00	10.00 +
Reliance Industries	252.00	120.00	222.00	0.50 +
Sandoz	82.00	31.00	62.00	6.00 +
Shriram Fibres	81.00	34.00	68.50	2.00 –
SPIC	137.00	43.50	120.50	4.00 +
Tata Steel	1237.50	381.00	1195.00	21.25 +
Telco	1030.00	409.00	797.50	20.00 –
Vulcan Laval	125.00	64.00	83.75	nil
Zenith Steel	75.00	28.00	73.00	5.00 +
20th Century Leasing	84.00	31.50	60.00	0.50 +
Straw Products	68.00	47.00	56.00	5.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.3788	8.2917
Austria	Schilling	100	69.6063	68.8829
Bahrain	Dinar	1	31.4960	31.4732
Bangladesh	Taka	100	39.8971	39.7032
Canada	Dollar	1	8.7757	8.6982
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.3408	1.3288
Egypt	Pound	1	14.3092	14.2917
France	Franc	1	1.5923	1.5588
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5724	1.5595
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.0537	1.0232
Iran	Rial	100	13.8632	13.8010
Italy	Lira	100	0.7332	0.7130
Japan	Yen	100	6.1312	5.9772
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7200	0.7173
Kuwait	Dinar	1	39.9337	38.9910
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0574	5.0134
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8190	0.8123
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5729	0.5720
Netherlands	Guilder	1	4.3289	4.2919
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7517	0.7409
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.7984	5.7463
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0793	0.0707
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4390	0.4287
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.5932	1.5787
Switzerland	Franc	1	5.8032	5.7501
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7220	0.7001
Thailand	Baht	100	44.9532	42.9010
UK	Pound	1	17.4155	17.2965
USA	Dollar	1	12.2700	12.1500
UAE	Dirham	1	3.2110	3.1932
USSR	Rouble	1	14.9999	14.6332
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	4.9431	4.8239

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 20.12.85.

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LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Low Key Leadership

TUCKED AWAY in the dreary backstreets of Aldwych in central London—best known for its cluster of theatres, India House, BBC's Bush House and Lincoln's Inn—is a charmless pile of buildings which houses one of Britain's liveliest and most remarkable institutions: The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). In its 90 years, the LSE's glittering alumni and teachers have represented every nationality, political creed and background. The LSE's reputation is sometimes considered higher than even Oxford or Cambridge.

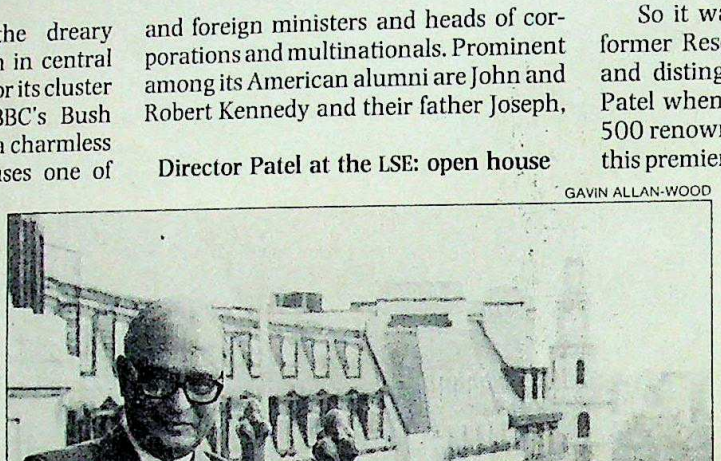
Its brilliant alumni spread world-wide include over 30 members each in the current House of Lords and House of Commons, countless finance ministers and foreign ministers and heads of corporations and multinationals. Prominent among its American alumni are John and Robert Kennedy and their father Joseph, Patrick Moynihan, David Rockefeller and those in India are V.K. Krishna Menon, B.K. Nehru, K.R. Narayanan and Jyoti Basu. The school's reputation for volatile student agitations kept pace with its acquisition of illustrious names to its staff.

So it was no mean achievement for former Reserve Bank of India governor and distinguished civil servant Dr I.G. Patel when he was chosen from among 500 renowned names a year ago to head this premier institution—by no means an enviable task. As the high-profile Ralf G. Dahrendorf, a political activist who retired as director in 1984, had once said with some mystification: "I shall forever love the LSE. I shall forever fail to understand the intricacies of its student politics."

In his one year as LSE Director, Patel has already brought about a change in style compared to his flamboyant predecessor. Low-key, diligent and persuasive, Patel's principal concerns have revolved around his students' problems such

Director Patel at the LSE: open house

GAVIN ALLAN-WOOD



I.G. PATEL

"I don't believe in extremes"

INDRAPRASAD Gordhanbai Patel, 61, is a warm, engaging individual with an easy, friendly smile. Born in Sunav, Gujarat, Patel studied Economics at Baroda College, University of Bombay and at Cambridge. It was while studying at Cambridge that he was first introduced to the LSE where he attended the lectures of many respected economists. He was an Adam Smith Prizeman and was rated as one of Cambridge's "most brilliant students". After spending 1947-48 at Harvard University Graduate School, he returned to Cambridge for his Ph.D. and came back to India in 1949. He soon joined the developing department of the IMF in Washington. Later he became a deputy economic advisor at the Ministry of Finance before taking over as alternative executive director for India on the IMF board. In the '60s he was chief economic advisor and a member of numerous committees both national and international. From 1977 to 1982, he was governor of the Reserve Bank of India and from 1982 to 1984, director of the Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad. In an interview to INDIA TODAY, Patel spoke about the problems facing LSE, his own style as its director, and the economic strategies of India and the developing world. Extracts:

Q. *How would you categorise the essential differences between Indian academic life and at the London School of Economics?*

A. I would refrain from making any comparisons with Indian universities since my own experience has been with the IIM at Ahmedabad. And it is a fine institution whose style of functioning is almost similar to the LSE. The most remarkable thing here is that it is a form of governing that is both participatory and decisive. Everyone is involved in the decision-making process. But at the end of the day, you have to make certain decisions yourself which may not always be popular.

Q. *The LSE always seems to have enjoyed a role in British society of a provocative outsider. And it has exercised some marginal influence. As a director, would you encourage the institution to take a participatory role in public policy?*

A. You don't really have to encourage. The interest always exists. For instance we have a centre for labour economics and researchers have been debating the problems of unemployment. We have a new research centre, Japanese-financed, to look into the welfare state. Of course, tomorrow I could always suggest—look here, we have got these serious problems concerning the inner cities: we have a department of social administration, a department of psychology, a department of economics, why don't we all sit together and look into it? This kind of thing is going on all the time. But mind you, all of these are group or individual endeavours and under no circumstances will they be considered completely from an " LSE stand-point".

Q. *Your problem area seems to be excessively high fees for overseas students. Out of 4,000 students, they constitute 43 per cent. Has there been a fall in admissions from India for instance?*

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as the prohibitive fees for foreign students, reorganising the school's finances to a more solid ground, maintaining the LSE's intellectual reputation and keeping up its international outlook when foreign students make up nearly 43 per cent of its student body. Matters haven't been easy for Patel, as he confessed in a wide-ranging interview with INDIA TODAY (*see box*) but he says he is a firm believer in the LSE's "sense of mission".

Patel's endeavour is to build an open and honest system and wants to be more "accessible" to his students. Describing himself as an "old fashioned socialist" who advocates "compassion rather than class war", Patel has maintained that the LSE's left-wing reputation is undeserved. While the student body is left of centre, the majority of its professors are apolitical or conservative—von Hayek, for instance, is considered to be Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's economic guru.

However, the students differ from him in many respects. Even as Patel insists that he would like to be more "open" and "accessible" to students, they complain that they hardly get to hear or see their new director. Indian students and members of LSE's India Society say they were initially "excited" about an Indian getting one of UK's most high-profile jobs. But to their increasing dismay they have found the new director far too "placid" and "low-key". For many, the director's status has reverted to that of a "nominal head". It is obvious that the students like to have a director who is charismatic, incisive and maybe even insurrectional—someone who can keep LSE in the forefront and speak out for more funds, and other grievances of the academic community.

SPEAKING to INDIA TODAY, several students repeatedly tended to compare Patel with his pugnacious and often provocative predecessor. "It is such a total contrast between the two personalities," remarks one. "Perhaps it suits the Tory-dominated Court of Governors to have someone so non-controversial and low-key," says another.

The students are agreed on one thing though: that Patel's credentials for the job are "impeccable". But this still doesn't help his low-key image. As one Indian student sums it up rather resignedly: "We know that he is very learned. And that he is very humble. But as far as we are concerned, we wonder if all this humility is such a good thing."

However, Elwyn Watkins, general secretary of the LSE's student union, who has taken a year's sabbatical to concentrate on his union's chores, feels that Patel's influence is not to be underestimated and the student community may have judged the new director's potential without serious thought. "It is a lot like the Queen's influence in this country," he says. Watkins emphasises that a placid and respectful director like Patel could even influence the school's academic policy. Watkins adds musingly: "Perhaps in five years' time, he may leave his mark."

Watkins is not wrong in his assessment. Holding one of the top jobs in international academia, Patel is one of the most sought-after personalities in Britain. Not surprising, considering that he is presiding over the fortunes of an institution once described as the "sacred college of social democracy" or the "breeding ground of hot-house socialism". Many academics, some of them non-LSE, think "I.G" with his vast experience as an international economic diplomat, is doing a "great job". His predecessor Dahrendorf was once described as the most influential German in Britain since Prince Albert. By the same token, Patel is one of the most influential Indians in the United Kingdom.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

A. Well, yes, this indeed is a major problem. What we are trying to do is to help with more scholarships. As for the Indian students, I think there may be about 35-odd students but some of them may be British citizens or of Indian origin. Talented students do need more support.

Q. *As someone who has been involved with India's financial policies for many years, how do you view all the catch-phrases of the Rajiv Gandhi Government...liberalisation of controls, less state intervention, greater role for the private sector, more modern technology...?*

A. Let me say that I have felt for some time that a change in this direction is absolutely necessary. Having said that, let me also state that I am not a believer in extremes—either controls or no controls whatsoever. So when you are progressing towards a freer system, you have to tread carefully. My first priority would be to remove as much of industrial licensing as possible. That is not intended except to give each Indian industrialist a turf of his own. It is a kind of internal protection of one against the other which has absolutely no justification. So I would be much stronger in the removal of industrial licences and all this talk of concentration has no great meaning.

"When progressing towards a freer system, my first priority would be to remove as much of industrial licensing as possible."

Q. *How about import licensing?*

A. I won't be all that open on import licensing. For instance one should be still careful in the import of luxury items and non-essential imports. But where you want competition you should certainly do so. Indian industry has been protected long enough and greater competition will only do it good. But in the name of that, import of luxury goods for the consumption of a few rich people should not be admitted. And in fact production of these items should not be encouraged even at home. But all right, if you have already done so, then the rich can exploit the rich and I am not worried about that. There is a tendency to do one thing instead of another.

Q. *How about international capital investment?*

A. I have nothing very much against direct investment. But I don't think very much is going to come of it. But on technological agreements, exchange of technology and purchase of technology, we should certainly not advocate loosening of our financial discipline.

Q. *Is government intervention still much of a bugbear?*

A. It still is. But you should realise there is a lot of intervention at the state level. We always talk of what the Central Government does. There is not enough analysis of the problems at the state level.

Q. *Are you saying that there is not much planning at the state level?*

A. There is no planning at the state level. I am for more planning at the state level. You can't have decentralised planning in India because there is no machinery for it. It has become so much a matter for political expediency.

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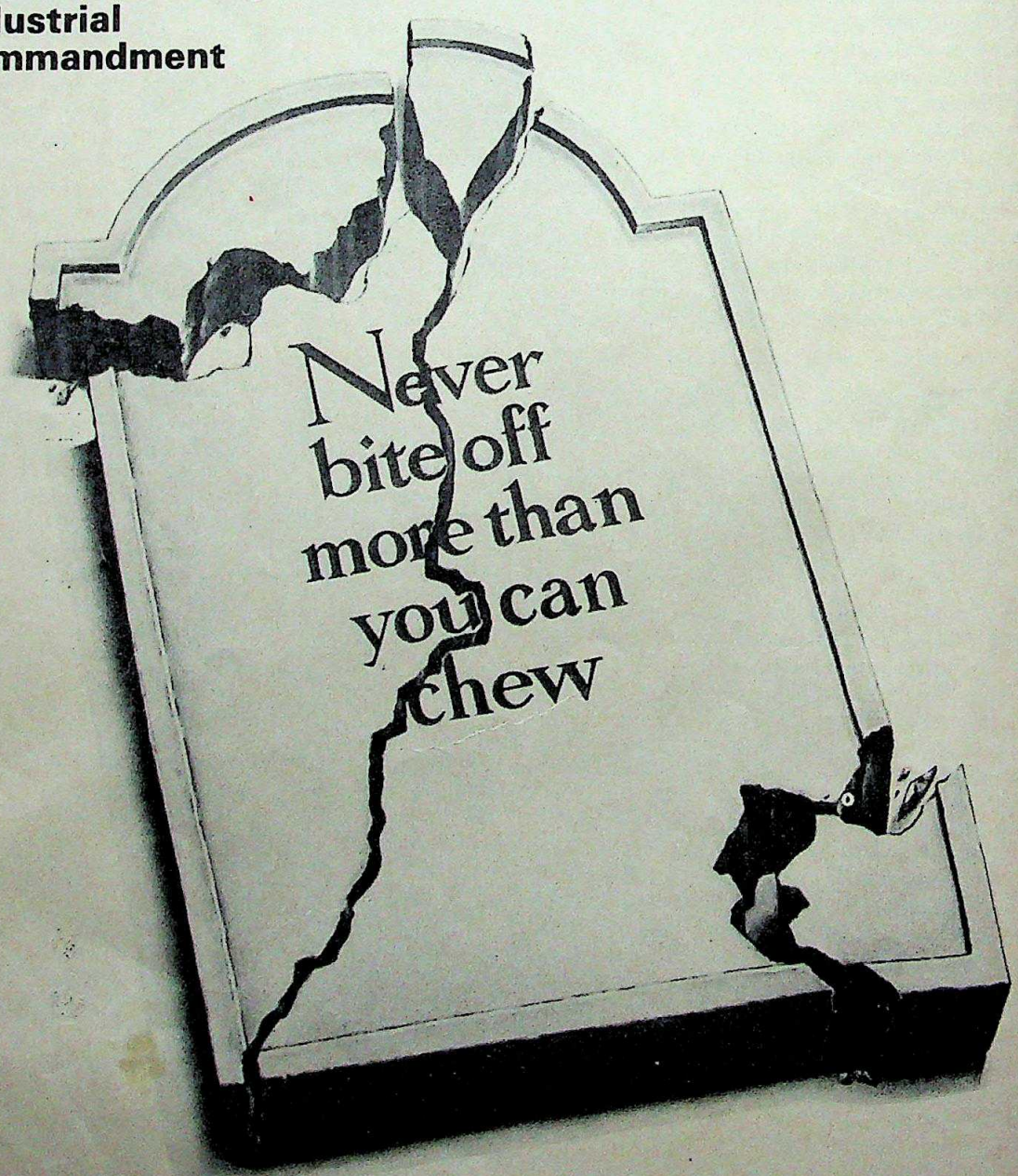
KEC breaks a major industrial commandment



Pratibha-83-73

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Strange as it may sound, our success at KEC and the total confidence of our customers derive in some measure from the fact that we dare to take on challenges when everybody else opts out. And we deliver, no matter what the problems.

Take the case of the no-break genset for the Rajasthan Atomic Power Plant, to cite just one example.

In the first phase of the Rajasthan Atomic Power Plant, Canadian General Electric supplied 300 kVA no-break gensets in 1965.

For the second phase, the Department of Atomic Energy, or DAE for short, decided to launch a major indigenization programme. When they floated tenders for the critical no-break gensets, not a single Indian manufacturer of electrical equipment responded. The uniform feeling was that nobody, but nobody in India could make them.

It was at this point that the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, recommended KEC for the job. DAE got in touch with us at KEC and asked our Chief Design Engineer to meet their consultants, Montreal Engineering Company, and talk things over. The consultants were understandably sceptical about our capabilities. The only condition on which they were willing to start a dialogue with us was to escalate the stringency of the specs.

The specs for the 400 kVA no-break genset required that the equipment should be highly reliable and suitable for continuous operation on a 24 hours per day basis. The genset could be shut down only on a planned basis once in 4 months. The loads connected to the high reliability Class II bus fed by these MG sets were very critical in their input requirements and so it was necessary to hold the steady state voltage and frequency variation within 1 percent of the set values. The transient specifications permitted were also extremely severe since a water pump driven by a very large induction motor had to be started without significant disturbance to the other connected loads.

The deal was on. We quoted and DAE gave us the go-ahead. We worked hand in hand with DAE. Their experience and constructive suggestions were invaluable. We pulled out all the stops and worked round the clock. The problems were many. Often we wanted to throw up our hands in despair. For instance, when one of our prestigious British associates on other projects took a look at the severity of the tolerances of the genset, they recommended that we should use a frame size suitable for a generator 5 or 6 times the capacity of the 400 kVA no-break genset. We decided to use our own brains and experience. We designed a 600 kVA frame for the application.

We supplied the first set in 1975. All checks were carried out to DAE's total satisfaction. On D-day, DAE pushed the button. And did our no-break genset live happily ever after? Sorry, this is not a fairy story, it's for real. When the set started rotating, the control system tripped. The set came to a halt. The redeeming feature was that the protection system had worked after all.

Within three months, with DAE's help, we re-designed the entire control panel. This time around when the button was pushed, the set went beautifully into action. It's still going great guns. Of course, there were minor teething problems. As a matter of fact we still continue to make improvements with DAE's active co-operation.

DAE have placed an order for 4 no-break gensets for the Madras Atomic Power Plant. In 1980, we won the order for four 325 kVA sets and 8 55 kVA control power supply sets for the Narora Atomic Power Plant in the teeth of stiff German competition. And, in 1979, DAE asked us to supply them two sets of 150 kVA for one of their research projects. To date, no other Indian manufacturer has entered the field.

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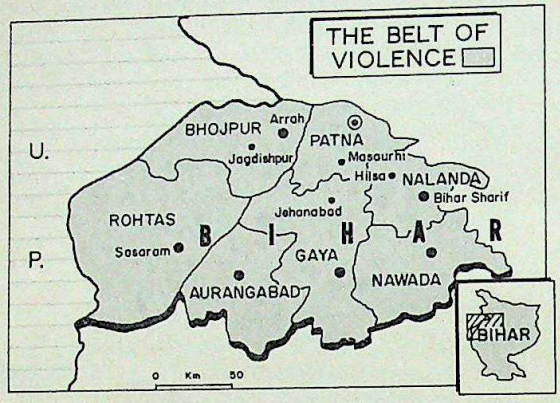
BIHAR

Armies of the Night

YOU'RE in the land of Gautam Buddha. Follow his preachings," reads the innocuous legend hanging from a palm-tree in Masaurhi bazar in Patna district. Nothing, however, could be more mocking and ironical than this noble little exhortation. Masaurhi, 65 km from Bodh Gaya where Buddha attained enlightenment, is the epicentre of the senseless violence that has once again rocked south-central Bihar, with the private armies of the powerful landlords ranged against the comparatively nascent organisations of the weak but retaliating serfs.



It is the same old vicious circle of offensive and reprisal. Retaliating to the excesses of the landlords' brutal private armies, the Harijans have organised their own militant groups and the two are now ranged in an endless running battle, with the state fast coming to resemble a bloody battlefield. Murder and cold-blooded killings have become everyday happenings while the connivance of the police with the powerful landlords has ceased to shock. As Ramprit, an old Harijan of Masaurhi, puts it: "Here, the life of the poor and the landless has become shorter than winter days."

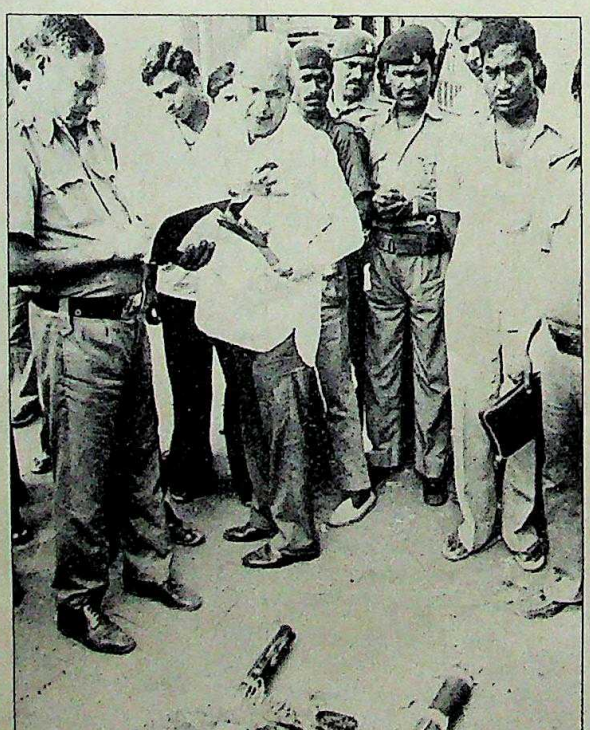
The confrontation is not a new one, but it has peaked to a fevered pitch. The red pins stabbing the map at the state police headquarters symbolise a land stained with the blood of mindless offensive and retaliation. The map of violence spans seven districts—Nalanda, Nawadah, Patna, Gaya, Bhojpur, Rohtas and Aurangabad. Not a month passes without murders and cold-blooded killings in the region and the toll keeps mounting. November and December, however, proved to be the bloodiest months yet with nearly 30 people being killed in this period, taking the toll in the landlord-labourer conflict in the seven districts to 300 since 1980.

The toll was exceptional even by Bihar's bloody standards and most of the victims, as usual, were innocent people. One such victim was Umesh Yadav, a 15-year-old landless labourer of Jaitipur village in Nalanda district. Umesh had gone to the waterfront one evening last month when a group of armed people, identified

Body of Bhoomi Sena victim in Deokuli village: mounting toll

"It is terrible to recall what happened to my son. I could not even perform his last rites."

BADHIKA DEVI
Jaitipur village, Nalanda district



Photographs by K.M. KISHAN

"My husband was a farm labourer and did not belong to any group. They came shouting and just shot him."

PIPARIYA
Brari village, Nalanda district

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as the "red squad" of the Naxalites, ambushed Baiju Yadav, reported to be the "local commander" of the Yadavas' Lorik Sena. When he ran shouting for help, many of the Yadav farmers nearby came out with guns and rifles. Baiju was saved but in the fracas, Umesh and Satyendra Pandey, a 20-year-old poor Brahmin, were killed. Says Umesh's foster mother Radhika Devi: "It is terrible to recall what happened to my son. I could not even perform his last rites."

Soon enough the Lorik Sena struck back, with the police lending more than active help. The Yadavas led by Baiju and reinforced by a posse of policemen from Ekangersarai raided Brari village hunting for the "red squad extremists". The two who fell victim to their wrath, however, were not extremists but merely innocent villagers, Ram Swaroop Ram, a Harijan, and Kailash, a landless carpenter.

THE LORIK Sena may have been looking for some particular extremists but the way they went about hunting for them showed that they were on a senseless killing spree. Says Ram Swaroop's wife Pipariya: "My husband was a farm labourer and did not belong to any group. They came shouting, dragged him out and just shot him. One reason why he was killed could be that he was once fishing in a pond to which the Yadavas objected."

From all accounts the killings had been planned in advance. Right after this incident, the raiders crossed the river to Piroghamath village in Jehanabad subdivision of Gaya district and killed two more, one of them a poor barber. As is usual in such incidents, Ram's body was found only a few days later and that too at some distance from the village. There is still no trace of the Kailash's body and the villagers suspect that the killers hacked it to pieces and threw it into the river.

As always, the Yadavas denied their involvement and blamed the killings on the "red squad" of the Naxalites. Said Jaitipur's former mukhiya Nasibi Prasad, a Yadav: "There is no such thing as the Lorik Sena and no Yadav from this village had gone to Brari to avenge the murders. In fact, we hardly step out of our village after sunset. We have even stopped going to our fields in the evenings."

The Yadavas may deny their involvement in the attack but the involvement of the police is beyond doubt. In fact, when the Jehanabad Sub-Divisional Officer Vyasji rushed to Piroghamath village under Ghoshi police station, he learnt that the Ekangersarai (Nalanda) police station in-charge, along with some Bihar Military Police (BMP) jawans, had been seen in the mob. On investigation, Zonal Inspector-General of Police D.N. Sahay found this to be correct and the officer-in-charge was suspended along with a BMP assistant sub-inspector.

If the Ekangersarai police killed villagers at the instance of the Yadavas in Nalanda, the Bhojpur police did one better. They did it on their own and added another angle to the caste affair. On November 14, a police party raided Kunai village under Jagdishpur police station and killed two Harijans, Totaman and Gobardhan Ram, in "encounters". Not only this, they "recovered" six rifles, including a military one, and one Sten gun, besides 340 rounds of ammunition.

The police claimed that both the Harijans had been hardcore extremists belonging to the Vinod Mishra faction of the CPI(M-L) and wanted in several cases. The police had a similar story about the Gangabigha incident too, where they claimed to have killed three "extremists" in encounters on November 21.

Villagers in both the villages, however, disputed these claims, saying they had heard only two or three shots and not a whole volley of them as would have been the case had these been encounters. Not only this, they said that the police went on a rampage after the killings, looting and plundering their houses on the pretext of looking for "extremists".

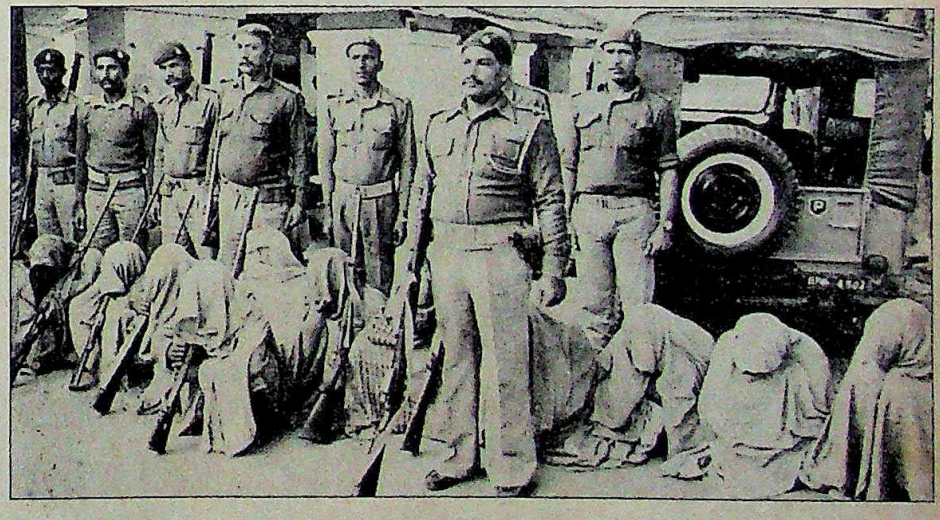
The police sustain their argument about the extremists by citing the latest incident of violence in the area. According to them, a group of extremists attacked a police patrol on December 16 in Sakla village of Rohtas district killing one BMP havildar and injuring three jawans. The extremists also snatched away five BMP rifles, the police said.

Whatever the truth behind these conflicting versions, the fact remains that the central part of the state, south of the Ganga, has become a bloody battleground for the landowners and the landless. The landlords have their own private armies (INDIA TODAY, March 15, 1984) made up of mercenaries and usually operating on a caste basis. In retaliation, many militant groups have sprung up to support the Harijans. These include the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS), the Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (MKSS), the Indian People's Front (IPF) and various militant factions of the CPI(M-L).

The upsurge in violence and the mushrooming of various militant *senas* are all part of a uniform pattern. When the Naxalite movement in the state lost most of its strength in the late 1970s, organisations championing the landless' causes sprang up as a natural corollary. Says IPF's Bihar unit chief Prithiviraj: "We are working in the villages where the BPKS and other Naxalite organisations are also active. Land and minimum wages are the main issues. We want everything to be settled in a peaceful way and this could be achieved only if the landlords took the initiative. But instead they are using guns." Adds Bihar Civil Liberties Convenor Kishoridas: "We are fighting for land reforms, minimum wages, restoration of dignity to the poor and protection of their women. Can we tolerate a situation in which their children, instead of being sent to schools, are being forced to work free on the landlords' farms?"

Bhoomi Sena men predictably deny any violent activities on their part. Girish Singh of Masaurhi, who is known as the "commander-in-chief" of the Sena, says:

"Red squad men" in police custody: bloody confrontations



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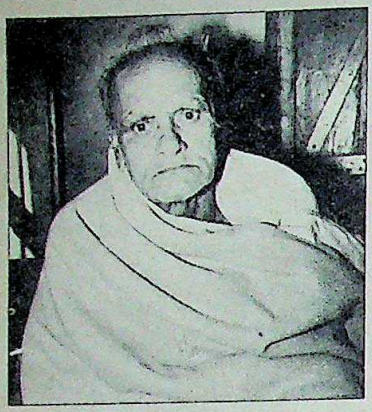


"We want everything to be settled in a peaceful way and this could be achieved only if the landlords took the initiative. Instead they are using guns."

PRITHVIRAJ
president, Bihar unit, IPF

justifies its actions. As Singh says: "The administration is ineffective and does nothing to protect the kisans. If we did not defend ourselves, we would all be killed one by one."

The Bhoomi Sena is not the only private army to operate in the region. The name that spells terror next to the Bhoomi Sena is the Lorik Sena of the Yadavas of the Nalanda and Jehanabad areas. Named after the legendary Yadava crusader, Lorik Chand, the Sena has ironically come to represent murder and bloodshed. IPF leaders and the police say that the Lorik Sena has been set up by Ramashray Prasad Singh, CPI MP from Jehanabad, though local CPI leaders are quick to deny this.

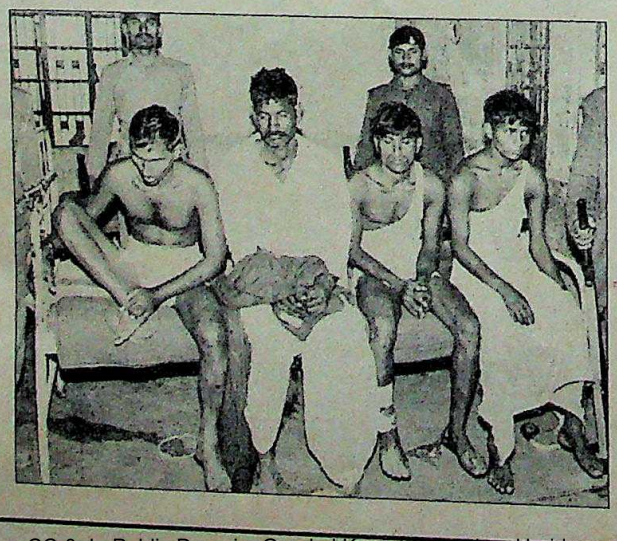
Apart from the major groups involved in the violence, there are smaller *senas* in various regions. Though most of these are either localised or dormant, they nonetheless spell terror in their respective areas. Prominent among these are: the Brahmarshi Sena of the Bhumihars, the Kuer Sena of Rajputs and other high castes, the Azad Sena of Brahmins, the Srikrishna Sena of the Yadavas, the Samajvadi Krantikari Sena and the Shoshit Samajvadi Sena of the Rajputs. As CPI MP Chaturanan Mishra pointed out in the Rajya Sabha recently, almost all these *senas* have links within the administration from whom they get help and protection.

The latest to come up is the Shoshan Mukti Sena, the convenor of which is none other than Assembly Deputy Speaker Shivnandan Paswan. The sena has the backing of Assembly leader of the Opposition Karpoori Thakur, known for his pro-reservation stand and such tough proclamations as: "Violence for self-defence should not be called violence. It (self-defence) is our constitutional right."

PART OF the massive effort to flush out extremists from the region was Operation Black Panther, launched by Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey soon after he came to power. This was followed by Operation Task Force in the trijunction of Masaurhi, Jehanabad and Hilsa covering all neighbouring villages. A BMP contingent is still combing the areas and the police have stepped up their operations. As many as 400 people have been arrested, many Naxalites killed in "encounters" and caches of weapons recovered in the Nalanda-Patna-Gaya belt.

Deputy Inspector-General of Police (Anti-Naxalite) Jyoti Kumar Sinha feels it is more than just a law and order problem. According to him, its roots lie in the steadily worsening socio-economic condition of the region. And things will not change unless the administration takes suitable steps to tackle them on a socio-economic plane. Chief Minister Dubey realises this and has announced a Rs 5 crore crash development plan for the region and promised to accelerate land reform measures. But unless the measures touch the root of the problem, they will be futile like all others before them.

Victims of police action in Gangabigha: target of brute force



"Can we tolerate a situation in which the Harijans' children, instead of being sent to school, are being forced to work free on the landlords' farms?"

KISHORIDAS
convenor, Civil Liberties, Bihar

As Sisir Kumar, former MP and commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes points out, the violence is concentrated in areas where the peasants' movement gained a foothold in the 1930s. This area has also seen the emergence of a new class of landlords, made up of Yadavas and others, in place of the old, established ones. While the old landlords desperately try to cling on to their power, the new ones try to assert theirs and between the two, the crushed Harijans make it clear that they have had enough. Their lack of confidence in the Government has prompted them to take the law in their own hands and the result is a bloody free-for-all.

So, as long as the officials remain lackadaisical in the implementation of growth plans, things will remain as they are. And the endless battle between the landed and the landless will keep raging, claiming its ever mounting toll of death and destruction.

—FARZAND AHMED

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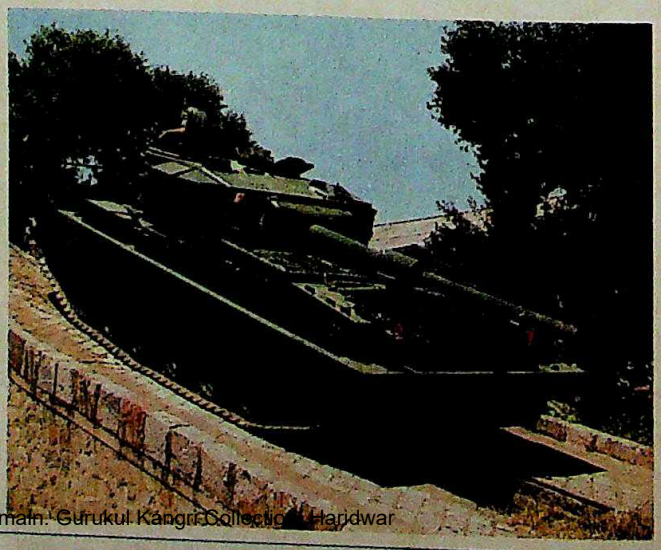

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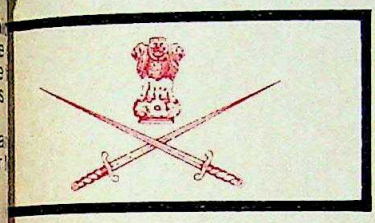

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(ii) I have also never been debarred from appearing at any examination nor have I ever been arrested, prosecuted or convicted by criminal court or involved in any other case registered by the police.

(iii) I undertake not to make any claim or compensation if at any stage of my selection my ineligibility is detected and my candidature is cancelled as a result thereof.

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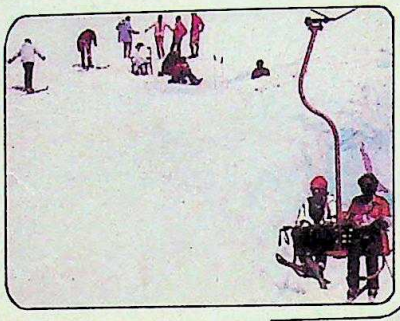

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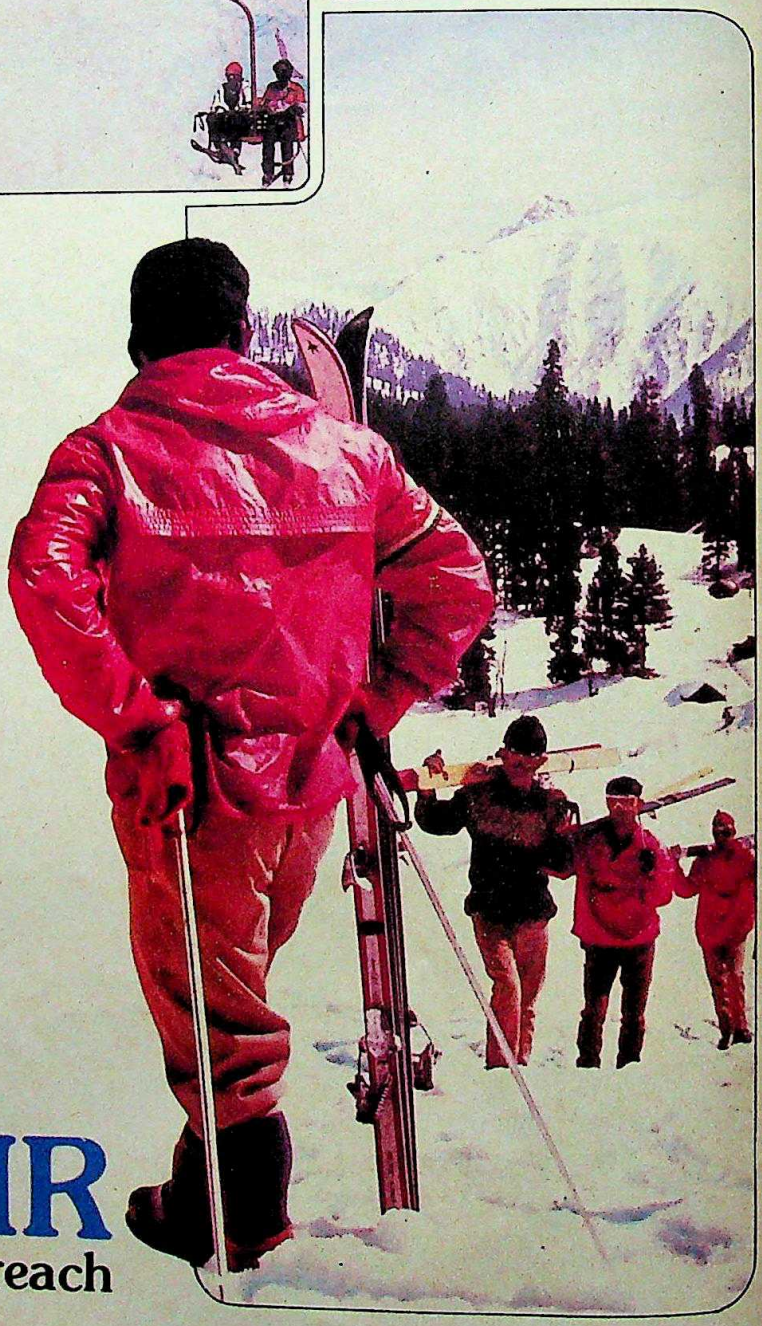

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INDO-PAK RELATIONS

Getting Into Gear

IT WAS only to be a six-hour visit, a mere stopover. But President Zia-ul-Haq's meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Delhi last fortnight, sandwiched between a Zia swing through South Asia and the December 18 marriage of his daughter, Qurratulain, achieved more than the five other meetings between the two heads of government in the last 14 months. Indo-Pak relations are like a bumpy car ride, mostly in low gear and occasionally in the reverse. This visit has undeniably put it on a higher gear.

At a joint press conference before emplaning for home, Zia exhuded his familiar optimism: "This is not a limit, but the beginning of future relations between our two countries in the interests of both countries." His comments from Pakistan were even more laudatory. He called the meeting "the most significant event in the recent past" and labelled it "the most cordial so far". Indian media comment agreed: a "breakthrough" was the term in general currency.

The hoopla was understandable—there was much that remained the same, yet there was a lot to show for the 45 minutes that Zia and Rajiv spent together. Zia was as charming as ever, bearhugging the prime minister and President Zail Singh, and 'sirring' Rajiv even though he is 20 years older. Rajiv started off by presenting a set of six proposals to which the Pakistanis responded with their own list of five proposals. Luckily, the points largely overlapped and it was fairly smooth sailing.

Capping the list of achievements was an Indian initiative, an agreement not to attack each other's nuclear installations, marking the first time that the two countries' nuclear programme has been the subject of any substantial bilateral discussion. Equally important was agreement on a "step by step" move towards normalisation of relations. This entails a meeting of the finance ministers in Islamabad in early January, of the foreign secretaries later in the month, of the four subcommissions of the joint commission, of the full joint commission led by the foreign ministers in February.

It was also agreed that a cultural agreement—the draft of which was prepared more than two years ago—would also be signed, more or less on Pakistan's terms since all the reservations are on their side. India also pointed out that though the Simla Agreement of 1972 provided for two border checkposts—at Wagah and Khokrapar Munabao in the Kutch—Pakistan had dragged its feet on opening the Gujarat channel. Pakistan agreed to consider the matter. Siachen would be discussed between the two defence secretaries. "We told them we will move at the pace you want but let us behave like good neighbours, like the USA and Canada," said an MEA official. More important, added a top-ranking Indian official: "The war clouds that were looming large have now been dissipated."

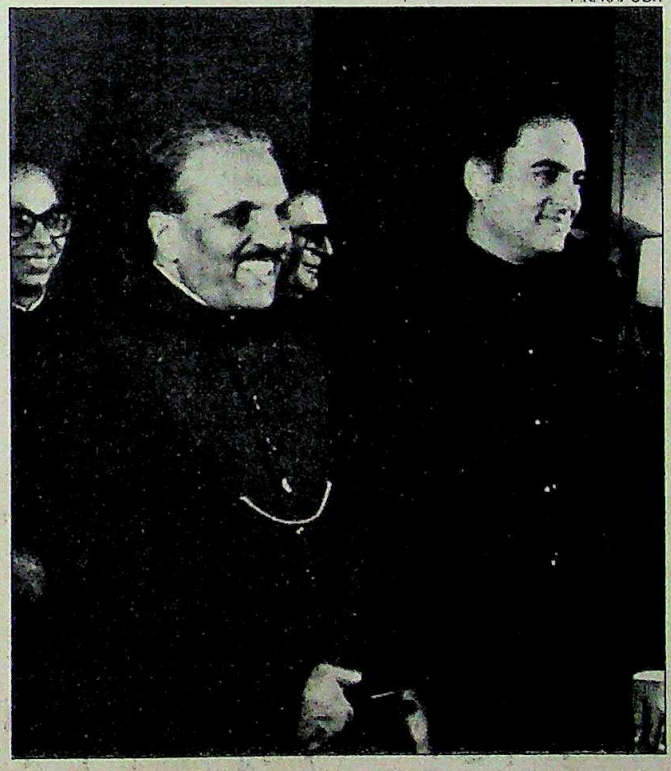
In this upbeat backdrop, speculation also surfaced in the media that an agreement had also been reached on signing a peace and friendship treaty, amalgamating India's draft of a Treaty of Friendship, Peace and Cooperation and Pakistan's draft of a Pact for Non-Aggression and Non-Use of Force. Indian Government sources denied the report but maintained that the two issues that have been bedevilling the treaty—acceptance of the principle of bilateralism and a commitment not to provide military bases for third countries—were "not insoluble".

The visit was Zia's idea but the date initially suggested by Pakistan was December 16, which happens to be the day 14 years ago when Pakistani troops had surrendered to India in Bangladesh. "It was astonishing that somebody there overlooked such an obvious connection. But we knew somebody would point this out and all our preparations were made on the assumption that he would come on the 17th," said an MEA official. It was left to *Nawa-i-Waqt*, the influential Urdu daily from Lahore, to draw attention to this embarrassing slip-up.

For the meeting itself India set the pace. The Indian approach was clear: "Pakistan never said no to any formulation but had been slippery when it came to specific proposals. This time we decided we would try to pin them down to specifics and would present workable proposals which they would find difficult to turn down," said an aide. The most dramatic, and for the Pakistanis the most unexpected, was the proposal to desist from attacking each other's nuclear installations. India had noted that over the last three months Pakistan had repeatedly raised the bo-

General Zia and Rajiv: breakthrough

P.K. KAPOOR



Indo-Pak relations are like a bumpy car ride, mostly in low gear and occasionally in the reverse. This visit has undeniably put it on a higher gear.

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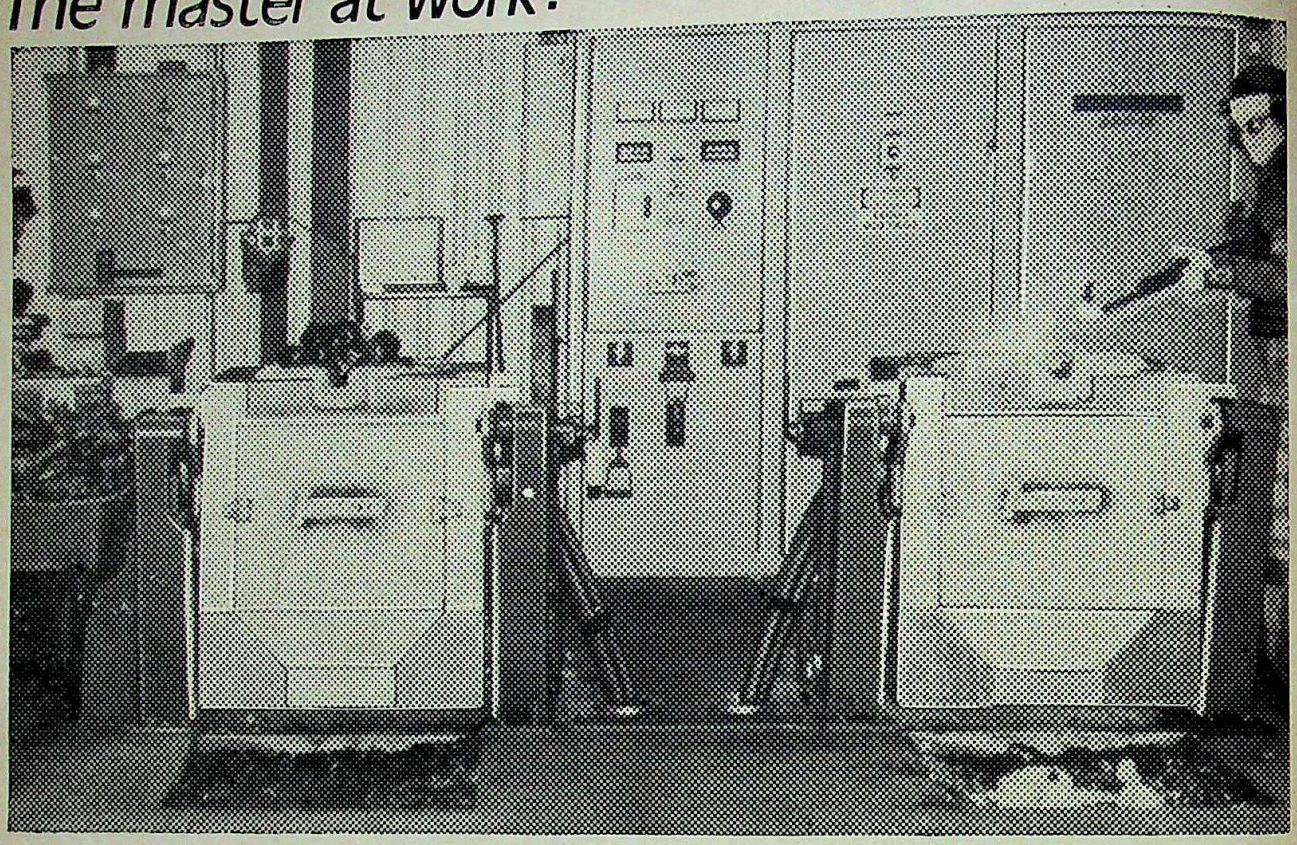

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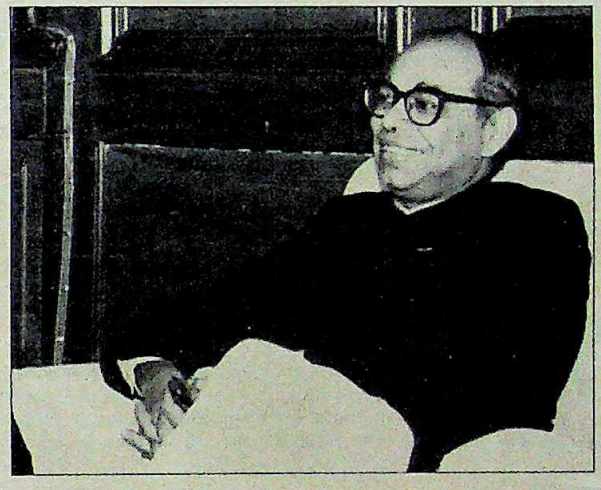
gey of an Indian pre-emptive strike on Kahuta.

"This was patently illogical for the simple reason that our nuclear installations are more vulnerable," said an aide to the prime minister but the decision was taken to take the winds out of Pakistan's propaganda sails. Said an MEA official: "The Pakistanis were taken aback but this was one proposal they could not turn down. If you have been crying hoarse that I am going to attack your house and I propose that we agree formally not to attack each other's house with what face can you refuse to agree?"

The proposal was accepted but there was some reluctance among Pakistani officials to announce it on Indian soil till Zia intervened and agreed to going public immediately. The Pakistanis made their original contribution in another sphere: it was at their initiative that the first followup meeting was raised from the level of the commerce secretaries to that of finance ministers. Indian diplomats maintained that Pakistan's Finance Minister Mahbub Ul-Haq's presence as the seniormost aide to Zia (Foreign Minister Shahabzada Yaqub Khan was away in Geneva) contributed to the positive tenor of the visit.



Mahbub UL-Haq: positive contribution

Yet there are limits to what a pragmatist like Haq can do. Haq, an economist of international repute, was here in November also when he confessed to his Indian friends: "As an economist I cannot see how we can afford not to have wider trade relations, but there are political considerations and we cannot afford to ignore them." Haq had also met the prime minister then and submitted a five-point proposal which, to start with, called for doubling or trebling the trade in the first year. But as Rajiv told Haq, in a reference to the negligible volume of trade between the two countries: "Doubling or trebling zero still comes to zero."

The trade protocol, signed in the wake of the Simla Agreement, was revoked by Zia in his first import policy statement in 1978 and though Pakistan later agreed to permit import of 42 items (in most of which India has no interest), Pakistan still brackets India with pariahs like South Africa and Israel and private trade between the two countries continues to be banned. "This," said an aide of the prime minister, "is against the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) and we know we will win if we took the matter to the GATT council but like we told the Pakistanis, we don't want to do that because we realise that you have your compulsions (a trade lobby is the strongest peace lobby) but let us move towards liberal trade relations." Pakistan, it is understood, has also agreed to a resumption of private trade though that point brought up the rear in Haq's list.

As Rajiv said later, the current approach on easing Indo-Pak tensions is twofold: to expand and diversify areas of economic, cultural and people-to-people contact while the contentious areas are addressed separately. For India the latter are mainly three: Pakistan's nuclear intentions, arms programme and the help it has been providing to Punjab terrorists, the last topping India's list of concerns. India has no intention of sweeping them under the carpet: all three issues were raised at the meeting and, for instance, on training and aid to Punjab separatists, India told Pakistan that while it did not expect the latter to accept its collusion with Punjab terrorists "we would know in a matter of hours the moment you stop helping them."

On Pakistan's nuclear programme, India told Pakistan that it was still convinced that it had a programme to make a bomb and there was little merit in Pakistan's five-point proposal to inspect the installations. "They told us that we should tell them what they should do to satisfy us but we told them that it is impossible to verify such things but we continue to believe that you have a N-bomb plan," said an Indian official. The Indian Government still continues to rely on the USA to discipline Pakistan but after President Reagan's clean chit to Pakistan, recognised that it was necessary to get pragmatic. Hence, the proposal to refrain from attacking nuclear installations.

America's attitude, in fact, looms large on the Pakistani horizon. Pakistan recognises that Indo-US relations are on the mend and with the Congress slated to vote this month on a new $ 6.5 billion economic aid-cum-arms package, Pakistan realises that better relations with India can be a welcome propaganda point. "They can tell the US, look now there are fewer reasons for India to be apprehensive of the arms you will give us," pointed out a Rajiv aide. But international compulsions apart, there is a genuine groundswell of public feeling in Pakistan for better relations with India and the Pakistani Government, though not as sensitive to mass emotions as an elected government, still cannot afford to ignore it. Indian government officials characterise the depth of feelings in Pakistan about better relations with India as bordering on the "euphoric" and compare it with the upbeat mood in the early 1960s when Nehru went to sign the Indus Waters Treaty.

Yet, nobody is saying that the ground realities ought to be ignored. Explained an Indian policy maker: "We realise that there is still a very strong lobby in Pakistan which wants to avenge the humiliation of 1971. So we cannot afford to do something dramatic like lowering our guard on the border or reducing the defence expenditure. But if the Pakistanis want to play ball, they will find that our prime minister is willing to go more than half way. There is no doubt that he wants to build confidence between the two countries."

For the moment, the idea is to accommodate Pakistan and move ahead on non-contentious areas. Said an MEA mandarin: "We want to tell them that the time has come to show sincerity in deeds not words. I do not want to use the word conditional but we are clear in our minds that the prime minister's visit will depend on how the initiatives are followed up." High up on the list of follow-ups is Pakistani help to Punjab terrorists and progress towards a peace treaty. And while Zia no longer needs a Rajiv visit to lend legitimacy to his regime, certainly his eight-year-old army government will gain in respectability should the prime minister of the world's largest democracy come calling.

—AJAY KUMAR

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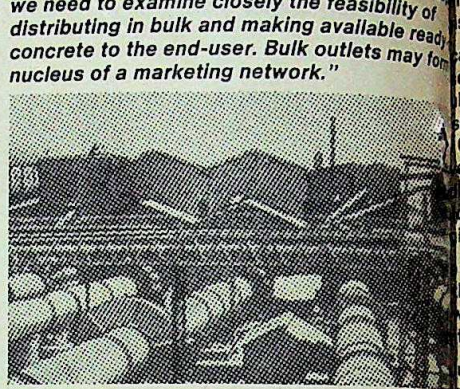
Company Meeting

The Associated Cement Companies Limited

Statement of the Chairman, Mr. N.A. Palkhivala

The 49th Annual General Meeting of the Company will be held at the Birla Matushri Sabhagar, 19, Sir Vithaldas Thackersey Marg, Bombay 400 020, at 3.45 p.m., on Wednesday, December 18, 1985.

"We are moving into times which dictate a dep... from the traditional modes of marketing. I am ... that hitherto the cement industry, lulled by a perpetual gap between demand and supply, fa... get on to the fast track of modern salesmanshi... With the increasing pressures on railway trans... we need to examine closely the feasibility of ... distributing in bulk and making available ready ... concrete to the end-user. Bulk outlets may for... nucleus of a marketing network."



A year has rolled by since Mr. Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister. No fanfare at the outset; no drum roll at the conclusion. The most striking features of this memorable year have been the quiet dignity of his success, and the moral dimension of his liberalism. He has proved himself to be dedicated to purpose and principle, rather than to doctrine and definition.

The threat of a nuclear winter cannot be allowed to over-shadow the truth that we are living through the most exciting period in human history. Nine times as much scientific knowledge has been generated since the end of the Second World War as mankind was able to produce in all the previous eras. "The amount of information in the world now doubles every eight years. Prosperity goes to countries that have a mechanism to put it to use."

1985 saw the redesigning of India to meet the challenges of the 21st century which is just a little over 5000 days away. The year witnessed an epoch-making Budget. Earlier budgets had imposed such draining direct taxes that thrift, once a virtue, had become a vice, and there was a danger of Envy, one of the seven deadly sins, being canonized. The twin begetters of black money had been inane controls and insensate fiscal levies. This year India indicated that it would be kissing goodbye to both. It was some change from the last 30 years in which posture politics had compelled entrepreneurs to breathe in an atmosphere of oxygen, nitrogen and odium!

John Kenneth Galbraith observed in *A Life in our Times*, "Economics is not a durable truth; it requires constant revision and accommodation. Nearly all its error is from those who cannot change... The experience of being wrong is salutary; no economist should be denied it, and not many are."

Providentially, India has had the wisdom to learn from some of the errors of the past. Over 34 years of the history of our republic, our per capita income had gone up only 61 per cent in real terms. In 1985 we began to change our course – silently and imperceptibly, as a big ship does – from economic fundamentalism and sterile socialism to fruitful and meaningful egalitarianism.

The world seems to be going through a cycle of economic rationalism as distinct from economic theology. In many countries socialism is in retreat. New Zealand's Labour government, and Western Europe's six Socialist governments –Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, France and Sweden – have swung markedly to the right. It is the clash of socialist ideology with obstinate reality which has brought about the change.

The cement industry should be one of the major beneficiaries of the re-thinking in our own land.

The Cement Industry

The cement industry, which was in the Intensive Care Unit, has been nursed back to health. Primarily as a result of partial decontrol, the installed capacity of the industry zoomed from 29.3 million tonnes at the end of 1981-82 to 42 million tonnes by the end of 1984-85, and production jumped from 21.1 million tonnes to 30.1 million tonnes. This was more than what was achieved during the preceding ten years!

Moreover, for the first time since the dawn of the planning era, the cement industry is sure of surpassing the Seventh Plan target of both capacity (62 million tonnes) and production (49 million tonnes).

Your Company has also contributed substantially to help reach the country's economic milestone. Between 1981-82 and 1984-85, we set up an additional rated capacity of 1.4 million tonnes. Our gross revenue crossed the Rupee 700 crore mark during the year under review. There was an increase of 2.22 lakh tonnes in the production of grey cement while the Company's installed capacity registered an increase of 1.37 lakh tonnes, over the previous year.

Decontrol

If partial decontrol can launch India on such a big market-driven wave of development, what a full harvest of benefits would not be garnered by to... decontrol! Last year I pleaded for tot... decontrol for three reasons – (a) the adequacy of cement production, (b) iniquity of the public being compelle... subsidize the government by having ... pay higher prices to enable the manufacturer to sell levy cement to government below the cost of produc... and (c) the dishonest seepage of lev... cement into the free market. These t... grounds continue to be as irrefragab... before.

There is no reason for the continua... of partial control on cement exce... reluctance of the bureaucracy to ... its powers and the national penchan... sticking to arsenic and old lace.

The injustice is compounded by the ... that the price of levy cement is not revised even when the government's own action results in increase in the ... of inputs. The last time a niggardly r... was granted to the cement industry ... in July 1984, when the government raised the retention price by Rs. 40 p... tonne (with a marginal reduction in t... levy quota which amounted in effect ... Rs. 5 per tonne) against the industry's unanswerable claim of Rs. 88.75 per tonne.

Fair play suggests that once it is dec... to hike up the price of coal or power, ... natural corollary should be to allow a proportionate increase in the prices ... products which have to use either of these inputs. But past experience ha... shown that when it comes to grantin... legitimate price increases, the government ignores the issue for as ... as it can and then belatedly proffers ... crumbs. The industry is saddled with ... burden of subsidizing the sale of levy ... cement to the extent of a whopping ... Rs. 250 crore in a single year. Your Company has suffered a loss of Rs. ... crore in uncompensated costs.

Why is there such inordinate delay i... doing what is just and fair? The reas... lies in the way governmental decisio... are still made. Files and minutes sti...

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n official to official and from artment to department. "Round and nd," Curzon the Viceroy noted, "like diurnal revolution of the earth went file – stately, solemn, sure and slow d now in due season it has pleted its orbit, and I am invited to ster the concluding stage."

ades later, Malcolm Muggeridge erved the same phenomenon: "I bt if any government has ever sted so cut off from the governed as Government of India... It was ernment pure and undefiled; lessly minuting and circulating files, ch, like time itself, had neither inning nor end, but just were."

administrative techniques pursued the government today are the same were cast in the concrete mould a tury ago.

une this year, the basis for calculation evy quota was changed from rated acity to actual production. In the case ld units, the government lowered the quota from 65 per cent of the alled capacity to 60 per cent of actual duction. As regards new and sick s, the quota was reduced from 45 per t of installed capacity to 40 per cent actual production. The linkage of levy ta with actual production beyond alled capacity is a retrograde step, as enalizes the efficient units.

oduction constraints

quickest mode of increasing duction and supplies obviously lies in ter utilization of existing capacities. the woeful inadequacy of the astructure that militates against ter utilization. The shortage of way wagons continues to haunt the ustry. Thanks to the chronic nsport bottleneck, we find that the problem is that of distribution and production, – as every bald man lizes when he shaves in the morning!

ring 1984-85, the total loss of your mpany's production was as high as 5 h tonnes due to inadequate power. bulk of this loss was at Wadi (old nt) and Gagal.

e industry continues to suffer sizeable ses of production on account of ensive and massive power cuts. We e, for example, an unprecedented wer cut in Karnataka which at times is high as 70 per cent, while the nataka State Electricity Board has ounced a steep hike in power tariffs he extent of 30 to 40 per cent.

duce the loss of production, the ustry has added substantial captive er generation capacity. It has set up el-run generators to the tune of ut 35 per cent of its total uirements. Your Company has captive rmal power capacity of 61 MW, and it eing augmented by a 6 MW thermal wer plant at Chaibasa. With this, the mpany's power requirements will be ered to the extent of 70 per cent, inst the government's suggested m of 40 per cent.

Another jinx presently affecting the cement industry is the shortage of coal. During the first quarter of 1985-86, the coal production declined sharply in marked contrast to the spurt in the corresponding quarter of the previous year. The coal output was 32.3 million tonnes, 2.6 per cent less than in the first quarter of 1984-85, and 10.7 per cent short of the target. This portends coal shortages in the current year.

While the industry's major grouse is the short-availability of coal, its abysmal quality is another inhibiting factor.

Coal, supplied even from the same field, has decreasing useful heat value, increasing ash and moisture content, and a generous lacing of shale and other foreign matter. Because collieries do not pay adequate attention to quality control, cement units have to face formidable process problems such as the generation of dust, production of very hard clinker balls, ring formations due to high ash content of coal, erratic performance of kilns, and damage to kilns' brick-lining. Only human ingenuity goaded by despair has been able to sustain the use of poor quality coal. Your Company was the first in the country to introduce the precalcinator technology which maximizes the use of low-grade coal.

Modernization and rehabilitation

Between 1982 and 1985, the industry has invested about Rs. 650 crore in modernization and expansion programmes. Your management's major preoccupation also continues to be the rehabilitation, rejuvenation and modernization of its old plants.

The conversion of our Madukkarai plant from wet to semi-dry process, and of the Shahabad unit from wet to dry process, will together entail a capital outlay of Rs. 144 crore. It is expected that the World Bank will agree to provide finance for these projects in a substantial way.

In line with our continuing concern for the community in which we do our business, your Company has taken firm steps to protect the environment. During the year, five electrostatic precipitators (ESPs) were commissioned at a cost of Rs. 3.9 crore. A further 16 ESPs at a cost of Rs. 21 crore would be commissioned in the next two years.

Marketing

With the marked increase in the availability of cement, the art of responding to and steering consumer demand has assumed great importance. We act upon the sage advice of Mr. Konosuke Matsushita (who 68 years ago founded Matsushita Electric Industrial, now the world's largest consumer electronics producer) that the basic rule of management is self-evident: learn what the people want and respond accordingly. The consumer is king, but the company must act as a loyal subject, giving the king proper advice and guidance. Your Company has initiated marketing strategies such as strengthening the stockists' network and opening new storage depots to cater to small and rural markets.

We are moving into times which dictate a departure from the traditional modes of marketing. I am afraid that hitherto the cement industry, lulled by a perpetual gap between demand and supply, failed to get on to the fast track of modern salesmanship. With the increasing pressures on railway transport, we need to examine closely the feasibility of distributing in bulk and making available ready-mix concrete to the end-user. Bulk outlets may form the nucleus of a marketing network.

Above all, we are conscious of the fact that the competitive market is also presenting challenges to the producers on the quality front, and the success of a business enterprise is more than ever dependent upon the quality and reliability of its product.

Overseas operations

I am happy to report that negotiations are under way for a renewal of the contract at Kubaisa, Iraq, for a further period of two years. Our earnings in foreign exchange from our overseas operations amounted to Rs. 20 crore for the year under review. More importantly, we have earned bonus at both Yanbu and Kubaisa for achieving production in excess of guarantees.

Corporate goal

We are conscious of the necessity of raising our sights from the solving of short-term problems to building for the future. The possibilities in the field for rejuvenation are immense, the challenge is awesome, but the reward will be nothing less than maintaining our position as the leader in the Indian cement industry.

Your Company is unique in that it has to maintain 17 plants in different States. We are painfully aware that running such a company is a job too real and too earnest to mistake a resolution for an accomplished fact or slogans for strategy.

To each and everyone of our officers and staff I should like to convey the well-worn message that there is no substitute for hard, dedicated work in the present. Between yesterday's regret and tomorrow's dream lies today's opportunity.

My heartfelt gratitude on behalf of the entire body of shareholders to the employees who have played a significant role in shaping the fortunes of the Company in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill.

Bombay, November 16, 1985

Raising our sights from the solving of short-term problems to building for the future

ACC

ACC 25A/85

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HUM LOG

The Final Flourish

IT WAS an epic ending—heavy and tearful. Last fortnight, when the labyrinthine *Hum Log* family walked off into the December fog, and Dadi, in the very last episode, had died as imperiously as she had lived, the proceedings constituted the frothiest finale to the first soap opera on Indian television. The froth vanished in no time, but not before it had unleashed an addiction, hooking a record audience of nearly 40 million twice every week, willing to be bombarded with the "family saga", laced with a message.

Doordarshan lost no time in ordering what it hoped would be a replacement, its second serial, this time a chronicle of three generations, to be named *Buniyad*, and produced by G.P.Sippy with Ramesh (*Sholay*) Sippy directing the first 13 episodes. With the big guns moving in, the soap opera on the small screen had obviously hit the high spot. But at the end of the 157 episodes of *Hum Log*, begun in July 1984, TV pundits were wondering just what drew such a large number of viewers to the seemingly flimsy tear-jerker which drew its inspiration from a Mexican serial, *Accompany Me*. Ever since the private sector began to make programmes —*Hum Log* was the first— no other serial has remained so steadfastly near the top of the charts, not just in the cities but in small towns and big villages opened up by the mushrooming of transmitters.

Doordarshan's Audience Research Group (ARG) has computed that Indians had spent 214 crore "viewer-hours" in front of the box watching the programme. Though rated as a distinctly down-market serial, it had for over 17 months commanded an average rating of 75 per cent to 85 per cent in the cities of north India and around 50 per cent in Madras, where Hindi programmes habitually run up against a wall of public resistance. In many towns with population varying between 100,000 and 500,000, it had notched up 90 per cent rating, turning itself into the most durable community obsession of the small town its electronic fire-side. Its achievemen transcended viewership statistics. Fo over a year, the Doordarshan receiv over 400 letters a day, with the corresp dents suggesting new twists to the p line, new characterisation, and new d nouement. "The audience wrote the sto with the writer," says Harish Khann Doordarshan's director-general.

BHAWAN SINGH

The serial also yanked out of obscurit a host of actors and actresses. Laha Singh, the septuagenarian compere of th Doordarshan's somnolescent agricu tural programme, *Krishi Darshan*, sud denly got into limelight as the lovin Dadaji of *Hum Log*. Seema Bhargava, Delhi stage actress, became a household name as Badki, the elde sister of the impoverish family trying to eke out a honourable living. Vin Nagpal, a city hotelier wit a passion for singing an acting, turned overnigh into a celebrity as Baseswa Ram, the poorer son Dadaji and the typical patr arch of the lower mid class Indian fam Jayashree Arora, an arm officer's wife who had nev acted before either a film a television camera, b came the symbol of th mute Indian housewife Bhagwanti, Baseswar wife, in the serial. Raje Puri, an actor of bit role became known natio wide as Lallu, the countr yokel who bravely sough to grapple with the Englis language. And actre Sushma Seth, who blend the hauteur of a Queen Vi toria with the guilelessne of an old-world India granny to create the char acter of Dadi, was mobb at airports and railway st tions. Says Seth: "It is a experience totally u known to me in my mar

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The *Hum Log* line-up: and (top) Seth: one big happy family

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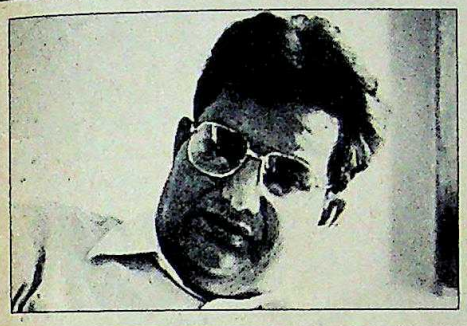
years of film and stage career."

So strong were the feelings of viewers that some of them marched up to Bhargava's house in the Daryagunj area of Delhi, demanding that she should get married to Ashwini Kumar, her doctor suitor forthwith. The evening they got married, there were celebrations in Allahabad, Varanasi and Lucknow, the cities inhabited by *Hum Log*'s hardcore viewers. Nagpal was besieged with two sets of

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"Once we had got onto the hook, it took us time to unhook."

MANOHAR SHYAM JOSHI

advices: one, recommending the songs of the late K.L.Saigal which he might sing while acting out the "drunk" scenes; and the other, recommending prescriptions for drying out.

IT WAS also a bonanza for advertisement of consumer products. Riding almost entirely the crest of *Hum Log*'s popularity, a range of food products expanded their market share. The Delhi-based Food Specialities Limited re-launched its Maggi two-minute noddle leaning heavily on *Hum Log*, which it co-sponsored throughout its run, and hit the bull's eye. Colgate-Palmolive and Food Specialities Limited went the whole hog with the serial, with the makers of Vicks inhalers and balm chipping on for 13 episodes in between. And, even though *Hum Log* was identified with the middle class audience, the advertisers found a gold-mine in it. When it started, the programme had virtually no buyers. But before it wound up, the cost of each of the 25-minute episodes had shot up to Rs 210,000, including a whopping Rs 70,000 transmission charge, but enabling the sponsors to advertise their ware through 90 seconds of "free time"; and yet there were a dozen buyers who would gratefully shoulder it if it got an extension and the traditional sponsors dropped a hint that they might back out.

But the Doordarshan, even if it had willed, could not have carried on with the serial which had really entered a no-exit situation with the characters refusing to grow any further and events getting tied up into inextricable knots. "We are used to the dramaturgy of an ascending situation," says Khanna, "but everything had plateaued off in *Hum Log*." The ebullient Shobha Doctor, whose Time and Space advertising agency had co-produced the serial with the Doordarshan, still tried for an extension but had to throw up her hands in the face of growing tiredness of everyone involved in it. The climax, provided by Dadi dying of cancer, was known nearly three months ago. The eligible bachelors on the cast had also been all neatly paired off, so that when the wedding bells began ringing one after the other there were hardly any surprises left. Lallu had ceased to sound funny; Bhagwanti looked tiresomely predictable is her depiction of the doormat housewife; Manjhli and Chutki, the two younger daughters, became characters drifting from episode to episode in search of a role. And veteran actor Ashok Kumar, putting up a cameo performance at the end of each episode, became stale and more and more predictable with each passing episode.

"The inherent limitations of the serial were showing at the end," admits Khanna who, during the 17 months of the serial's life, often had to throw his weight to straighten out the frequent "cinematic loops" in the story. It began obviously under client pressure when writer Manohar Shyam Joshi was obliged to give a *filmi* edge to the story, contriving a murder-plot, a couple of chases, and a gaggle of baddies who hatched conspiracies behind hidden doors. But Joshi admits that instead of making the serial popular these contrivances alienated it from the audience who refused to appreciate the *Hum Log* characters alienated from the everyday domestic background. "Once we had got onto the hook," says Joshi with a smile, "it took us time to unhook."

Despite its inconsistent quality, and the fact that its popularity was closely linked with the spread of the medium in the past year with the sudden mushrooming of TV transmitters it offered certain object lessons for future makers of long-drawn soap opera. Satish Gargh, *Hum Log*'s executive producer who represented the Doordarshan in the production team, categorises them as follows:

- ► it clicks only as long as the characters are identifiable social types;
- ► aping of commercial cinema for family serials is most likely to be resented by viewers of the small screen even though the audiences may overlap; and
- ► no long serial will be accepted if it is peppered with accidental twists such as, long-lost brothers being reunited to the script-writer's convenience, or an irreconcilable triangle being rationalised by the death of one of the protagonists.

In fact the serial created most of its vibrant chapters when it could manage to avoid these pitfalls. One such juncture in the serial was when Manjhli returned to her family, a shattered woman disillusioned with the glitter of the neon lights. Her return alone was greeted with over 4,000 letters written by viewers. And Joshi admits that the "supreme moments" in the serial were those which depicted the family ties: between Dadaji and Dadi; between their children placed in entirely different stations in life; in Baseswar's helpless efforts to get out of alcoholism; in Nanhe's spontaneous buffoonery; and in the warmth of the family get-togethers. "Everything else was garnishing added to the story," he says.

Obviously *Buniyad* is going to test Joshi's mettle, for he has been chosen by Sippy as the writer for Doordarshan's second long serial. Like *Hum Log*, *Buniyad* too is a story of generations and has the same episodic character. Obviously the loyal audience created by *Hum Log* cannot be ignored any more: neither by the Doordarshan nor by the advertisers whose appetite has been sharpened by the frequency and long reach of roll-on serials. But Doctor sounds a note of caution. She says: "The association of big banners in the production of family serials spells a shift in emphasis. I have a fear—only a lurking fear—that from now on commercialised fantasies will take over from the drama of simple relationships."

But the Doordarshan top brass are pretty confident that *Buniyad*, initially contracted for 104 episodes, will be able to keep television audiences glued to the set for months to come. And chances are that like *Hum Log*, anything that Doordarshan dishes out in the most popular time slots will be lapped up, proving once again the abiding wisdom of the dictum: the medium is the message.

—SUMIT MITRA

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SUPREME COURT

Tug of War

WHEN Prafull Natwarlal Bhagwati, a self-proclaimed Indira-phile, became the chief justice of India earlier this year, many thought that the appointment would enable the two long-disharmonious wheels of the republic—the executive and the judiciary—to be reconciled at last. Bhagwati rode into the office waving the banner of judicial activism, but soon found that he had his wires crossed with the 74-year-old Union Law Minister, Asoke Sen. The radical Bhagwati and the patrician Sen went about like two unwilling horses yoked together to the carriage of office. Often they charged at each other.

The most serious of their collisions was last fortnight when Sen formally withheld his opinion, which is a procedural euphemism for saying no, on Bhagwati's recommendation to appoint Justice P.B.Sawant of Bombay High Court as a judge of the Supreme Court. Sawant's name was suggested earlier this fortnight by Bhagwati himself in a letter to the law minister. It is a convention established over the years that no name for appointment to the bench of the Supreme Court is put down on paper unless there is unanimity between the chief justice of India and the law minister, who is the constitutional representative of the President of India. Article 124(2) of the Constitution lays down that the Government shall always consult the Chief Justice of India while appointing a Supreme Court judge.

There were two appointments to the 18-member Supreme Court bench since Bhagwati took over, and both went through without a hitch. The judges who joined the Supreme Court thus are: Justice B.C.Roy of Calcutta High Court; and Justice G.L.Oza, former chief justice of Gujarat High Court. The vacancies were caused when the country's highest bench recently lost five judges including the former chief justice of India, Y.V. Chandrachud, who retired at the end of his term. While there was no problem with the elevation of Roy and Oza, the spiking of Sawant's appointment made eyebrows go up.

This is because Sawant, though only number seven at the Bombay High Court bench in terms of seniority, is regarded as an 'active' judge much in the mould of Bhagwati himself.Sawant is also a champion of public interest litigation in Maharashtra. Only recently, he and Bhagwati inaugurated the Lok Adalat in Nagpur. And his views on judicial activism run contrary to those of Sen, who is a strong disbeliever in the crusading approach. In fact, while Sen did not oppose Bhagwati,purely on the ground that he was the seniormost, he nonetheless told INDIA TODAY: "Law-making should be left to the legislators. Judges can at best unfold anomalies in law, but they should never remake them." But the Bhagwati school swears by the American activist judge Felix Frankfurter's dictum:"A judge is not a mimic."

When asked to comment on the impasse over Sawant's appointment, Sen refused to discuss it, but sources in the Justice Department of the Law Ministry predicted that the matter would go up to the prime minister early in January because "it is now beyond the competence of the ministry to resolve the deadlock". However, this is not the first time—and it is unlikely to be the last time either—that the David and the Goliath of the judicial world have clashed.

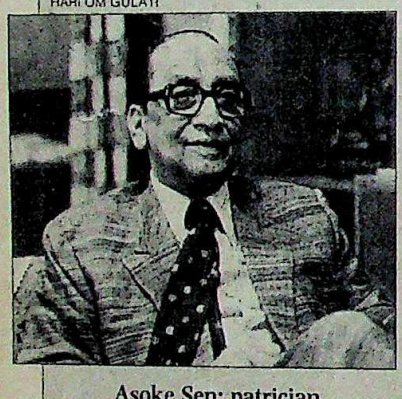
They collided first on the question of who should become the chairman of the Law Commission. On the retirement of K.K.Mathew, Bhagwati suggested the name of D.A.Desai, again an activist judge and a compatriot of Bhagwati who had sided with him on many a judgement, including the historic *Judges' Transfer* case in 1982 (INDIA TODAY, January 31, 1982). Sen objected to it in writing, but Desai was made the Law Commission chief in August this year, much to the chagrin of Sen. Around the same time came another crunch when Sen, in a three-line letter to the chief justice of India, said he favoured the appointment of Prakash Narain, the retiring chief justice of the Delhi High Court, to the bench of the Supreme Court. High court judges retire at 62 while a judge of the Supreme Court can continue up to 65 years.

In Narain's case, Bhagwati simply put his foot down. In a confidential note he listed out a series of charges against Narain. The most unassailable of them was the fact that a case against him was in pendency in the Supreme Court. It related to the erstwhile government's refusal to extend the term of S.N.Kumar, former additional judge of Delhi High Court, apparently prompted by Narain's 'secret' report to Shiv Shankar, the then law minister. Sen's advocacy for Narain was dropped as a result.

The bad vibes between Sen and Bhagwati are already casting their shadow on judicial appointments. While 62 high court vacancies are yet to be filled up, every proposal is now subjected to an unprecedented tug of war. And, in most of the disputed appointments, the tussle is not between the high-handed Centre and the refractory state Government but between the Law Ministry and the Centre's chosen chief justice of India.

—SUMIT MITRA

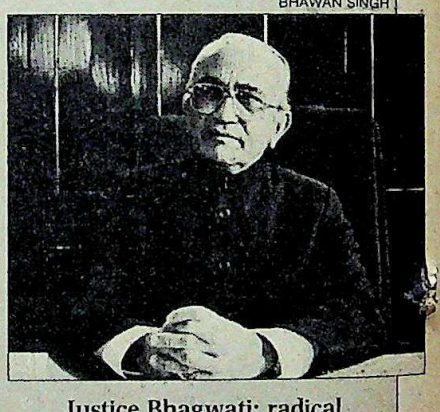
HARI OM GULATI



Asoke Sen: patrician

Differences between Sen and Bhagwati, two pillars of the legal system, are already casting their shadows on judicial appointments.

BHAWAN SINGH



Justice Bhagwati: radical

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MUSSOORIE
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4 days/3 nights
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Student rate—Rs 499/-
Stay in Savoy Hotel, Mussoorie.
In association with
Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam Ltd.

NAINITAL-BHIMTAL
RANIKHET-KAUSANI

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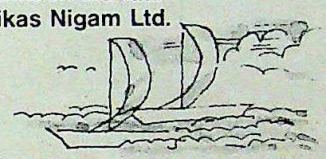

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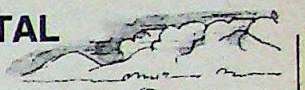

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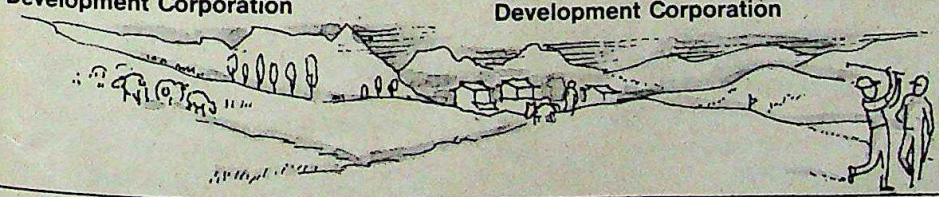

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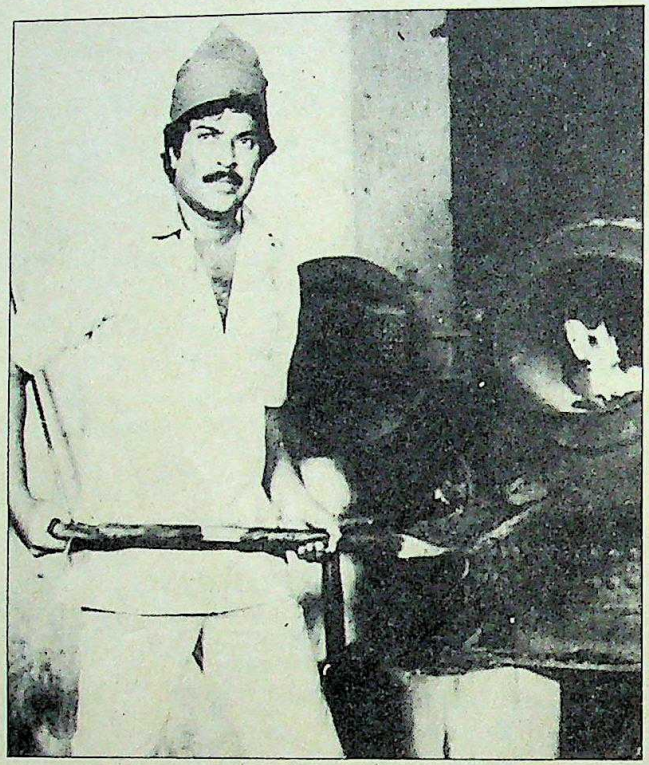
MALAYALAM FILMS

New Heroes

HE IS cool. He is tough. He has steel in his eyes. He does not rant at the drop of a hat, but when he talks the lines are punchy enough to hit the audience hard. Mammootty, the 38-year-old lawyer-turned-star of the Malayalam cinema, may be the *idli* variant of a Sly Stallone; but he belongs to a crop of new icons of Kerala's thriving movie industry which has zapped the jaded demigod Prem Nazir, undisputed king of the state's silver screen for 25 years. The new films that are drawing audiences in droves are neither the corny tear-jerkers nor the B-grade erotica of the Nazir era but films rooted in life. And the new heroes, unlike their predecessors, are less windows into what the audience would fantasise itself to be than mirrors to what it actually is.

It was most startlingly demonstrated by the success of *Yatra*, the biggest hit of 1985 which grossed Rs 19 lakh in the main circuits. Mammootty plays a forest officer who is picked up by the police on the suspicion of being a terrorist and, in scenes somewhat embarrassingly reminiscent of *First Blood*, is subjected to brutal torture in custody. Later he kills a cop in his fury, in the best manner of Stallone. He is subsequently hunted down, imprisoned, and, at the end of the term, reunited with his lover. But, in the process, director Balu Mahendra turns upside down some of the stale conventions of Kerala's "heroic" cinema, bringing dialogue close to life and making violence believable on screen.

If *Yatra* had been a forerunner of the sweeping changes in audience preferences, there have been a host of other films pointing invariably in the same direction. Notable among them is *Nokatha Dooratu Kannum Natu*, made by young film maker Fazil, which caused a stampede at the box-offices despite the fact that his script does not have a male lead. *Nokatha's* story revolves around the loneliness of an old woman, played with a great *eclat* by the faded star Padmini. It had superb performances all around, particularly by Nadiya Moidu, a vibrant teenager who played the old woman's granddaughter. The point is,



Lawyer-turned-film actor Mammootty: new icon of Malayalam cinema

Nokatha became a runaway hit without any of the conventional ingredients of commercial cinema—such as the usual burlesque, the running around trees, the heavy doses of oratory and display of gladiatorial skills.

The change has been all-embracing, and only those who have adapted their art to the times have survived. I.V.Sasi, whose *Her Nights* rode the crest of an erotic wave in Malayalam cinema, now makes films where the heroine does not even drop the pallav of her sari. Instead, in his latest *Kanamarayatu*, Mammootty plays a middle-aged bachelor reluctant at first to be seduced by a luscious 18-year-old but who later on succumbs to her charm in the Mills and Boon tradition. The story-line may be banal, but it has worked at the box-office. In his latest *Karimbin Poovin Akkare*, Sasi blends a streak of villainy with machismo in hero Mohanlal who rapes a woman, kills her husband, puts the girl in a brothel and yet manages to ride into the sunset. And the producer goes laughing to the bank.

Says Sasi: "The concept of the hero has totally changed. The hero is no longer a chocolate-faced do-gooder. In fact there is only a thin dividing line left between him and the villain." His theorisation is not plain academic. The acceptance of the mingled yarn on screen now looks complete with the matinee crowd, which forms the hardcore film-going audience in Kerala's matrilineal society, lapping up the new films. And if they have rejected the aura of a Prem Nazir, they have pulled into limelight the likes of Mammootty, Mohanlal and comedian Balachandra Menon. Even the art-conscious parallel cinema is now waking up to the new realities. G. Aravindan, the acclaimed maker of many a Malayalam masterpiece, has decided to cast Mammootty in his latest film.

With the new personalities blitzing their way into the limelight, a lot of film conventions have changed too. Gone are the garish costumes, the outrageously extravagant sets and the soft-focus photography. In *Kathode Kathoram*, Mammootty is shown wearing the same mundu (dhoti) and kurta throughout the film. A mature actor like Gopi, who won the Bharat award for best acting in Adoor Gopalakrishnan's classic, *Kodiyettam*, does not have to hide his bald pate under a wig any longer.

Nazir, at the other end of the spectrum, is a sad man now. His decline started in 1984 when *Pushparajan*, a mindless extravaganza, bombed at the box-office. He flirted briefly with the anti-hero role, but it failed to click. Finally he had overpriced himself, charging a kind of remuneration—since film budgets seldom exceed Rs 14 lakh—which Malayalam cinema could not permit.

But now, with the whirligig of show business taking a new course in the coastal state, the question that looms largest is: whether the new attraction for naturalism will survive? The coming of age of Malayalam cinema will depend to a large extent on whether the new breed of film makers can stay close to life and yet sell their products. If they fail, the era of melodrama will only return in a new garb.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI in Trivandrum

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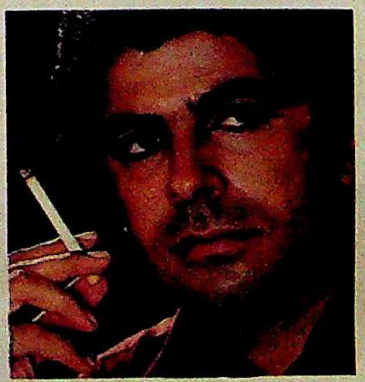

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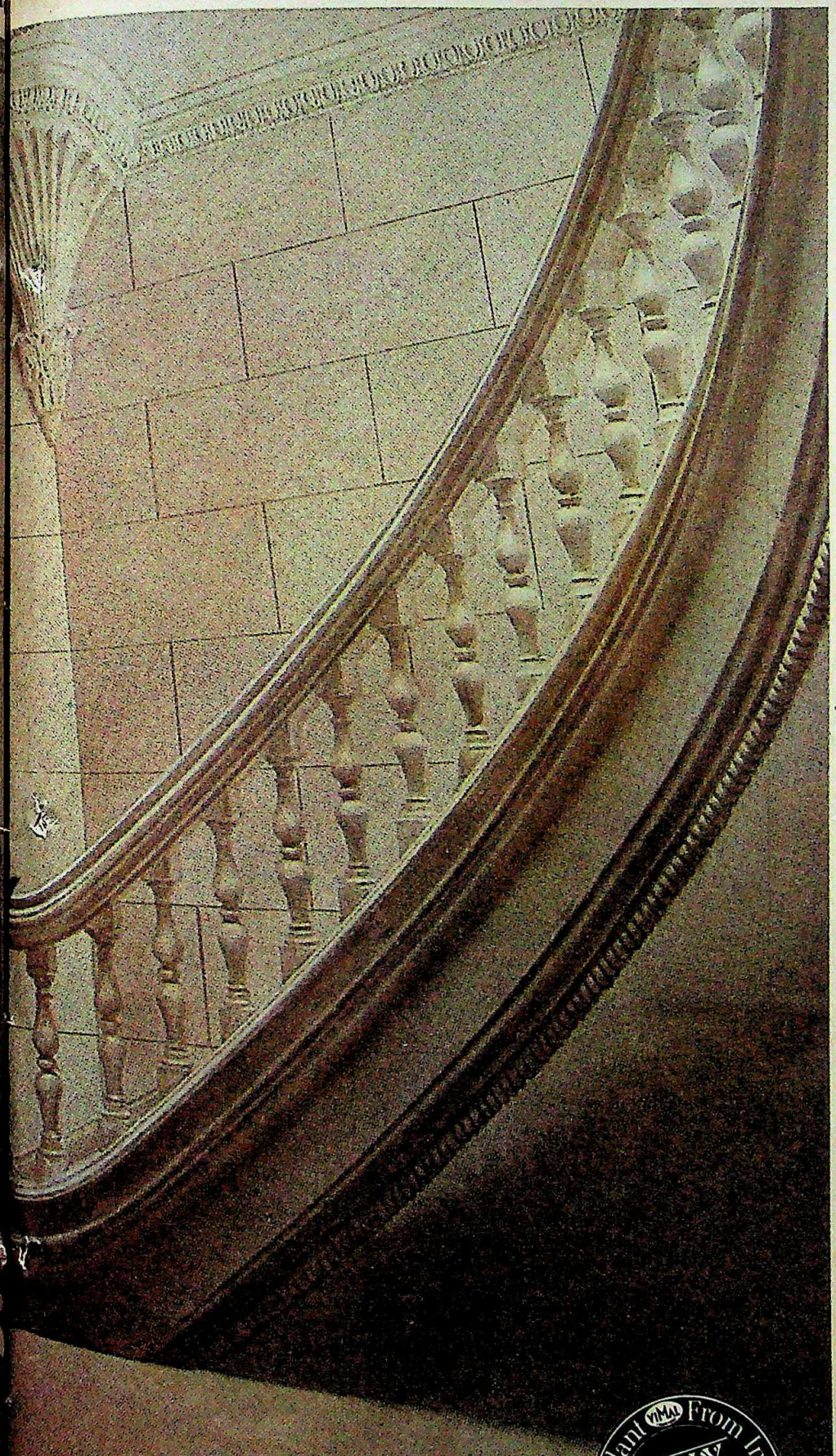

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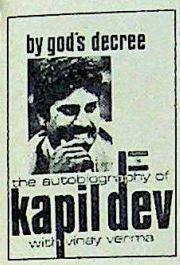
Howzzatt!

BY GOD'S DECREE
by KAPIL DEV with VINAY VERMA
Harper & Row
Pages: 104



WHAT in heaven's name is a combative and earthy cricketer like Kapil Dev doing with a book titled *By God's Decree?* Quite frankly, it is doubtful if India's current cricket captain knows the answer either. Or, if he does, it is as cleverly concealed within the sparse pages of his long-awaited autobiography as one of his dreaded in-swingers. The title, thus, is about as misleading as the blurb proclaiming it to be the autobiography of one of the country's most controversial and gifted cricketers.

God, in whatever form or substance, has nothing at all to do with Kapil's stormy entry into the Test arena. It was, as the book explains, largely the encouragement and prodding from his elder brother, and later, the coach of the Chandigarh Cricket Club, D.P.Azad. Neither can this book by any yardstick, be classified as an autobiography. It is instead, a rambling, disjointed mixture that appears to have been written by a tourist guide masquerading as a penny ante philosopher masquerading as a cricketer.

The problem, inevitably, is that it is instantly obvious that the book is not Kapil Dev's but Vinay Verma's, an Indian businessman settled in Australia for the last 15 years. The overall effect is that of a substitute player going out to play a Test match on behalf of Kapil Dev while he himself busily scribbles autographs in the pavillion. The other problem is that the book has been clearly written for a foreign (read Australian) audience. The publishers, the Australian branch of Harper & Row, have very carefully timed the release of this rather slim paperback while skipper Kapil Dev was in Australia in person with the Indian cricket team currently on tour down under.

It is difficult to understand the kind of telepathy that must have been employed between Sydney, where Verma resides, and Chandigarh, Kapil's home town, since the style and substance of the book is clearly as alien to the unsophisticated Haryanvi lad as a can of Fosters beer. There is a quite unnecessary description of Chandigarh's physical and architectural origins to start off with followed by a layman's guide to Hindu philosophy and traditions offset by cliched impressions of western society with a little bit of college cricket tossed in to keep up the charade.

Verma's main contribution is the lengthy descriptions of Australian cities and test centres and the character of the Australian people which would have been perfectly suited to a visitor's guide to the country rather than an autobiography of one of the world's leading all-rounders. The visual impression the book conjures up is that of Kapil scribbling notes on his flapping shirt tail between overs and transmitting them to Verma's wordprocessor in Sydney during the drinks break for translation into book form.

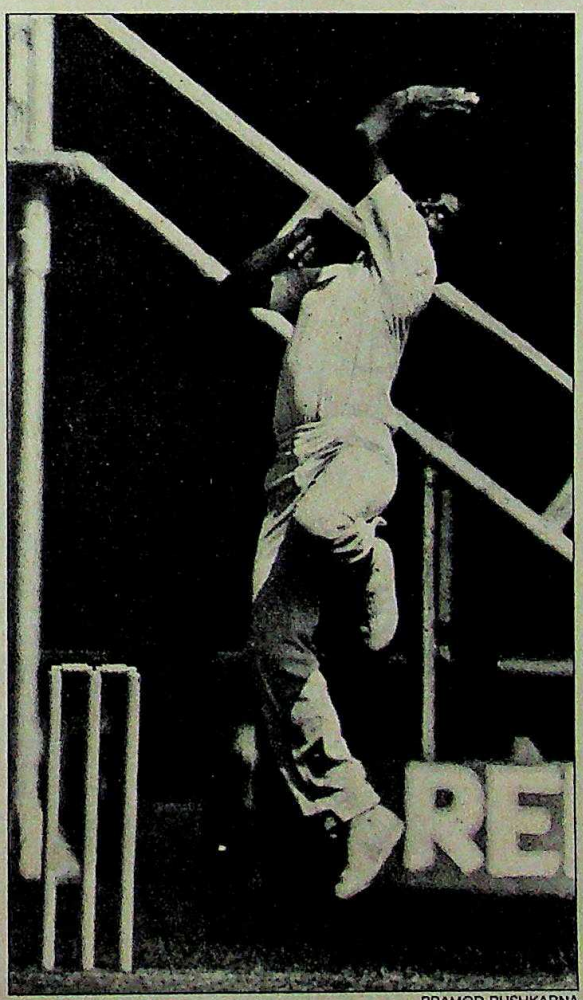
Equally disappointing are the actual cricketing bits, such as they are, when the authors decide to give the reader some of their penny's worth. Kapil steers carefully clear of any issues which might evoke controversy, of which he has had his fair share, even glossing over the Test against England where he was dropped for disciplinary reasons after he threw his wicket away at a crucial stage in the earlier match. He ignores the well-documented efforts of the then Cricket Board chairman, N.K.P. Salve, to bring about a reconciliation between him and the then skipper Sunil Gavaskar. In fact, Kapil goes out of his way to debunk the alleged friction between him and Gavaskar and come across as exceedingly charitable to the rival cricketer in his book.

The cricketing pages in the book essentially offers an abridged version of the highlights of Kapil's cricket career, with the main emphasis being on replaying virtually ball for ball, India's successive wins in the World Cup One Day Championships in England and Australia. But what is clearly lacking is an insight into the man, which is basically the idea behind any autobiography, or the cricketer or the captain. In fact, the impression the book gives is that of a captain going into crucial test series without any strategy, planning or forethought. He admits that in the crucial finals of the World Cup he had nothing to say at the pre-match meeting except to tell his team-mates, "Let's go out and play cricket", somewhat like Lord Wellington telling his men to go out and fight a war before the Battle of Waterloo.

Kapil devotes exactly one paragraph each in the final chapter to his main rivals for the title of world's best all-rounder, Richard Hadlee, Imran Khan and Ian Botham and the only revelations, if they can be called that, are contained in his deliberately diluted opinions on his fellow Indian test cricketers. Perhaps Kapil intends to make amends by his intention to add an additional 80 pages to the book in its Indian version. But by any yardstick, Kapil's original effort can clearly be declared a no ball.

—DILIP BOBB

The author in action: no ball



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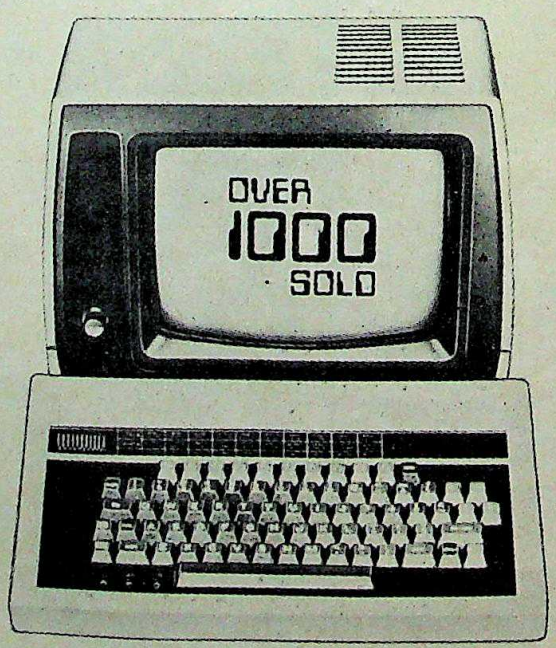

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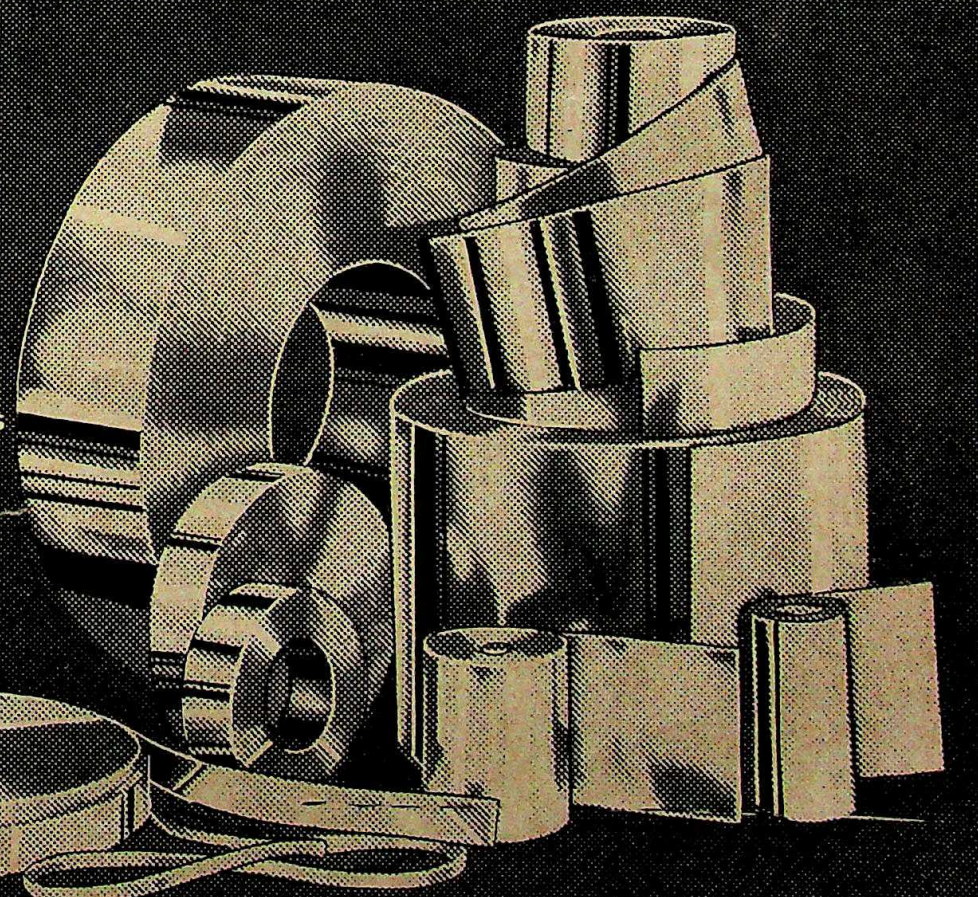

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KALAKSHETRA

Legend of Bharata Natyam

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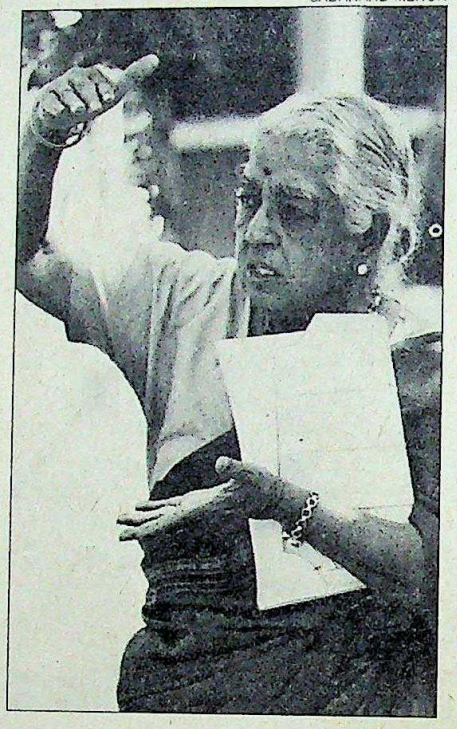

Arundale: high priestess of dance

SHE CAN pass off as a stern grandmother, irate and authoritarian. And her permanent backdrop, Kalakshetra, the school for classical dance south of Adyar in downtown Madras, could be mistaken for a hostel run with an iron hand. The woman is 81: the school is 50. But as Rukmini Devi Arundale, wizened with age and pale with an undiagnosed ailment, appears in view, an overpowering inner rhythm seems to fill the scene. It is as if a perfect *mudra* has been eternalised, sculpted for ever in the form of one woman and her life's work.

Last fortnight, when Kalakshetra celebrated its golden jubilee with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi presiding over the function, it was a lot more than a mere cultural event. For, the unique school, with the unique lady at its helm, had not only propagated the classical Bharata Natyam dance but had been its midwife and mother. The 50-year-old school is the surgical scalpel with which Arundale freed the ballet form, which was an exclusive preserve of temple prostitutes, and put it for the first time on the concert stage.

Begun under a thatched roof in Arundale on January 6, 1936, Kalakshetra, or the "temple of the arts", today is the country's most authoritative centre for the teaching of Bharata Natyam. Its alumni include a galaxy of national and international celebrities: Yamini Krishnamurthy; Mrinalini Sarabhai; N.S.Jayalakshmi; A.Sarada; Subbalakshmi Khan, wife of *sarod* player Amjad Ali Khan; and Uma Rao, a highly acclaimed classical dancer in Singapore. Krishnaveni Lakshmanan is yet another famous Bharata Natyam dancer turned out by Kalakshetra. The 600-odd seasoned danseuses and musicians that have passed out of its portals since it began issuing diplomas in 1960 have all been, in the words of an insider, "apostles of pure Bharata Natyam." But it is the personality of Arundale which, standing in the midst of all these glittering achievements, overshadows it all.

She has steadfastly refused any allopathic diagnosis of her treatment because, as she says, "allopathic medicines are based on experiments on animals, and

INTERVIEW

"Education first and then art"

AGE HAS finally begun to tell on the nimble Rukmini Devi Arundale. A ripe old 81, she is ill and pants after speaking even a couple of sentences. Her legendary footsteps are slow now. Someone has to hold her to walk. But still she knows where she is going and she speaks without the slightest hesitation. Her puffed cheeks and round face give her a sullen look, but as she opens up and speaks out her eyes come aglow. Last fortnight, she spoke to dance critic Sunil Kothari and Madras Correspondent S.H. VENKATARAMANI, *on her life, her dance and what the future holds. Excerpts:*

Q. What has been your mission in the arts and have you succeeded?

A. We first started with the Besant Theosophical School, and then Kalakshetra was formed. It was education first and then art. We began to teach dance and music for people to acquire proficiency in the performing arts and get oriented to our culture.

I don't think I have completely succeeded. The trends in our country have been going in the opposite direction. We still have to educate people in the fundamentals. It is true that hundreds of our students who have come out of Kalakshetra have really benefited. But then it is easier to destroy than to build. I came into the arts only to help India. My juniors and students are still well-known dancers, here and abroad.

Q. What is the situation in the arts now?

A. If we provide the proper background there must be enough people who are idealistic enough. But then the atmosphere is commercial now. Keeping in mind the prospects of money always, artistes don't want to give themselves heart and soul to their art. If total dedication is there we can cultivate it.

Q. When you started studying Bharata Natyam what was the attitude of the Nattuvanars (gurus)?

A. They were custodians of the art and passed it on to the *devadasi* class. When people from different strata stepped in they were elated and willing to teach. But it required certain methodology and corelation with theory.

Q. With your arrival Bharata Natyam got institutionalised and became a part of the educational system. What was your major concern?

A. The art had fallen into disrepute by then. It was necessary to bring the best elements back to it. In order to make the art respectable one had to, on account of its inherent beauty and vitality, take away the elements which were not acceptable to society. I am a firm believer in spiritual content of the song. The same songs which would in the hands of the *devadasis* look despicable were with refinement made devotional. The costumes were in bad taste. The musicians used to follow the dancers. I had to have aesthetics and also one had to bring back the musical instruments like the veena in place of the clarionet. With Kalakshetra as an academy of dance I aspired to instill among the trainees these qualities.

Q. You have choreographed many dance-dramas. Did you wish to revive traditions of Bhagvata Mela Nataka and

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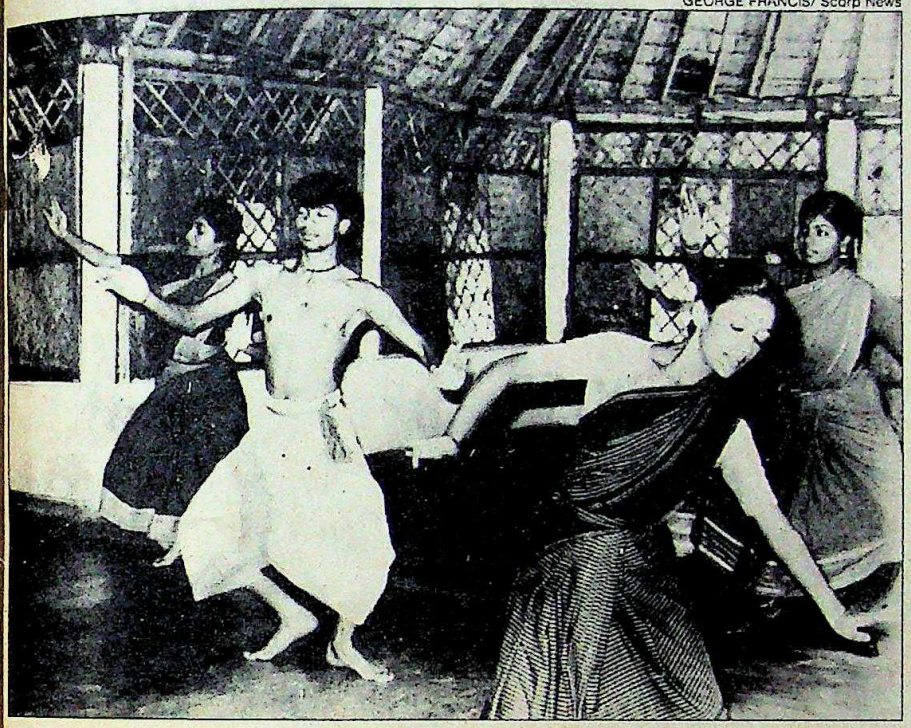
I'm totally opposed to cruelty to animals." But even though the unknown affliction has slowed down her movements, she must drive down to Kalakshetra every morning from the Theosophical Society building, her residence for many decades. She has the last word not only on the centre's aesthetics but also its administration and finance. And though physically unable to attend to office work, Arundale has a clear grasp of the strategy she wants to follow for perpetuating the pre-eminence of the centre. She recently got the centre's rules changed to transfer all powers in the hands of a new nine-member board of trustees.

GEORGE FRANCIS/ Scorp News



Dance class at Kalakshetra

However, her invisible grip over the affairs of the centre, where some 35 teachers impart music and dance trainings to 150 students, is most strongly felt in the emphasis on formal purity that has always marked Kalakshetra. A 15-minute prayer is still held before any dance can commence at the centre. The inmates are all passionately attached to their art. But one can seldom avoid the feeling of a high wall separating them from the outside world. Kalakshetra is wedded not only to pure Bharata Natyam but also to a brand of religious puritanism whose sole repository is Arundale.

However, Arundale's is not the life of a puritan but that of a rebel. Born of a conservative Iyer family in 1904, there was a touch of rebelliousness in everything that she did, including the whirlwind romance and eventual marriage in 1920 to George Sydney Arundale, the theosophist who came to Madras as prin-

Kuravanji dance-dramas?

A. Not exactly. When I saw Kuravanji for the first time I realised that the tradition was in bad taste. With excellent technique support from the great musicians and scholars, one visualised it in its total impact. I was fortunate to have support from the scholars and musicians. The students had by then acquired the technique to project the dance-drama concept.

Q. *Who will head Kalakshetra after you?*

A. I have taught so many people. There may be somebody who has the flame. Somehow it may hit a spark somewhere. I know some here are really dedicated. But they may not be well known. Because merit alone is not enough these days. You require showmanship and publicity. But leadership must come out of merit alone.

Q. *Are you keen on making Kalakshetra a deemed university—the University Grants Commission (UGC) has already inspected it.*

A. It (the deemed university) was not my idea. I didn't want Kalakshetra to become an unmanageable institution. The whole idea of a lot of people managing it (Kalakshetra) makes me nervous. The UGC are considering the matter. But I have set the conditions which will have to be fulfilled if I have to agree to make Kalakshetra a deemed university, not they. I have insisted, for instance, on Kalakshetra framing its own syllabus.

> **"The atmosphere is commercial now, even among many artistes. Keeping in mind the prospect of money, they don't want to give themselves heart and soul to their art."**

Also we will appoint our teachers entirely on merit.

Q. *But will not a deemed university mean better salaries for teachers?*

A. More salary... but less culture? For the sake of money, you cannot sacrifice many things worth preserving—art, culture, beauty, refinement, spirituality, character, and so on.

Q. *Why have you introduced the new scheme of management of Kalakshetra by a management trust?*

A. There were trustees earlier. But a lot of people were interested that the quality of work in Kalakshetra must be safeguarded. We gave a lot of thought to evolving a permanent system of management for the future. We wanted to prevent wrong people, in principle, from taking over Kalakshetra. But our new management scheme is not against any one person. We do not want to get rid of anybody. Every human being has got good points and bad points. I take only the good points. I want everybody to help Kalakshetra.

Q. *Why did you rush through the new scheme without even informing the executive committee of the Kalakshetra society?*

A. I wouldn't have minded calling them and talking to them. But if we delayed there might have been obstacles in the way of carrying it out. The actual announcement about the scheme may have come quickly, but we had been thinking about it for quite some time.

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"Little Anita is a moving bundle of trouble, tantrums and a maddening mind of her own.

Getting her to eat is an exasperating experience.

Lips pouting, she refuses vegetables. She nibbles at a chapati and the rest of it goes to her waiting pet dog. In desperation, I shout at her. With a disdainful look, she leaves the table.

I complain to my husband.

Laughing, he says Anita has taken after her mother.

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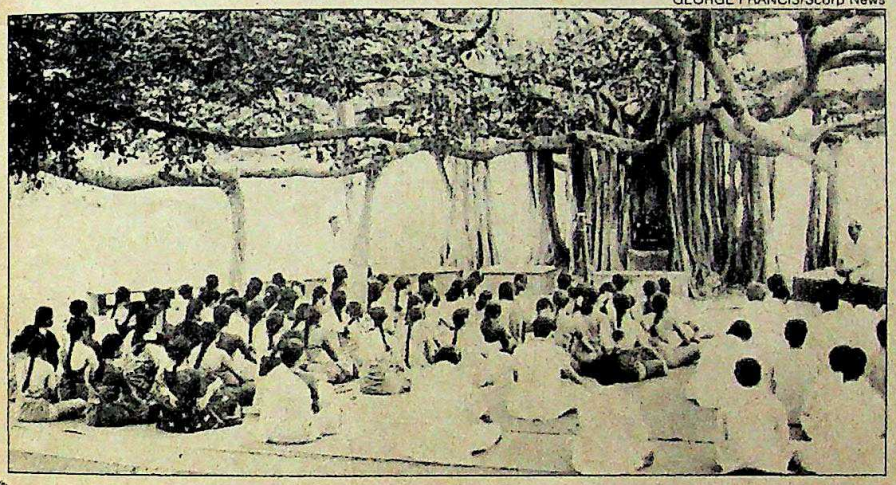
cipal of the Theosophical School. It might have been the shared passion for theosophy, animal welfare and vegetarianism that brought them together; but the marriage was strongly resented by the society of Tamil Brahmins. But it paled into insignificance the beside bigger rebellion that was on the cards. K.Sankara Menon, the 78-year-old vice-president of Kalakshetra recalls that the Arundales had gone to see a dance programme of the Tiruvalluputhur sisters, Jeevaratnam and Rajalakshmi, on an evening in 1929. "Rukmini Devi has never been the same person again," he recalls.

GEORGE FRANCIS/Scorp News



Morning prayers at Kalakshetra

She was obviously moved by the grace and poise of the dance form, its great resemblance to the gestures of real life and its limitless dramatic possibilities. So she at once began learning the dance from the veterans: Mylapur Gowri Ammal and Pandanainallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai. It created a furore in the staid Madras society. Foremost among those who wanted to dissuade the good Brahmin woman from learning the "art of the temple harlots" were V.S.Srinivasa Sastri and Sir C.P.Ramaswami Iyer. But Rukmini Devi's heart was set. She was determined not only to free the dance form from its narrow social milieu but also its all-erotic connotation.

When Kalakshetra came into being, Rukmini Devi was its only teacher. She had only one student, G.Leelavati. Later on she was joined by Rukmini's niece, S.Radha. She is now Radha Burnier and the present president of the Theosophical Society. But the early years of Kalakshetra were not easy. Before every dance programme, George Arundale would stand up before the audience, ready with a lecture on the social prejudices that had surrounded Bharata Natyam and the efforts made by his wife to defeat them. Slowly, a system which was considered disrespectful and only fit for the *devadasis* was restored to devotion and dignity. Explains S.Rajagopal, who is now the principal of the College of Fine Arts in Kalakshetra: "Rukmini Devi Arundale has succeeded in eschewing all the lower types of *shringara rasa* (the erotic mood) and made dance dignified." The *shringara* is an exposition of unalloyed sensuality. Arundale subtly transformed it into an expression of love of god.

Arundale effectively reinforced the religious element by beginning to compose her own dance-dramas based on Hindu scriptures and epics. *Kumarasambhavam* and *Shakunatalam* of Kalidasa, and the *Ramayana* in different episodes, like *Sita Swayamvaram* (in which suitors compete for winning Sita's hand) and *Paduka Pattabhishekham* (Lord Rama's slippers' anointment) were some of her classic presentations that have stood the test of repeated recitals. Significantly, Arundale began changing both the look and the soul of Bharata Natyam. She also brought into vogue the changing of costumes in between dance numbers. Recalls S.Sarada, till recently head of the department of dance at Kalakshetra: "Rukmini Devi used to change costume twice during a recital. She had a green-and-magenta costume made of Benares silk, and a white silk costume in which she would dance the last number."

She changed many of Bharata Natyam's stage concepts. Before her time the musicians and the dance programme conductors, called *Nattuvanars*, used to stand behind the dancer facing the audience. But she made the entire orchestra sit on the side of the stage, thus bringing the stage backdrop into fluid dramatic contrast with the forms struck by the dancer. She also enforced the "gurukula" system of the teacher and the student living together for the four or five years of the course. And she also enforced the diploma-orientation of western educational system—the best of both worlds.

It is of course for a long time now that Arundale has not danced. Her brief reappearance in the limelight was eight years ago when friend and fellow-vegetarian Morarji Desai began publicly toying with the idea of making her the then ruling Janata Party's candidate for presidency. But her real achievement lies in the unquestionable popularity that Bharata Natyam has acquired in the past half-a-century. "I've taught so many people," she says in her characteristic feeble voice, "there may be somebody who has the flame to carry on from me. Somehow it may hit a spark."

There of course hangs a question mark. She dominated Kalakshetra so completely for all these years that there is no second line of leadership in sight. Also there is the question of where Kalakshetra will lead to from here. In 50 years, the centre has gone on perfecting its grammar and technique whereas the content has always been purely religious. It has put the art into a greenhouse of religion, segregating it from life. Asks Sadanand Menon, connoisseur and dance critic: "Kalakshetra has become insular with its religion. But should not dance reflect the society as well?" Quips Kalanidhi Narayanan, a well-known dancer of Madras not associated with Kalakshetra: "I feel the centre has sacrificed emotion for technique and execution."

These obviously are questions that are better not asked around the time of golden jubilee of an institution as distinguished as Kalakshetra. The jubilee itself is being celebrated through three weeks of festivity. But as the music of the *nadaswaram* trails off and the beat of the *mridangam* ends, Kalakshetra has to decide on its course for the years ahead. Will it infuse into its graceful steps the rhythm of the moving times? Will it venture out of its niche of devotional themes, and explore the society around? Or will it stay insular? A lot of it will be decided by the octogenarian prima donna of Indian classical ballet who has often combined fixity and flux in her life as well as her art.

—S.H. VENKATARAMANI

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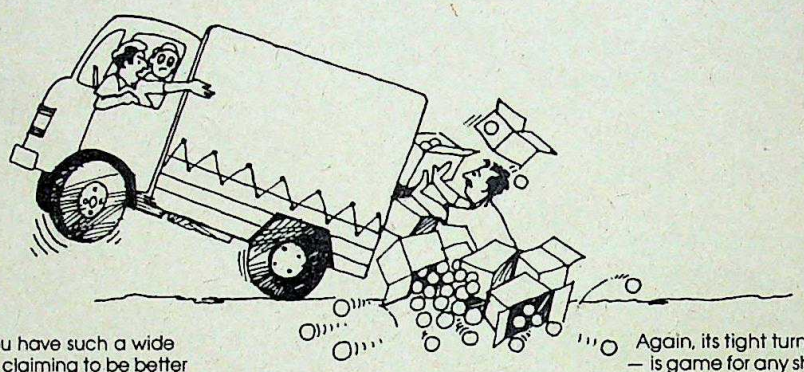

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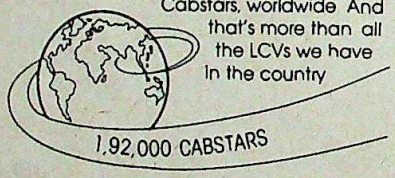

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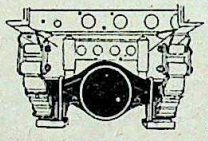

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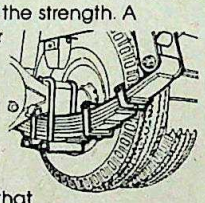

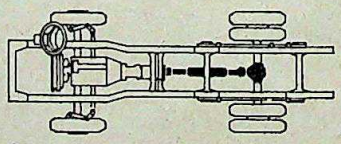

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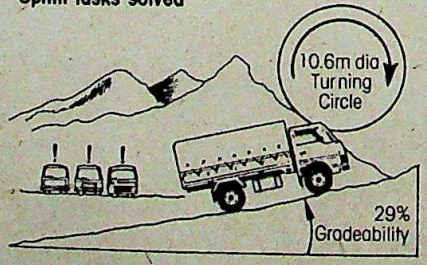

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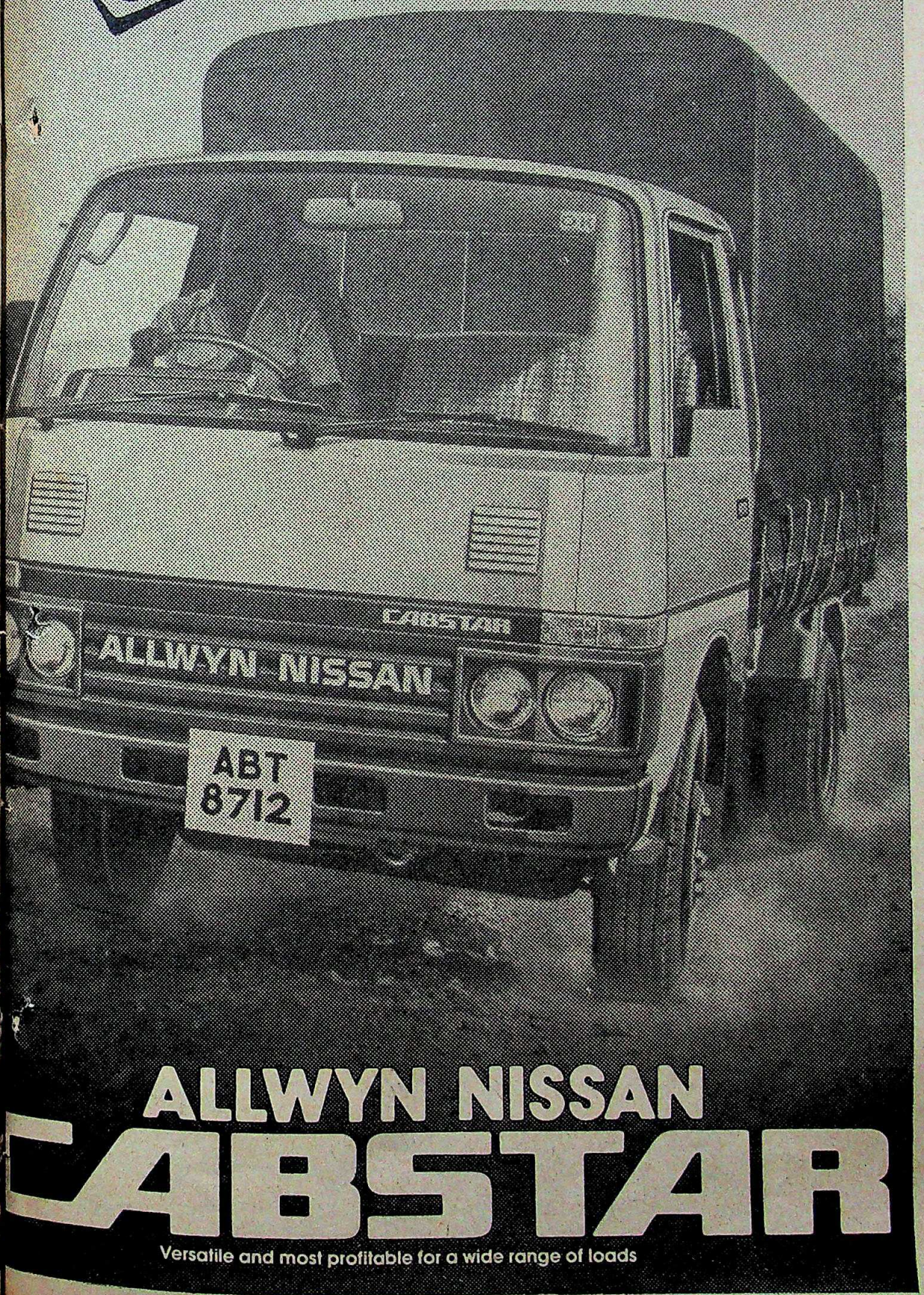

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MYSORE ANTIQUES

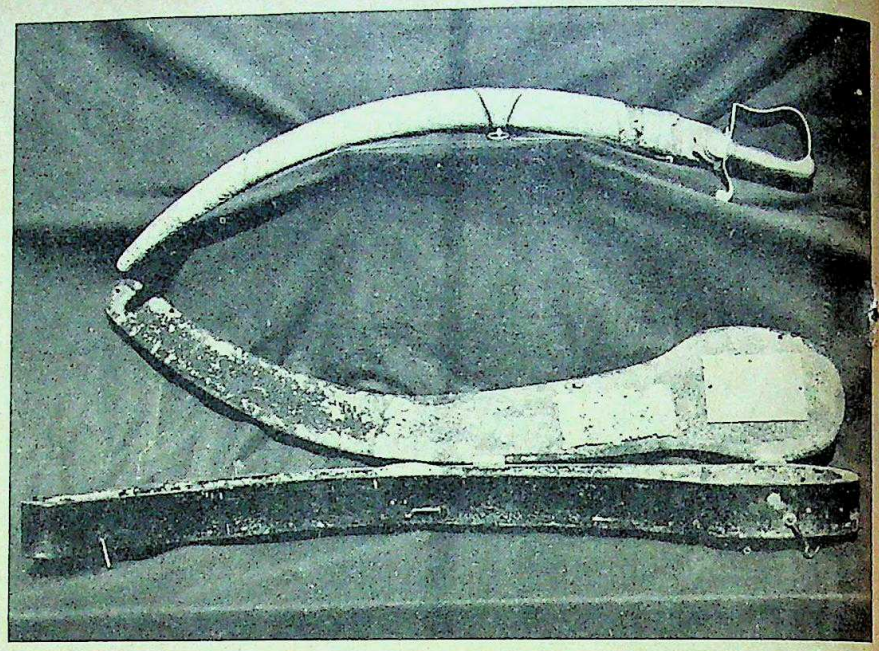
Rich Haul

UNEASY lies the head that inherits the crown jewels. And for Srikanta Datta Narasimharaja Wadiyar, the chubby scion of the late Mysore maharaja and a member of Parliament, the unease must have grown last fortnight after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) raided the houses of former palace associates and unearthed a king's booty. Among the prized items seized were: a sword said to belong to Tippu Sultan, the valiant former ruler of Mysore, a 14th century metal idol of Shiva, a rare painting of the Mysore palace estimated to be 400 years old and playing cards belonging to the Adil Shahi rulers. Ironically a majority of these items were seized from a temple in Mysore which was at one time presided over by the *Rajguru* or chief priest of the late Mysore maharaja.

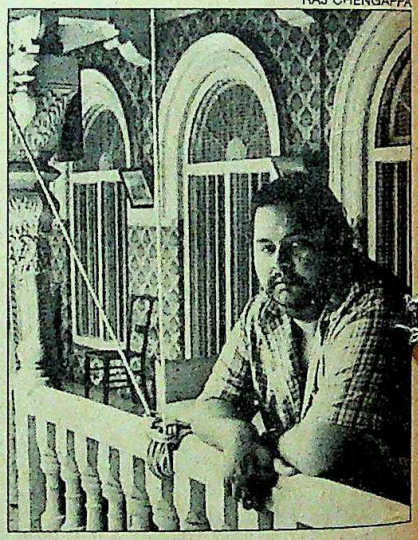
But Wadiyar, who is away in London, can rest easy for a while because so far the CBI has not come up with any evidence to implicate him. R. Srikumar, the bespectacled superintendent of police, CBI, said: "We cannot prove as yet that Wadiyar had any knowledge of these items leave alone their sale." The raids were in fact prompted by a letter in June last written by Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi alleging that Wadiyar was selling away priceless artefacts. Rajiv had asked the CBI to investigate the charge.

But Wadiyar's respite might be short-lived. Despite the 1972 Antiquities Act compelling everyone who owns an antique of more than 100 years old to have these registered with the Archaeology Department so far Wadiyar, who is reported to have a whole treasure of them, has not complied with the act. The state Archaeology Department has sent him caustic reminders periodically but Wadiyar has studiously ignored them. Now the State Director of Archaeology Dr A. Sundara says: "We are examining the act to see if we have the power to raid the palace in case Wadiyar does not register the items." If Wadiyar is found in possession of antiquities he is liable for penal action varying from fines being levied to six months imprisonment.

But unlike Hegde, who can get away by hurling charges against Wadiyar without definite proof the CBI has to prove that not only is he in possession of unregistered antiques but he was also involved in selling them. After three months of intense investigation last fortnight's raids is the only gold lining. They found Tippu's sword by pure chance. Masquerading as antique buyers CBI officials were astonished to find themselves being ushered into a temple where a middle-aged priest with the illustrious name of Shilpi Siddhanthi Sri Mahadevaswamigalu is alleged to have offered to sell the sword for Rs 2 lakh. He showed them a room full of antiques and claimed that these items were given by the Mysore maharaja to the chief priest. The CBI officials immediately dropped their disguise and seized all the items. They are now gathering further evidence before charging the swami. When contacted Mahadevaswamigalu refused to comment pleading illness.



RAJ CHENGAPPA



The sword (top); the Shiva idol; and Wadiyar: trouble in store

But if the CBI is yet to come up with facts against Wadiyar it has been receiving accolades from many including the prime minister for recovering Tippu's sword. Although its antiquity is yet to be proven, the sword itself is a real beauty. Sheathed in a gold scabbard with beautiful floral inscriptions the sword was kept in a mildewed box that had a moth eaten note proclaiming that it was 'Tippu Sahibs' sword taken by Sir Arthur Wellesley, after Tippu was killed in the last battle of Srirangapatnam in 1799. Experts say that it does bear a resemblance to other swords of Tippu now housed in several UK museums. But for Wadiyar it might resemble the proverbial sword of Damocles.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Mysore

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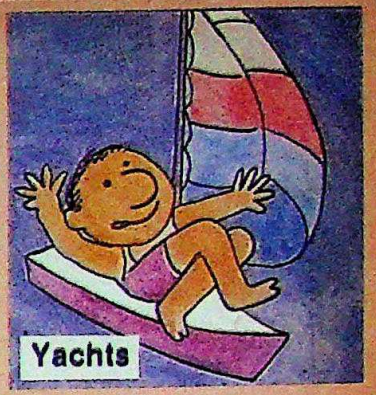
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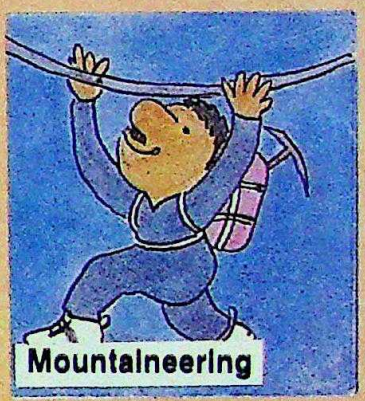
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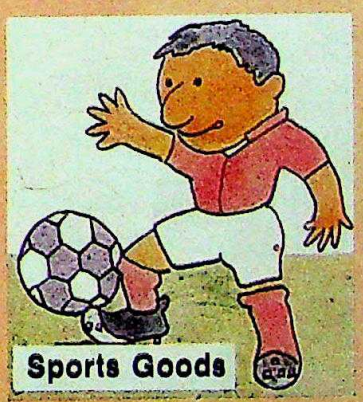
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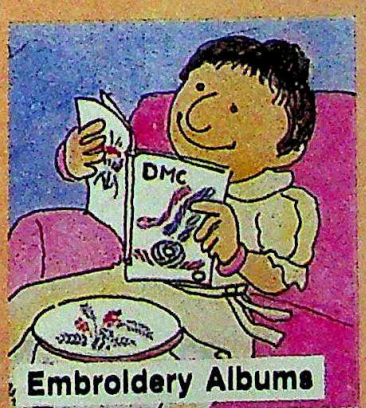

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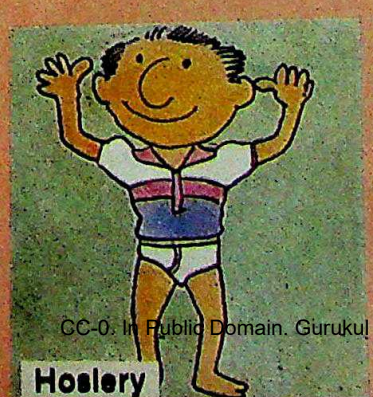
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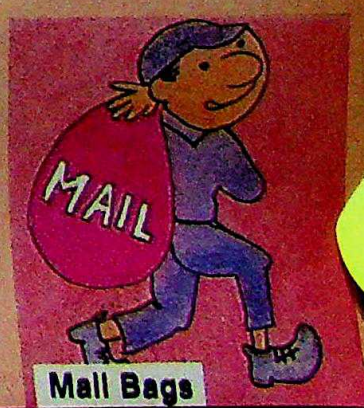

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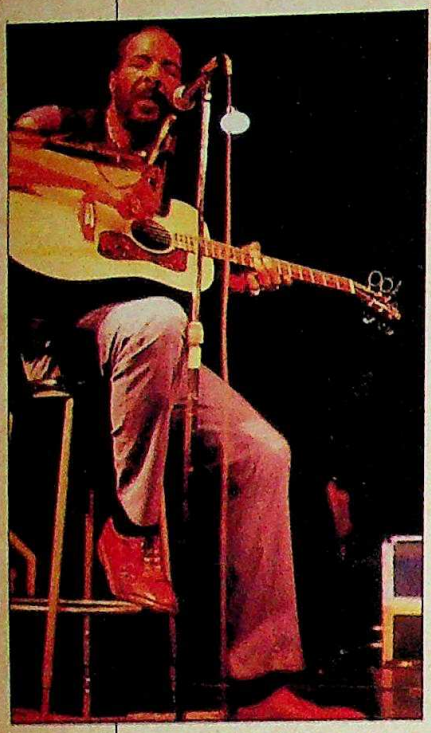


Havens: rock-a-bye Richie

◆ For the show-starved rock and folk fans of India, he came like Manna from the Havens. And memories of Woodstock came clouding over Bombay's Bandra Gymkhana Grounds. Opening the Wishbone Ash concert last fortnight was certified legend **Richie Havens** with his earthy timbre and folk fantasia. Richie's rich repertoire had them eating out of his hands as he belted out one scintillating number after another—from *Fictitious* to *Down to earth* to *Nobody left to crown*. It is *Freedom*, however, that still remains closest to his fans' hearts. When Havens swung to this all-time hit, the crowd simply went wild and just won't let him off. To the endless cries of "encore", an overwhelmed Havens said: "People come to hear the music but they leave with more than that. They hear a part of themselves in the song. And when that happens I love it."

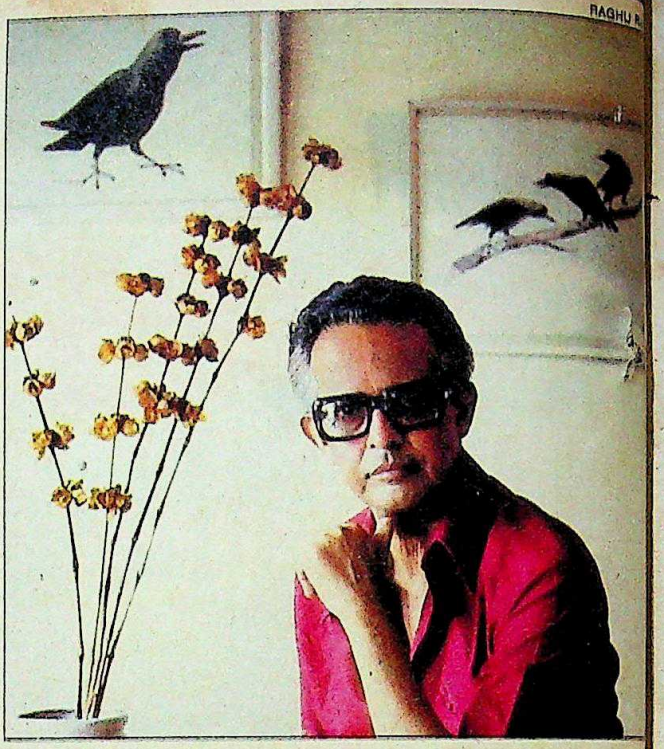
◆ It's a journey into the past. A voyage of discovery. A daughter following in the footsteps of her dead father and discovering facets of his life that had remained hidden to her in his lifetime. It is also a literary reconnaissance since the father is none other than Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the Urdu poet who became a legend in his lifetime. For daughter **Moneeza Hashmi**, "it is painful, it is fun...it's a debt we have to pay". An educational programmes expert on Pakistan TV, Hashmi was in the capital last month to meet contemporaries and admirers of her famous father for an audio-visual biography she is doing for the Faiz Foundation. Instead, she stumbled on a treasure of Faiz memorabilia and "people who had just been names became close friends". It will be two years before her film is finally complete. Till then, it's a lot of hard work and bitter-sweet memories. "And at times," she says, "I feel so angry that he's not here to help me."

◆ What's the next best thing to the common man? The common crow, of course, the Harijan of the feathered community. So when cartoonist **R.K. Laxman** is not outlining the misery of the *babu* next door, he is crowing—not on a ledge but at his eccentric easel. And what emerged from this exercise last fortnight was a flock of feathered friends—in repose, in ecstacy and in cawing ca-

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Hashmi: warm memories

RAGHU R.

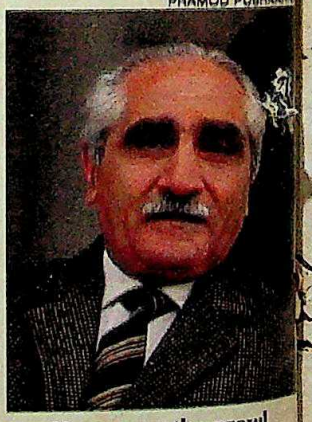


Laxman: crowing glory

cophony—at an art gallery in Bombay. And if you thought that the crow is only an ugly nuisance, listen to Laxman who finds it "the most human of all birds". He has been crow-watching for years and has exhibited his drawings the world over. Says the quiet cartoonist: "I have been communicating with them for very long. They come to my window sill and sit there looking at me. It's a joy doing these drawings and relaxes me from my regular political works." The conference of the crows, it seems, is a darn sight better than the conference of chappal-flinging politicians in the state Assembly.

◆ The night was young, the music blared full blast and the floozie on the floor gyrated away to glory. When suddenly our hero strode in, the cymbals crashed and a hush fell. The bunch of cops who had been ogling away at Liza or Suzie or Lily vanished into the cigarette smoke. No, it wasn't Amitabh Bachchan spilling blood and swearing vengeance. It was merely Delhi's new Lieutenant-Governor **Harkishan Lal Kapur** on his nightly prowl. And the unlucky target of the midnight raid was one of those shady cabaret-cum-disco

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Kapur: on the prowl

joints that abound in old Delhi. To make matters spicier, outside was a police jeep complete with an assistant sub-inspector, while some fellow cops took a peek inside. Sure enough they were soundly ticked off. Said Kapur: "There has been an atmosphere of lassitude here. And I want to change that." And as he vowed: "I'm not after publicity. I'm merely doing my job." Well, here's to *governor saab* and his night watch.

—Compiled by MOHAMMED ASLAM

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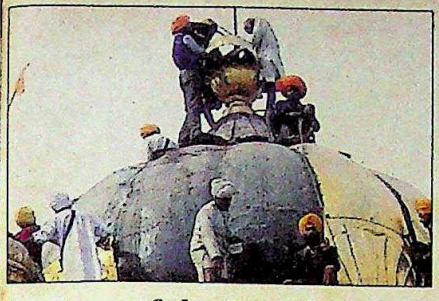
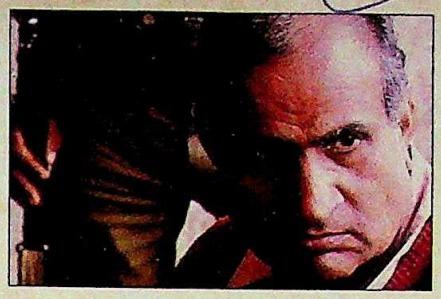


Capture of the Temple

The takeover of the Golden Temple complex last fortnight by Bhindranwale followers signalled a new crisis in Punjab, just as the failure to transfer Chandigarh to Punjab and Hindi-speaking areas to Haryana marked a setback in the implementation of the accord.

COVER STORY 24



Double Edged Scandal

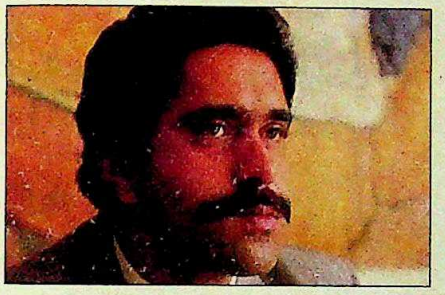
Rama Swarup's arrest last October had not threatened a crisis in the Government. But that is precisely what has now come about. And with it, the discovery that the alleged American spy may in fact have been an Indian intelligence agent. A report.

CURRENT EVENTS 41

The Thinking Man's General

India's new Chief of the Army Staff, Krishnaswami Sundarji, is the thinking man's general. The army can expect major structural changes under the stewardship of Sundarji who has already chalked out the goals for his term in office.

INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT 78



Fighting Spirit

Vijay Mallya, the country's liquor prince, has been in the news for the last year over charges concerning his involvement in the Shaw Wallace affair. A report on the high-flying tycoon, his ambitious corporate plans and an exclusive interview.

BUSINESS 120

Finding a Place

The Indian Panorama section of the Filmotsav '86 held at Hyderabad recently revealed a rising social awareness, expanding budgets and the hope of finding large audiences for the parallel cinema. Glimpses of three films testifying to this trend.

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Over Rated

They started out as the favourites, and quickly became the underdogs fighting for a place in the final amid persistent reports of dissension in the team. An on-the-spot report from Australia on the travails of the Indian cricket team down under.

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The new passion...

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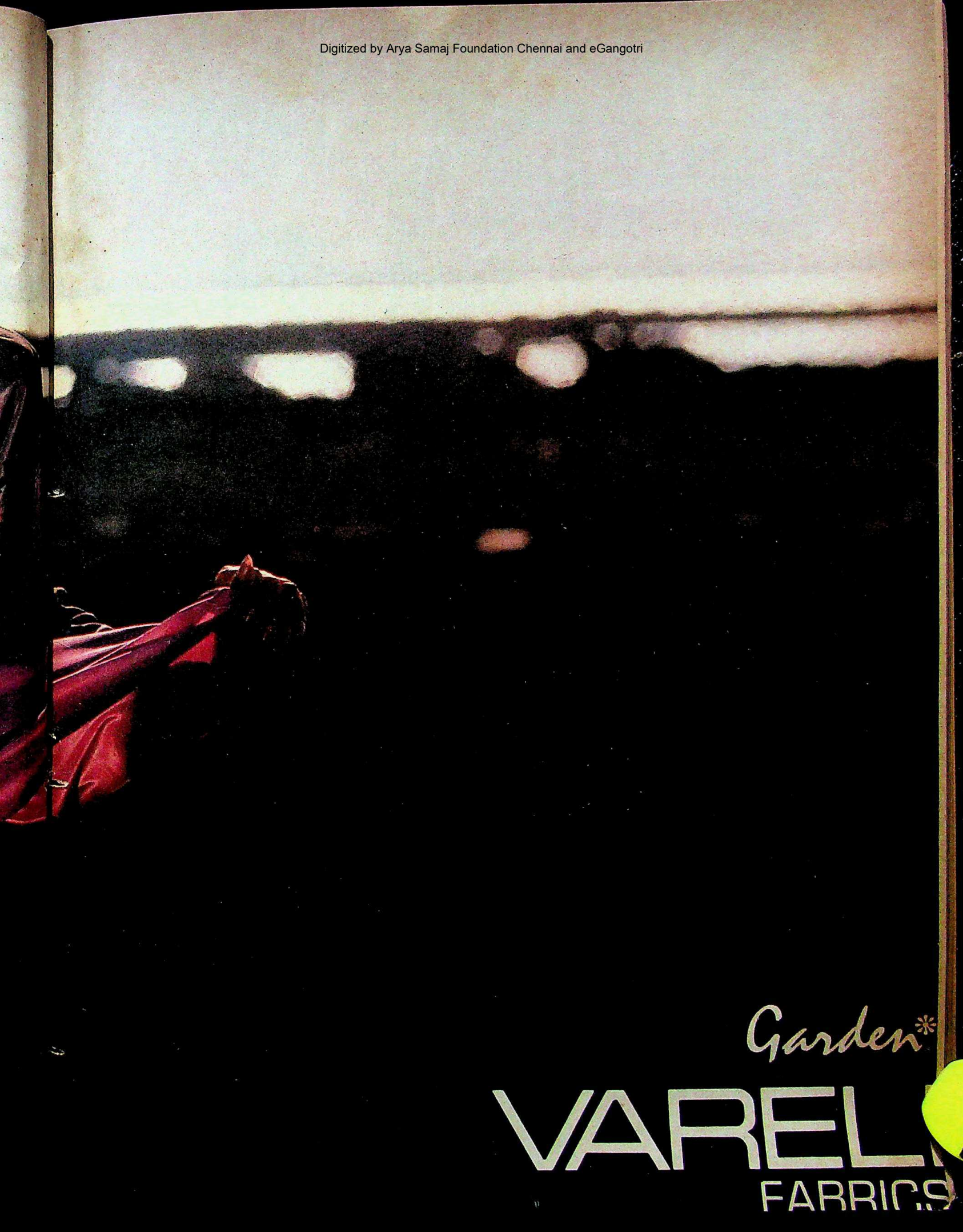

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BETTER LIGHT BETTER SIGHT

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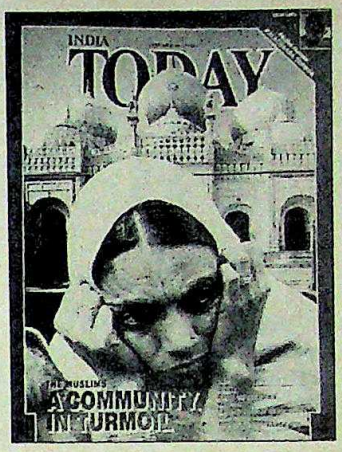

CODE CONFLICT

Your cover story "The Muslims: A Community in Turmoil" (January 31) was very revealing indeed. One cannot but be astounded at the row the maulanas have managed to kick up among the majority of Muslims over the Shah Bano judgement. It is a row which is hardly going to benefit anyone. It defies comprehension as to why the Indian Muslim leadership so vociferously object to the apparently innocuous changes in the Muslim Personal Law when the same have been modified pretty substantially in Islamic countries like Pakistan, Indonesia and Turkey. One only hopes that Rajiv Gandhi, for fear of losing chunks of Muslim votes, does not get pressurised into conceding the demands of the Muslim clergy and do something which might undo the little good the Shah Bano judgement has done. And as you so rightly say, making concessions under political coercion is not such a good policy.

New Delhi — **SUSHIL MEHTANI**

■ In your cover story, Najma Heptullah says that in Islam marriage is not a sacrament, it is a contract. That does not take away from the fact that it is a one-sided contract. If educated women insist on supporting unjust outworn laws, what hope is there for oppressed Muslim women? It is not immoral for a man to cast off his wife after 43 years of marriage, but it is immoral for her to expect maintenance. What would Najma Heptullah and others of her ilk expect women like Shah Bano to do? Beg on the streets?

Delhi — **DEEPA AGARWAL**

■ These mullahs are making so much hue and cry only because they want to continue using the Muslim Personal Law as a licence for polygamy and exploitation of women. The Muslim community is by and large illiterate and is under the influence of these religious heads. They want the community to remain backward otherwise their position and leadership will be jeopardised.

Delhi — **IQBAL ANSARI**

■ It is not clear why the Muslim community did not agitate earlier with regard to Article 44 of the Constitution and Section 145 of the CrPC. What is more intriguing is how the members of Parliament as well as ministers, can agitate against it, both inside and outside the House. A careful analysis of the speeches made by various Muslim leaders—cutting across party lines—makes it clear that the recent agitation is politically motivated to regain the leadership of the Muslims.

New Delhi — **DR V. SAGAR**

■ Shahid Siddiqui's statement that "every maulana has become a leader now. These people will take the community behind by three decades if controversy is not resolved quickly," makes sense. It is time the Government forgot about its votes and took a firm stand and acted decisively to uphold national integration and secularism.

Kolhapur — **TATYA TENDULKAR**

■ Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had said: "It's not for me to codify Muslim Law but some Muslim personality and senior people should come forward and see what can be done." Whenever the issue was raised, the Government had the same to say. Politics and religion should not be mixed or another Punjab-like problem will arise. There is a need for a group of progressive Muslims who can explain to their co-religionists that to deprive Muslim women of their rights is nothing short of an insult to Islam, which is more generous to women than any other religion.

Surajpur — **P. RAMESH MENON**

■ The best thing that the Shah Bano judgement has done is that Article 44, which remained a dead letter hitherto, is being debated. A country which boasts of secularism must have uniform personal laws for all the communities. This will also help the courts in awarding justice with simple and codified laws around. Thus the present day tendency of the so-called religious leaders to interpret laws according to their convenience will be curbed.

Lucknow — **DHIRESH BAHADUR**

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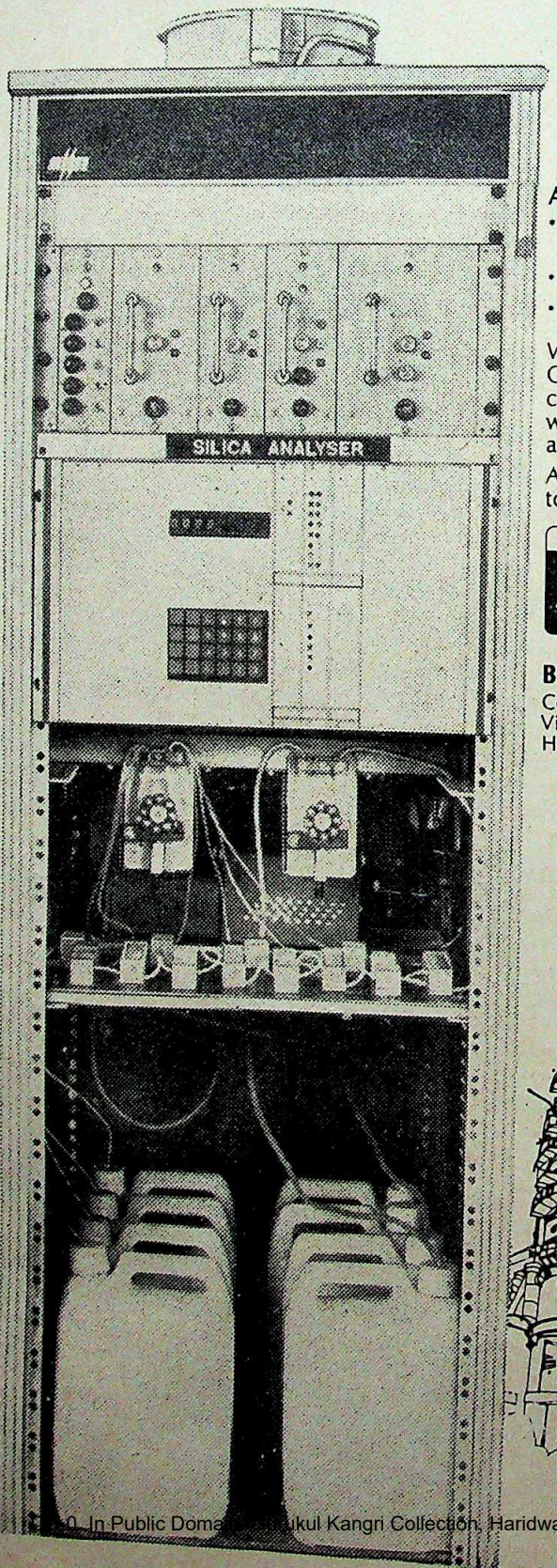
Water Chemistry now in a new light



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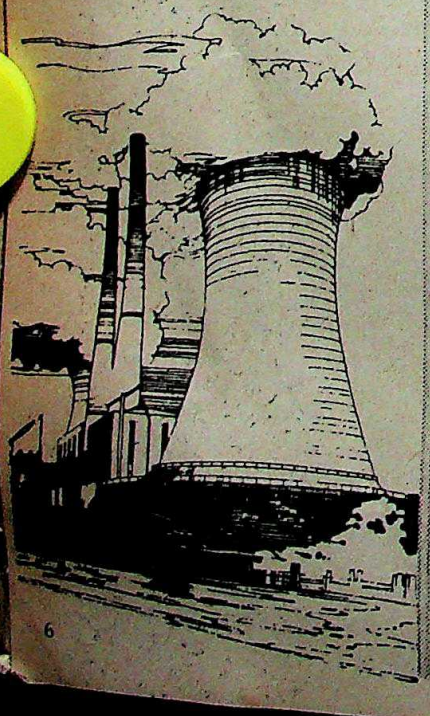

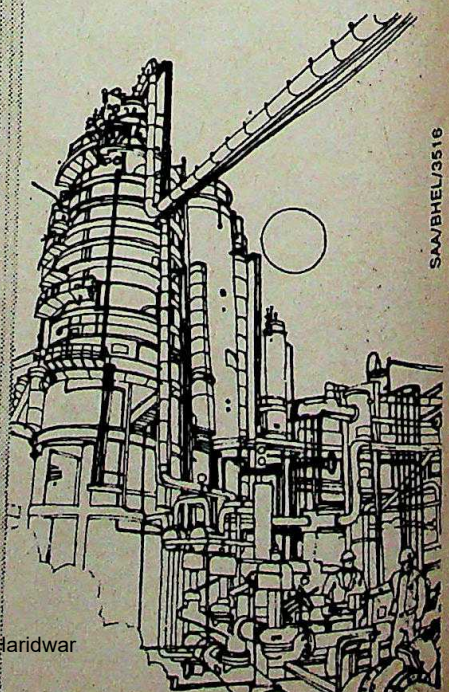

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LOOKING FORWARD

The entry of Ajit Singh into politics ("The Rising Son", January 31) can start a new era for the Lok Dal. The party only has people who have come from other parties, so a person beginning his career in the Lok Dal, with a clean image, might prove fruitful for a party which has never seen the face of triumph in the elections.

Surajpur — KAMLESH PRASAD

YOUTHFUL ACHIEVEMENT

"Coming of Age" (January 15) made interesting reading. There could have been no better achievement for the AGP boys in the International Year of the Youth than coming forward to shoulder the responsibility of building a new India. We are sure they will perform well, if not better, surely not worse, for there can be nothing worse than what has happened to the country in the last 38 years.

Dhaligaon, Assam — A. KALITA

■ The Congress debacle was expected when we look towards what the party had given the Assamese over the last seven years. It has once again proved that despite the Congress ruling at the Centre it cannot and should not ignore the regional issues.

Udhampur — KULDIP SINGH

■ The story on Assam was both enlightening and timely. The conclusion drawn by your correspondent, "though now perched atop lofty political heights the student leaders will need to show results quickly...a stiff test for a bunch of men and women with an average of less than 31", is interesting but there is no forgetting that the need of the hour is to mobilise all resources in Assam for economic development of all regions in a balanced manner. Central assistance, in a magnanimous way, would solve the starting problems and be the most welcome step.

Nasik — DEVENDRA BHARATI

POLITICAL GIMMICK

Your Comment "Trial by Publicity" (January 15) puts the basic facts about the tax raids on the establishments of a few well-known industrialists in its right perspective. By giving undue publicity to these raids, the Government is, in fact, turning them into political gimmicks. The only way to find an everlasting solution to the problem lies in making the system foolproof whereby the industrialists cannot bait the government officials.

Manipal — P. MADHAVA RAO

■ In your Comment you consider legalising donations to political parties as a sensible and welcome step. But one tends to disagree with this statement. At best you may call it a better step than under-the-table payments. All business houses are shrewd and if they make any donations they will definitely expect and get undue benefits. Besides, it will induce more chamchagiri.

The political parties must learn to manage their shows with their meagre revenue collections and not spend something like Rs 48 crore in three days, like the Congress(I) did at the centenary celebrations in Bombay.

Pune — M.N. BHIDE

CHAOS AND CORRUPTION

Kudos for your candid and forthright appraisal of the Congress centenary celebrations in Bombay ("Pomp and Chaos", January 15). Beyond doubt, gone are the days when the Congress used to be a symbol of reverence and dignity and Congressmen were synonymous with austerity and unrestrained demeanour. Today when the Congress is celebrating its 100th anniversary, the khadi-clad guys reek of corruption and tend to communicate a semblance of chaos and indiscipline.

Faizabad — ASHOK KUMAR PANDEY

TAXING TIMES

V.P. Singh's draconian measures against alleged wrongdoings in big business ("Raiders of the Lost Tax", January 15) are to be welcomed. But the people will judge his real intentions when he also cracks down on the shady financial dealings of the politicians. He can perhaps make a start with some of his own ministerial colleagues. But will he dare, is what remains to be seen.

Lucknow — M.S. JAIN

■ I appreciate what the Rajiv Gandhi Government is doing for the country and I fully agree with the finance minister's policy of going after tax evasion and coming down hard on those who practice it. But by giving so much publicity to the raids and the wealth recovered, he himself is bringing to light the inefficiencies of his predecessor.

Calicut — B. MANOJ

■ You have quoted the finance minister as saying "industry must create an environment in which the Government trusts them", but the pertinent question is—what is the Government doing for the common man to have trust in them? If it is indeed sincere about eliminating black money, raids should be conducted on politicians and political parties as it is a known fact that they thrive on it. Are the ministers able to account for their assets, and their expenditure?

Pune — A. VIKRAM

STRAIGHTENING FACTS

I was surprised to read "Cut Down" (Indianotes, January 15). The road you refer to was opened by me on December 3 in the presence of about 5,000 people, the entire 9-km route decorated and sweets distributed. Three days before this an old lady was brought in a jeep by some persons and she cut a ribbon in the presence of the driver and some others.

Kerala — P.C. GEORGE, MLA, Poonjar

The error is regretted. —Editor

NEED FOR CHANGE

It is very interesting to read about the Tourism Department of India's plans to attract more foreign tourists to India ("Bracing for a Boost", January 15). It is even more amusing to read about Rs 1 crore being budgeted for an advertisement campaign in the *Time* magazine. Tourists are not attracted by advertisements but by reasonable facilities. And the Bombay airport which is the gateway for most tourists is in the need for immediate attention.

Only if the tourism babus have the occasion to experience this long waiting time at the airport, will they realise that it is much better to spend the money on expanding the airport and increasing the facilities, than spending crores on advertisements.

Dhahran — M. JANARDHAN REDDY

CORRECTION

It is regretted that the mast-head of the magazine *Star & Style* was erroneously included in the photograph showing pornographic magazines in the article "Sexual Mores: Changing Scene" (December 15, 1985). *Star & Style* is a well regarded magazine of the film industry and any misimpression created is regretted. —Editor

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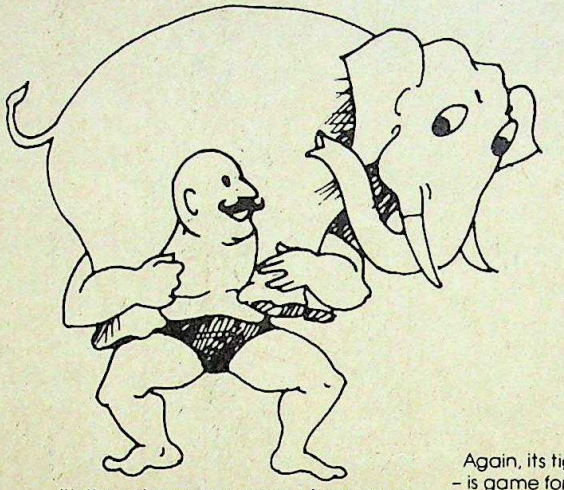
Its inner strength is easy to see



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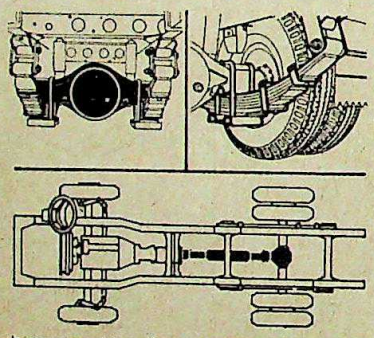

bigger and two times stronger. A corrugated body for maximum strength – to shoulder all the heavy loads, backed up by an extremely powerful engine of 75 HP. Indeed, a remarkable vehicle that does the job of two LCVs single-handed – for double the return – on the lowest maintenance cost. Because, Cabstar is specially engineered to last longer under Indian road, load and operating conditions.

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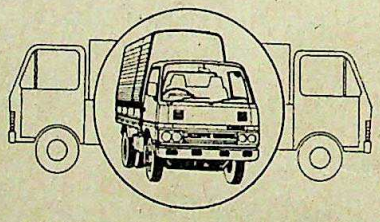
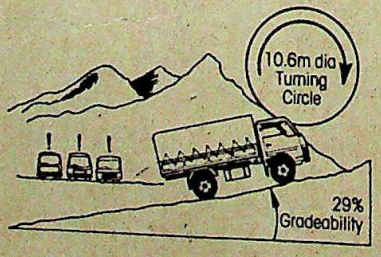


extremely economically. Because, its engine is highly fuel-efficient, compact and vibration-free. Plus, it has over-drive facility in the gearbox and a small knob to easily adjust 'idling speed', both features adding to fuel-saving. No wonder over 900 proud owners of Cabstar have expressed their delight on this score.

Uphill tasks solved



Its gradeability is 29%. Result: it climbs where other LCVs struggle.

Again, its tight turning circle – 10.6m dia – is game for any sharp bends. And all the wheels have dual-line circuit brakes, absent in some of the latest vehicles. Six wheels, as against the conventional four, make the tyres last longer, aided by uniform load distribution ensured by the structure of the vehicle.

Easy does it

A major constraint overcome: low slung platform with three sides opening, makes loading, unloading easier and faster.

A nice place to work

Unlike other LCVs, a noise, vibration-free spacious cab adjustable seats, the latest dashboard instruments, all-weather ventilation, single piece windshield, easy steering and a hundred and one innovative features, make driving safe, and a real pleasure.

The right commercial vehicle

Allwyn Nissan Cabstar easily wins on price to performance ratio ... More load on less fuel. Minimum maintenance cost and excellent dealer network for efficient after-sales service. Ready availability of spares. Greater versatility and reliability. Sleek look. Tomorrow's design features ... Yet priced low ... That's Allwyn Nissan Cabstar, the Right Commercial Vehicle, far more profitable for diverse transportation needs.

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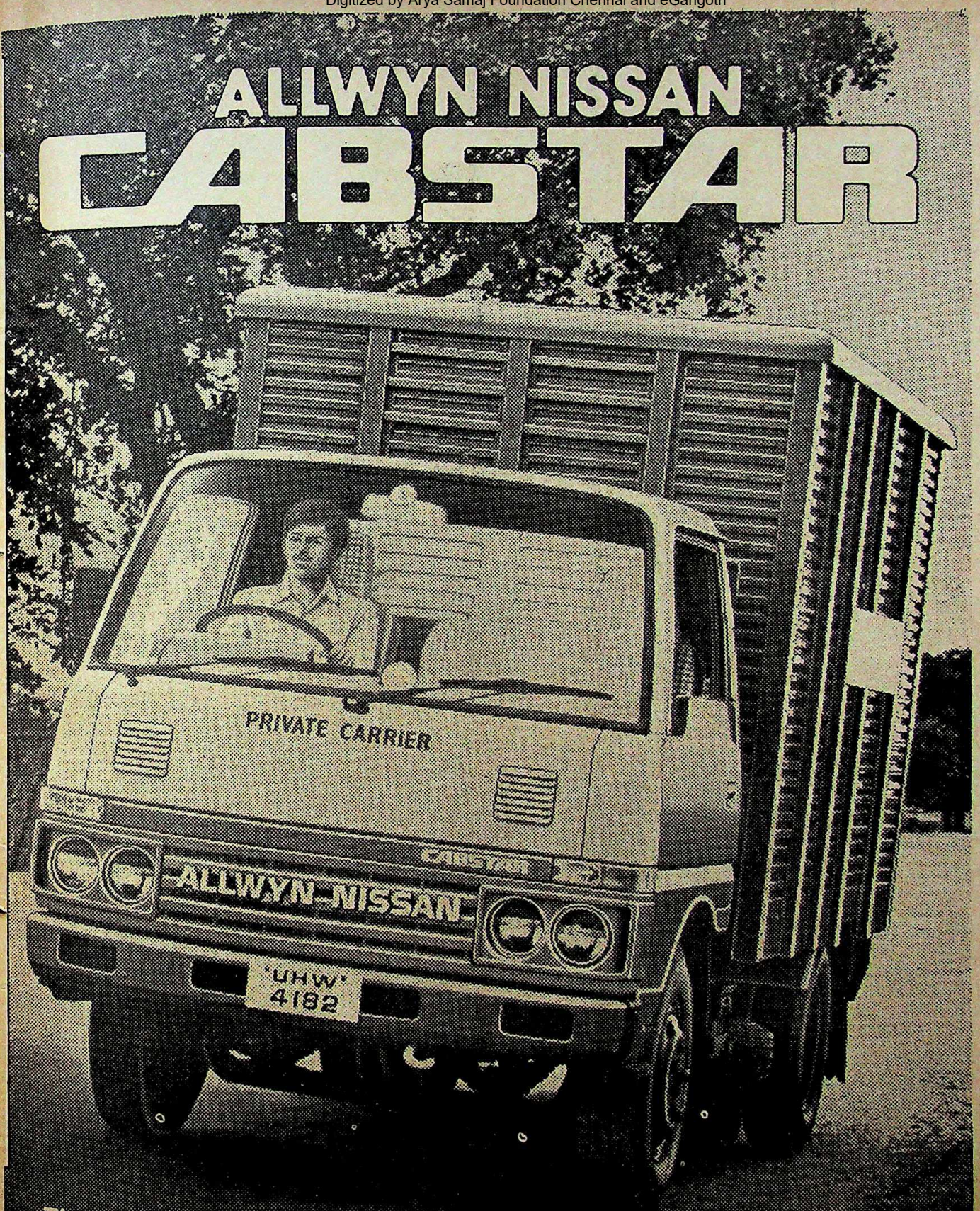

The difference between the light commercial vehicle and
the right commercial vehicle

Versatile and most profitable for a wide range of loads

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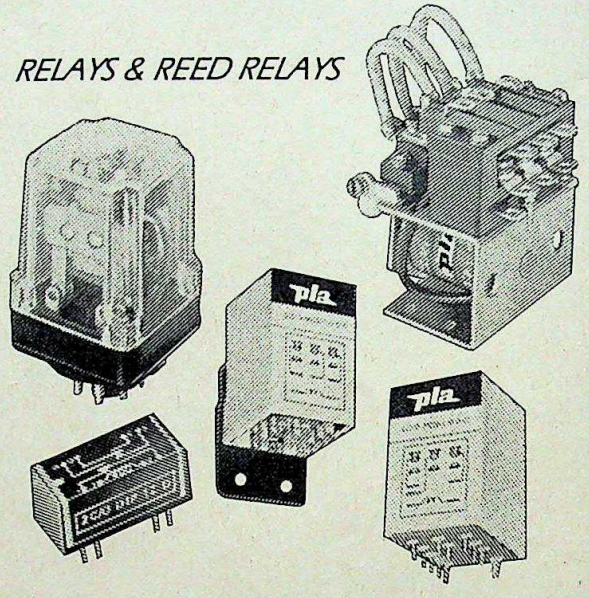

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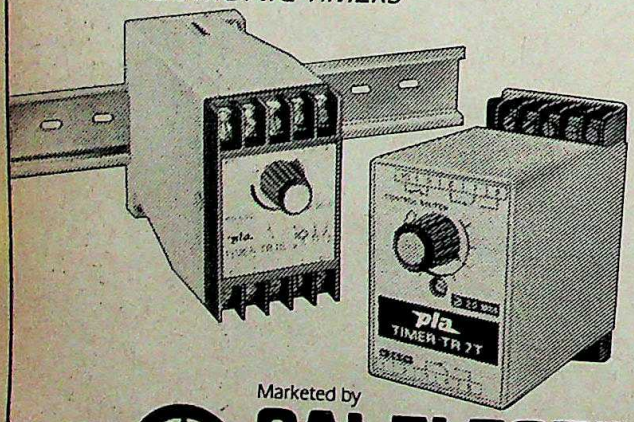

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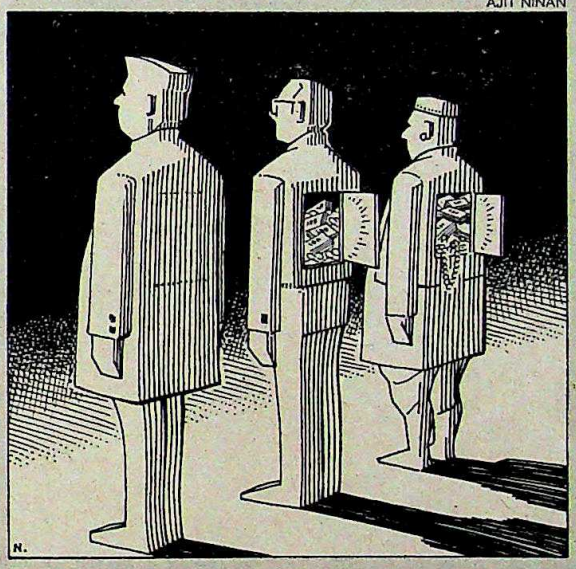
Political Immunity

POLITICIANS are judged partly by the standards they set for themselves. And in setting his sights on a clean administration, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has raised expectations of a less messy and murky political era. His government has already passed an anti-defection law early last year in an effort to put an end to political jobbery, legalised donations by companies to political parties, raised the ceiling on election expenses to slightly more realistic levels, taken disciplinary action against corrupt or inefficient government officials and ordered their premature retirement, undertaken the wholesale reshuffling of the boards of the government-owned banks following charges of large-scale bungling perhaps and malfeasance, and more recently, arrested or launched widespread raids on businessmen who the Government believesd have violated the law.

AJIT NINAN



All this is very welcome, and the only rider that can be attached to the Government's actions is that raids and arrests should not turn into a witch-hunt or lead to trial by the press. But more important than all this is the fact that there is one category of citizens which has been left conspicuously untouched throughout this period—the politicians. This is inexplicable because everyone knows that politics in this country has been funded by unaccounted money, that almost every candidate who stands for election on a party ticket spends far more than is allowed under the election rules (despite the raised ceiling on expenditure), and that it is the politician who has gained as much as a businessman through the creation and operation of the licence-permit raj.

Indeed, almost every major scandal that has erupted in recent years has had some politician or other involved—sometimes centrally, on other occasions peripherally. But the involvement has been there—in the Kuo oil deal, in some of the bank transactions that have hit the headlines, in the allotment of cement permits, in controversial take-over operations and in the issuing of key licences or permits. Yet it is the politician who seems to have the least to fear in the current environment, when officials, businessmen and others wonder whether they will next have the tax official at their door armed with a search warrant and a press release.

There is little to suggest that the legalisation of donations to political parties or the gradual dismantling of the licence-permit raj has altogether snapped the link between politics and black money, or between politicians and corrupt businessmen. After all, no one has seen politicians change their invariably expensive life-styles. If anything, the general tenor of politicians' life-styles has become noticeably more attuned to conspicuous consumption. Many of the Congress(I)'s leading lights stayed at five-star hotels during the party's centenary celebrations in Bombay a month ago, with no questions asked and none answered as to how they could afford to do so, or who was paying for them. Political campaigns in recent months have also not been marked by any significant drop in the level of spending. Worse, the prime minister has inducted personalities from the film world into his parliamentary party, even though it is well known that high-priced actors traditionally earn unaccounted incomes.

If the prime minister does indeed believe in clean politics, he must logically take steps that will demonstrate to the country that he means business, and that he wants not just clean politics but also clean politicians. There is no excuse for not immediately mandating the auditing of all political parties' accounts, and introducing legislation that will make it compulsory for every parliamentarian and legislator to annually declare his income and assets. After all, the last embarrassment a government professing honesty as its by-word wants is a repetition of the case of Jagjivan Ram in the 1960s, when it was discovered that the longest serving minister in the Government had not submitted his income tax returns for 11 years.

Admittedly, the prime minister has taken other steps to clean up both politics and the Government. Some of the questionable personalities who had surrounded the late prime minister Indira Gandhi in her final years in power have been sent to the wilderness. And his posting of reputedly honest men in key positions like the Finance Ministry and the absence of any credible suggestion that the current raids against businessmen are motivated by party fund-raisers have sent signals to all concerned that this government believes in conducting public affairs honestly, without surreptitious motives.

Elsewhere, the lower tax rates introduced in the last budget, combined with the promise of still lower rates contained in the long-term fiscal policy, should ensure greater tax honesty. Since this is being dovetailed with the widespread raids on suspected tax evaders and an as yet unspecified plan to deal with the black money menace, the country can look forward with some hope to a relatively more honest environment for conducting business operations.

All this is welcome. But the point is that the Government has not gone far enough and that other, obvious steps down the same road have not been taken. Indeed, given the wide range of measures that the Government has taken on other fronts, the absence of any crack-down on corrupt politicians cannot but be striking. If Mr Clean wants to carry conviction as Mr Clean, he has to take a closer look at his own ilk.

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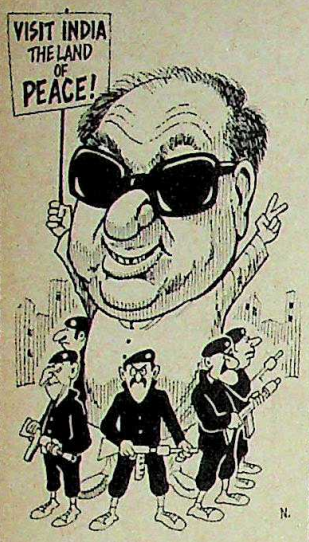


Captive Audience

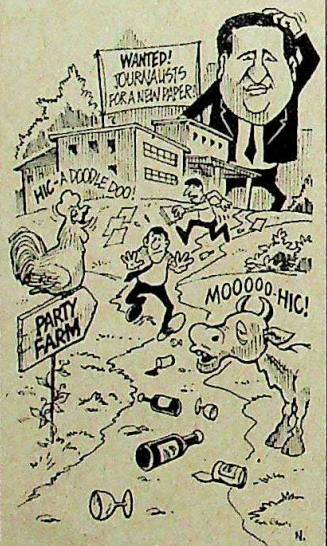
● Tourism Minister H.K.L. Bhagat's problems transcend those of his personal security. Ever since he took charge of the tourism portfolio, his major task has been to convince travel agents and tour operators that conditions in India are safe for large tourist groups and that foreign tourists need have no apprehensions. Conditions *are* safe, as tour operators have now realised after travelling around in India, but when Bhagat makes this argument it often proves counter-productive.

This was brought home recently when the minister addressed a group of leading British tour operators invited to India so that they could see for themselves that things were normal. This was also the theme of the minister's speech, but many of the tour operators left the meeting bewildered and confused. The minister had arrived ringed by commandos. Worse, they accompanied Bhagat into the room where the meeting was being held and flanked the minister, guns ready, even as he made his "everything's OK" speech. Many of the visitors appeared keener to photograph this aspect rather than heed Bhagat's remarks. The message they got was definitely not the one Bhagat had intended.

Welcome Aboard

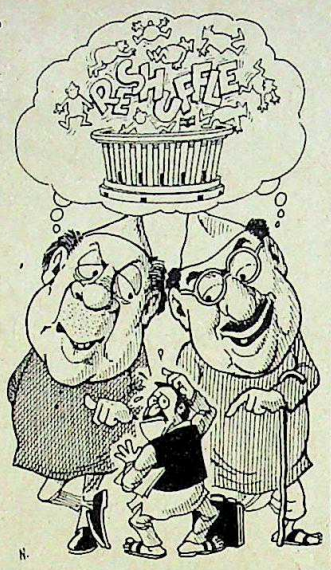
● Balraj Chopra, the Delhi businessman whose farm party attended by senior government officials raised a considerable stink in the media recently, is now turning his attention to fresh pastures. Going by the dictum of if-you-can't-lick-them-join-them, he now has plans to start a tabloid newspaper in the capital. In recent weeks, he has been sounding out various journalists in the capital with offers of jobs. According to him, the proposed paper will have no dearth of capital and neither will there be any shortage of advertisements.

Chopra says his intentions



Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

are to launch his tabloid in March and has also been confiding to friends that the newspaper will 'tell all' regarding politicians in New Delhi. He should know, since many of them have been frequent guests at his equally frequent parties. However, he is having lesser luck among the members of the fourth estate. Till last week, no journalist of any standing had taken up Chopra on his exceedingly generous offer though that has not slowed down his recruitment efforts. But one thing seems certain: if the paper does indeed get launched in March, the inaugural splash will not be at Chopra's farm.



Trying Time

● Calling on ministers before an impending cabinet reshuffle can be a trying business, as a young and up and coming Congress(I) member of Parliament discovered last fortnight. The MP happened to call on a minister who represents Delhi. But even before he could say his piece the anxious minister launched into a full and detailed account of how efficient he was in his portfolio, how he had introduced a host of changes, what further action he proposed, and so on. The young MP could barely restrain himself from saying that he was not the man in charge of the coming reshuffle.

He then went to see a minister who represents a Bihar constituency. This time he got a chance to say what he had to, but the minister merely threw up his hands in despair and said: "But why are you bothering me with all this? We (the veterans) are going and you (the young ones) are coming in."

The MP decided after this that there was no point talking to ministers till after the reshuffle and drew up a 10-day tour programme. A third minister came to know of this and told the MP that he was either mad, or foolish, or both, to be going out of Delhi at such a time.

Wet Property

● They were touted as the hottest property in town, in one of the most coveted parts of the capital. So there was no shortage of prospective buyers wanting to acquire the luxury flats in the Asiad village, built three years ago in an exclusive enclave of south Delhi to house athletes taking part in the Asian games held in the capital. But now the few non-resident Indians and large number of public sector companies which finally bought most of the flats at exorbitant prices find that hot property can be wet property too.

After the initial problems of running around to get water and other necessary connections, a number of occupants of the Asiad flats have been complaining of water seeping through the ceiling and walls, wetting household goods and in at least one case ruining a prized collection of books. It was only after the monsoons that repairs slowly started and most of the complaints have now been attended to. But considering the flats are barely three years old, questions are being asked again about the quality of the construction work that went on in the pre-Asiad rush, specially in the light of the premium prices that the flats eventually fetched.

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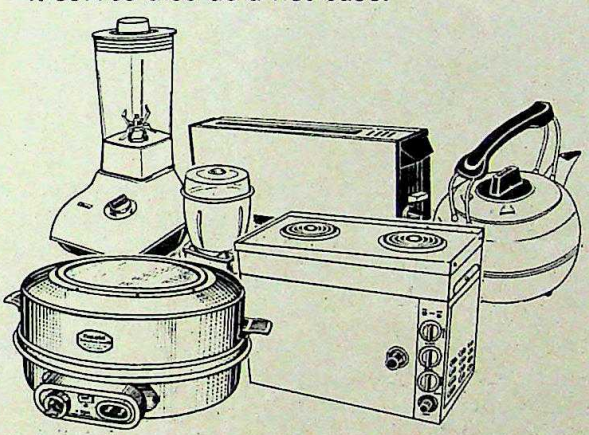

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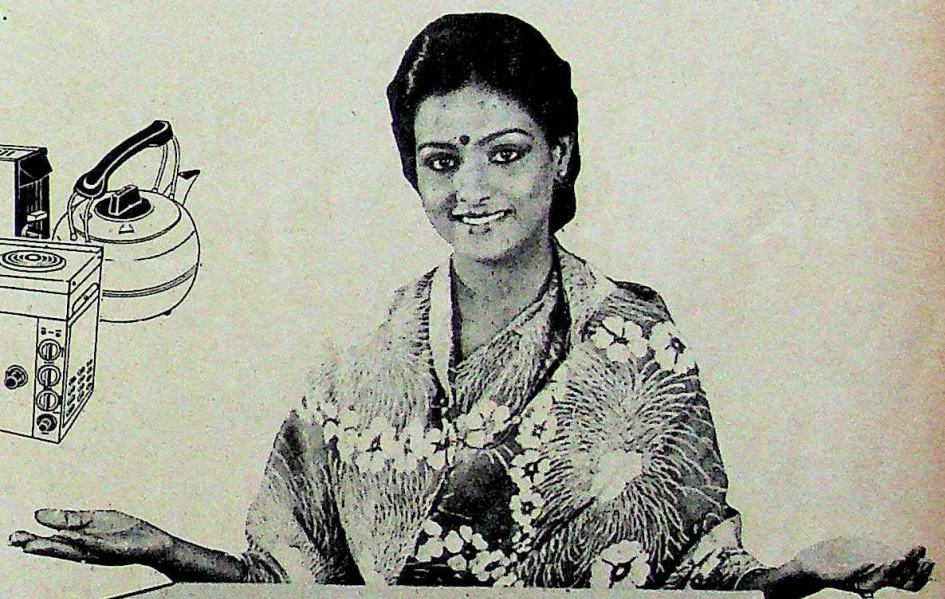

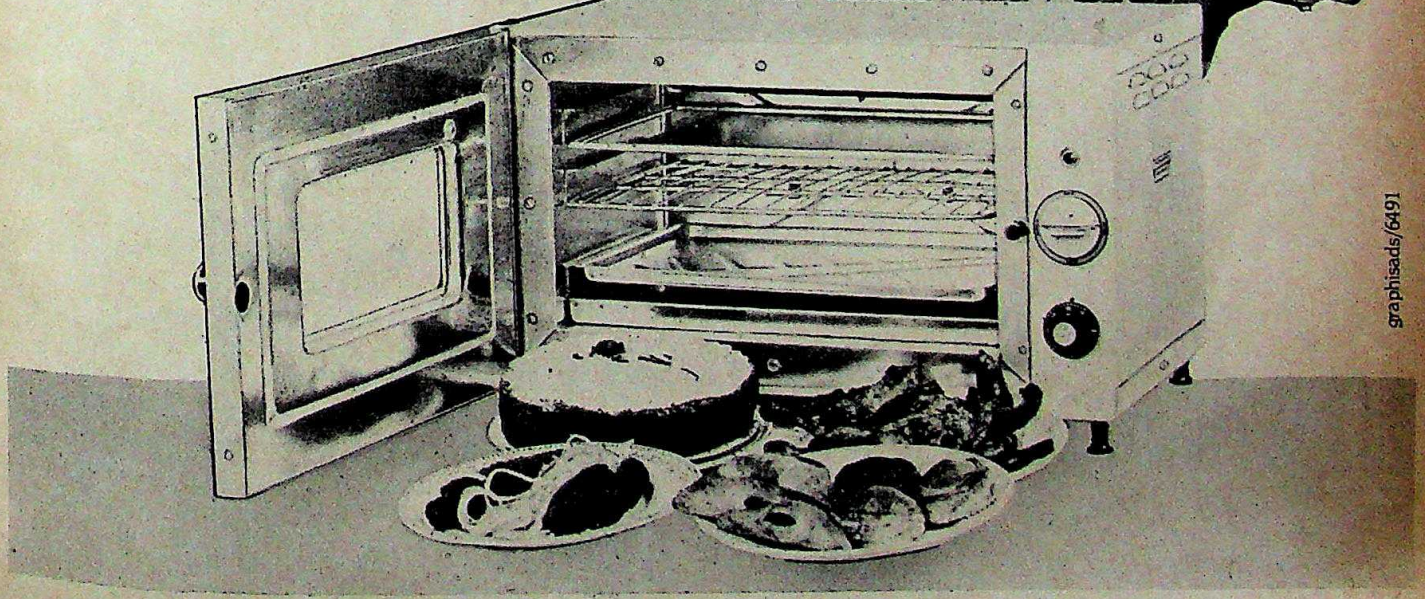

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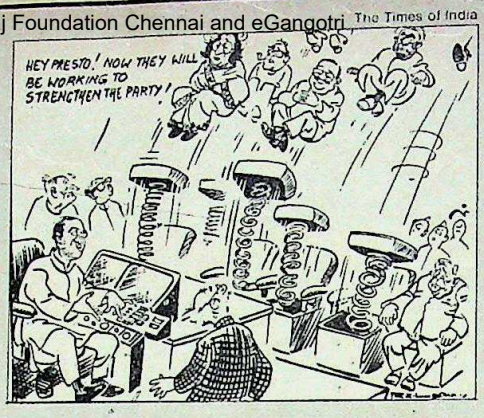

• *We are trying to involve them (the Opposition) in everything we do. But they don't have anything to say. All they say is that Mani Shankar Aiyar is a terrible fellow. And as long as that's the only complaint they've got we are very happy.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *The entire experience proves that it is unattractive to invest in India: the environment is not right. Patriotism brings me to India and then I get kicked.*

■ SWRAJ PAUL in *Sunday*

• *For the first time I'm being accused of not doing enough. It's not like my films. In three hours, I righted wrongs and handed out justice. But in politics, even a lifetime isn't enough to hand out justice.*

■ AMITABH BACHCHAN in *Imprint*

• *Despite our high sounding and platitudinous protestations about the rule of law and justice, we have constantly and continually denied justice to them (the underprivileged) by reason of an elitist court system inherited from the British.*

■ P.N. BHAGWATI, Chief Justice of India, in *Frontline*

• *My party has asked me not to make any statements about my stepping down. But working for 16 hours a day is too much of a strain on me. Another reason for wanting to retire is that in two years I will be 60. There should be an age limit for active political life.*

■ RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE in *Gentleman*

• *I am perhaps the most misunderstood and misrepresented public worker left today. The press calls me casteist, anti-Harijan, anti-woman, anti-industry anti-everything.*

■ CHARAN SINGH in *The Sunday Statesman*

• *He (Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal) has declared war on Punjab. But we are determined to resist it with all the resources at our disposal.*

■ S.S. BARNALA in a press statement

• *My husband owes 50 per cent of his success in elections to me.*

■ PRAMILA DANDAVATE in *Eve's Weekly*

• *The steps taken by the institutions after the (Escorts case) judgement have proved that they have always been against destabilising the management of companies. However large the stake of the institutions, they have dispelled fears at the earliest opportunity. This has been a very important fall-out of the judgement.*

■ S.S. NADKARNI, chairman, IDBI, in *Business India*

• *When I make a film, the ideal audience for the film is me. I should know, I should be satisfied with the way the film is.*

■ GOVIND NIHALANI in *Filmfare*

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*"You cannot climb the ladder of success with your hands in your pockets."**

Always remember : if you wish to project a confident, dignified image, the kind of clothes you wear do matter. They add to your self-esteem and to the opinion others have of you.

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* (Henry Ford, Pioneer of today's automobile.)

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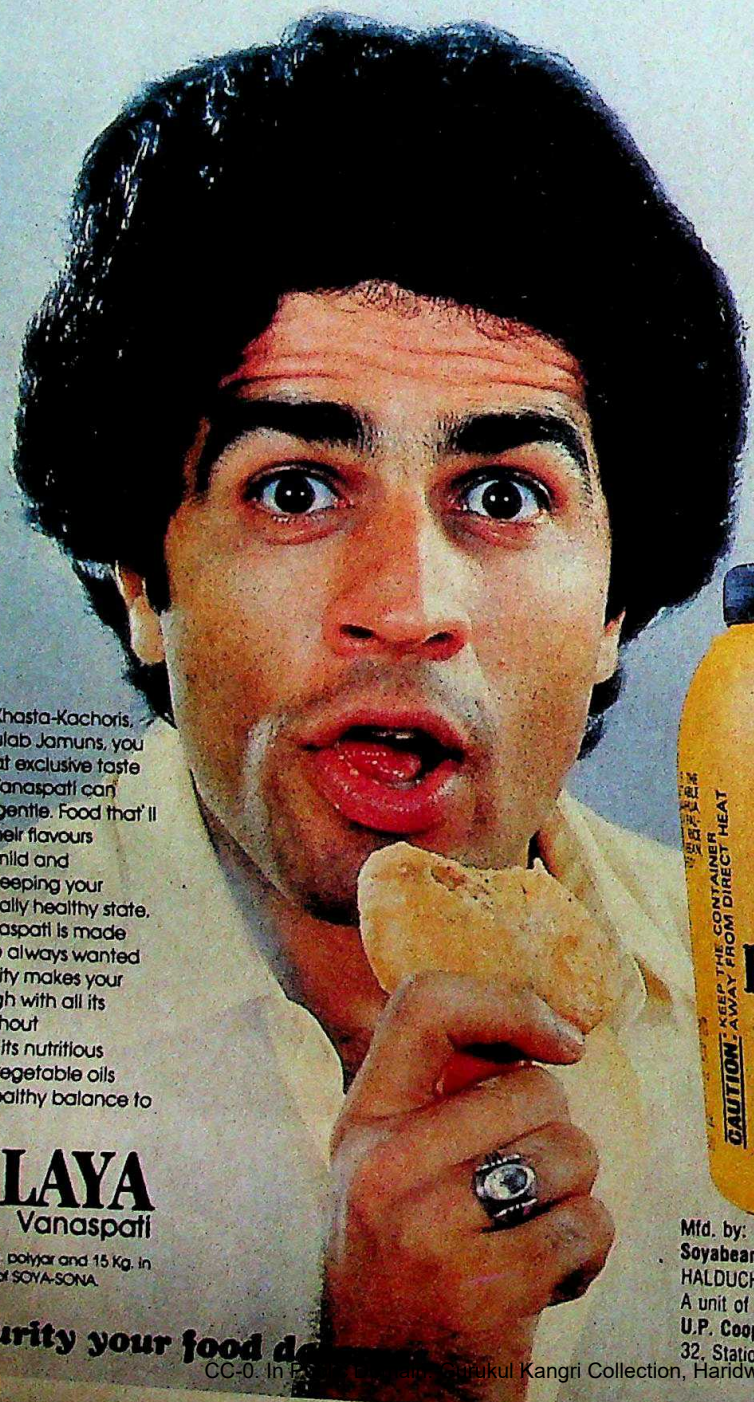

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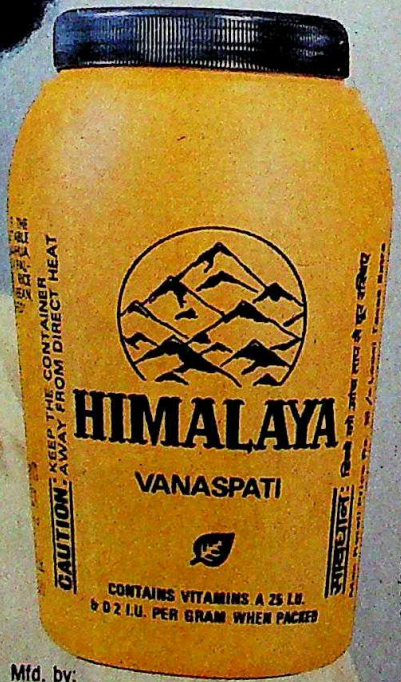

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MARK OF A MAN

■ The Assam elections, watched with bated breath all over the country, so crucial to the future of the state, had quite a few sidelights, one of which is from Sarukhetri constituency.

A couple went to the polling booth only to be told that while the lady's name was on the list, the husband's, by one of those cute bureaucratic oversights which do so much to spice up life, was not. The wife, hugely amused, teased her disenfranchised hubby: "What kind of a man are you? You've no right to vote but I have, and I'm a woman."

Hubby went into deep depression, not unlike the pit into which Bobby Riggs had fallen years ago when Billie Jean whipped him to the net and back some years ago. He—hubby, not Bobby—tried to persuade the presiding officer to let him vote as it was a question of prestige and all that. The officer, naturally, refused. But one more look at the stricken face and all his instincts of male superiority and solidarity came to the fore. He picked up the bottle of indelible ink and delicately dabbed some on hubby's finger. His face radiant, the husband went off to flourish the evidence in his wife's face. When it is a marriage that is at stake, what's a little lie now and then?

WAGES OF SIN

■ Show a human gold and the eyes glisten, knees falter and he or she starts blubbering. For if diamonds are forever then gold is eternal and to have a gleaming golden bauble round slender necks and fingers is bliss. The woman who visited the jeweller's in Vijayapura, Karnataka, obviously thought the same, for she made the jeweller pull out ring after ring from the tray before settling down to make her choice.

Which she did after agonised deliberation; only, when the jeweller did some arithmetic, he found that she had seen eight rings, chosen one and returned only six. In vain did she cry that she didn't have the missing ring; in vain did she turn out all her belongings; he was adamant: "You must pay, or I'll call the police." She paid up Rs 180.

As it turned out, the shopkeeper was right to be suspicious. That night, the woman suddenly groaned with what seemed like appendicitis but turned out to be a stomach upset. She was admitted to hospital the next day and admitted to doctors that she had swallowed the ring. Truly it is written by the all-purpose sage: "Nobody digests stolen goods."

COMMUTER'S ITCH

■ The local trains of Bombay are very convenient transport. Or were, going by the mutterings of a group of commuters last fortnight.

When they got off at Churchgate, the commuters were a little difficult to talk to, not because they were from a public school, but because they were all engaged in a disco version of St Vitus's Dance. With some difficulty, they blurted out their sorry tale:

On the run from one of the longer-distance suburbs, there where the nightingale no longer sings, the travellers were jolted out of their morning stupor by a shower of manna thrown by some urchins at a station. They reached eagerly for the holy gift only to discover that the manna was a particularly potent powder much beloved of B-grade comedy films: scratching powder, which causes one to try and skin onself whenever one comes into contact with it — preferably alive. Why the urchins had blessed the compartment with this itchy substance was not clear, but they had, and the travellers scratched from Andheri to Bandra to Bombay Central to Churchgate all the way to the toilets. It wasn't surprising that all of them were simply itching to get their hands on the so-and-so's who'd done this to them.

CHARMED RETURNS

■ Snakes are revered creatures, the companions of Gods and soul-mates of sadhus. No devout Hindu will kill a snake in the house, preferring to shoo it away after feeding it. Last month, however, a gentleman in a town near Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, was discovering the truth of the old adage about too much of a good thing.

He sensed there were snakes in the house—at night they did the *bhangra* in the loft, which did not exactly make for restful slumber. In between nightmares of being choked to death he decided they had to go. So he called in a snake-charmer who made a few passes with his *been* and the snakes, like Mac's guests, stood not on the order of their going but went. A few days later they were back; the snake-charmer reappeared and lured them away. A few days later....

When the cycle of snakes, *bhangra*, snake-charmer was repeated five times, he got suspicious. He kept a close watch and soon caught the snake-charmer snake-handed smuggling the reptiles in. You might also call it, if you please, the recurring deposit scheme.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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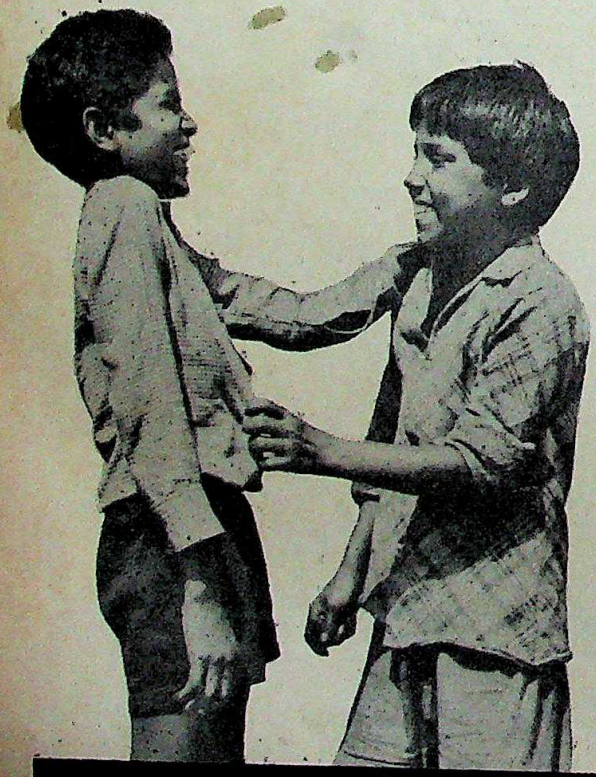
"If leprosy were always infectious, you might have got it by now"

Some startling facts that shatter a myth

- Leprosy is the least infectious of all infectious diseases. Besides, four out of five leprosy cases in India are the non-infectious kind. Of those who come into prolonged contact with infectious cases, less than 5% actually catch the disease.
- Patients with severe deformities may not always be infectious.
- Leprosy doesn't strike overnight. It can take years to manifest itself.
- Leprosy is not hereditary.
- Leprosy is curable. A full course of medication and treatment is all that a leprosy patient needs.



The true identity of the leprosy patient has been concealed for want of community support.

- Leprosy need not result in deformities at all. If detected and treated early, it leaves no physical or psychological scars.
- Leprosy can be cured even at an advanced stage, though deformities cannot always be remedied then.
- Leprosy is not a poor man's disease. It can occur in any social or economic class, even among the affluent.
- Leprosy is not only an adult's disease; 30% of all newly detected cases are children.
- The treatment available today renders even the most infectious cases non-infectious within five or six weeks.

The first signs of leprosy

- A pale or red patch which could be oily, smooth or dry. The patch is neither painful nor itchy.
- Loss of hair and lack of sweating in the discoloured area.
- Numbness in the patch.
- A tingling or 'ant-crawling' sensation along the affected nerve.

Remember, leprosy is curable. All it needs is :

— Early detection
— Early intervention
— Sustained treatment
— Community support throughout.

You can help

Drive away the stigma. Encourage leprosy patients to lead a normal life. Remind them — and yourself — that they pose no threat to their family or friends. Only you can help them retain their place in society.

All you need is an open mind.

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For further information, write to : Leprosy Awareness Campaign, C/o UNICEF Information Service, 73 Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110 003.

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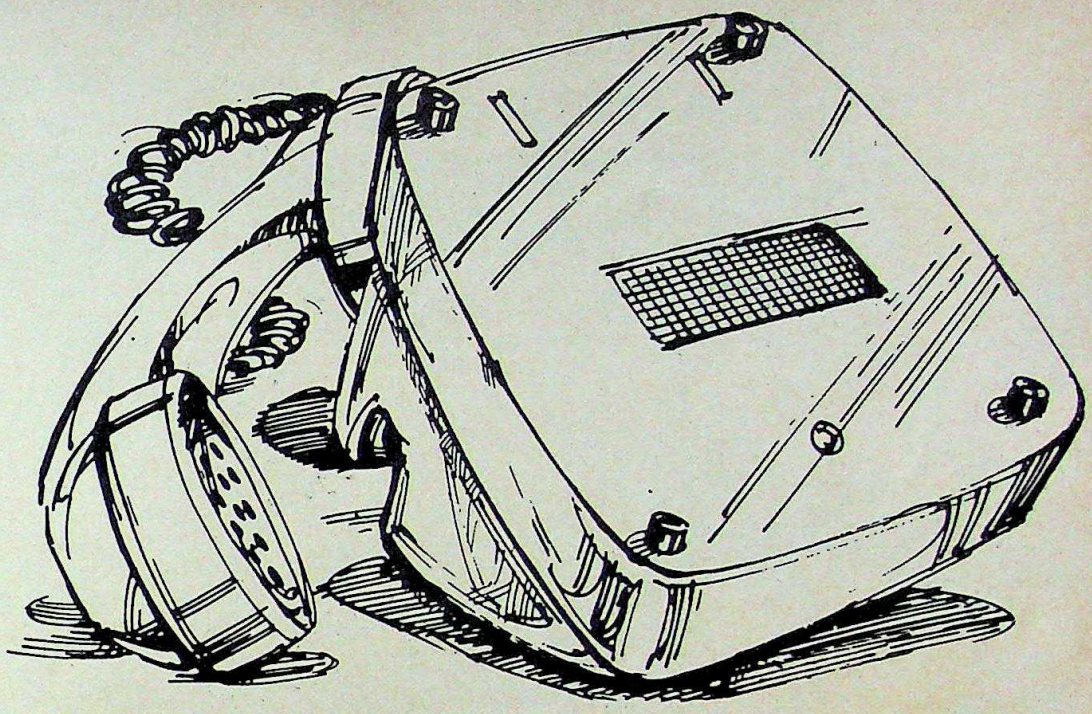

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If the weather is fair, the exchange is still ticking and the instrument is fit but silent, then the cable's credentials need to be checked.

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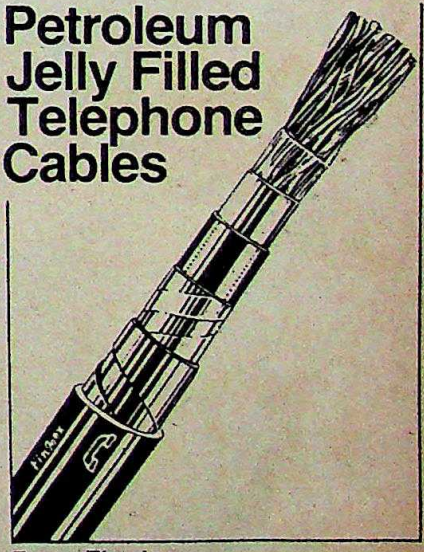

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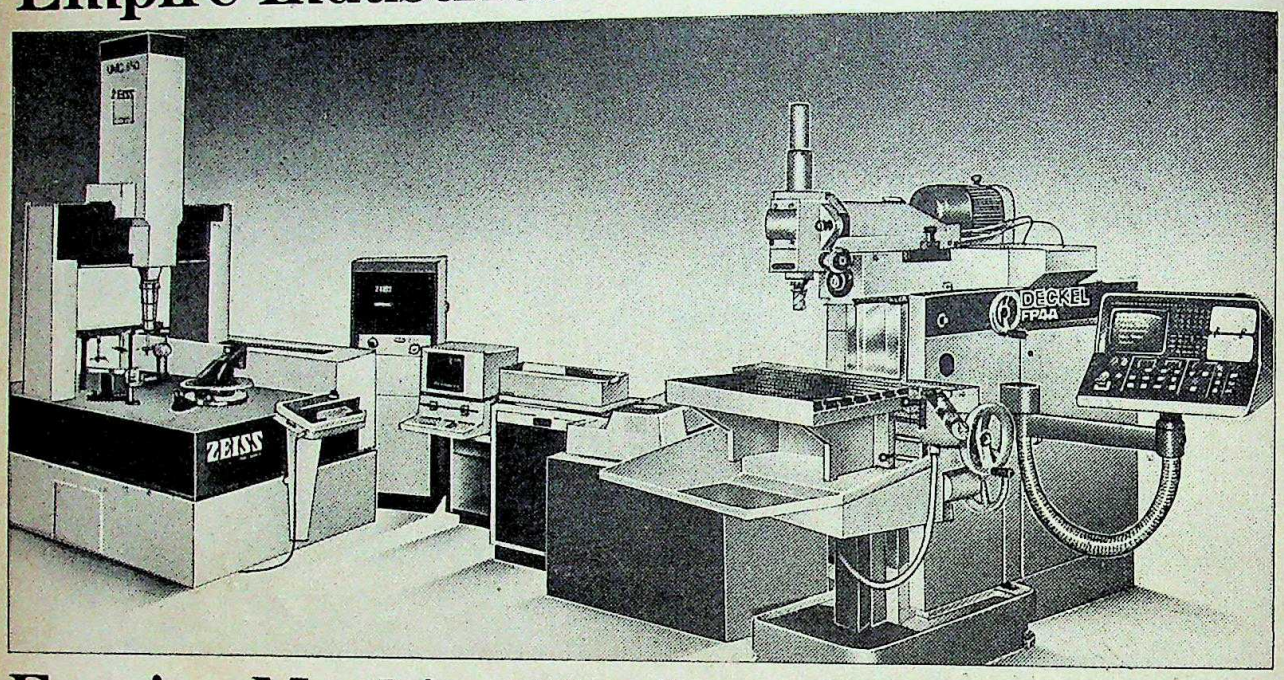

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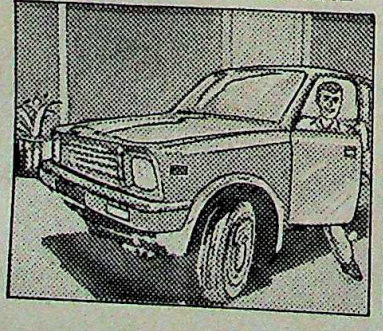

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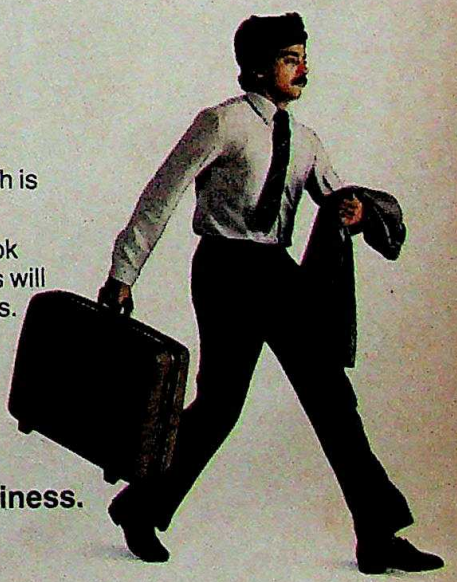

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PUNJAB

Capture of the Temple

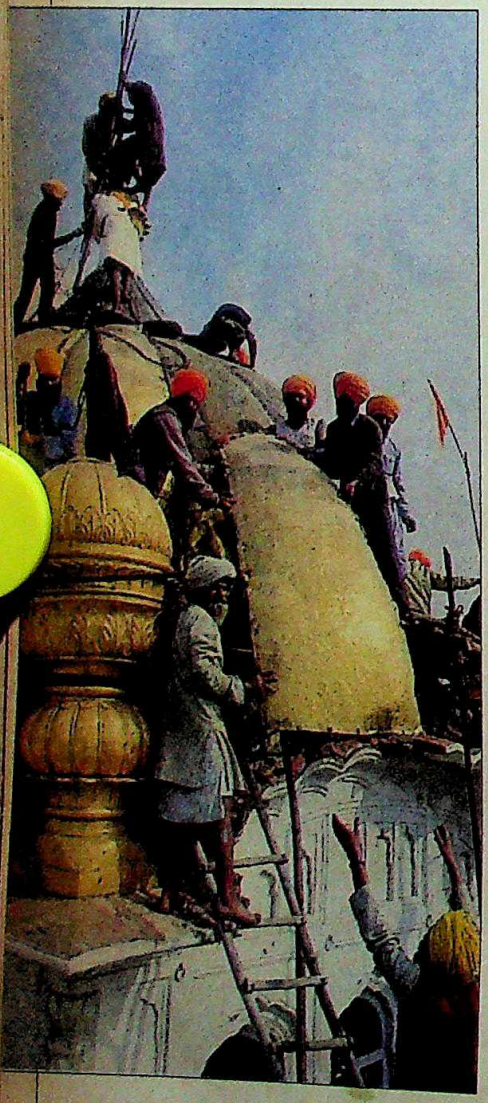
ONCE again the swords are out and the complex housing Amritsar's Golden Temple rings to militant cries. Once again the hotheads are back in control of the holiest of Sikh shrines which they wrested from a weak-kneed Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and plunged Punjab's fledgeling Akali Government into fresh uncertainty. Once again tremors of concern swept across the country as a volatile Punjab seemed drawn inexorably to the brink of a past no one wants to revisit. No one, except perhaps the inheritors of the Bhindranwale creed—the Damdami Taksal and the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), whose cadres last fortnight took over the complex and awaited the inevitable government and SGPC action to oust them.

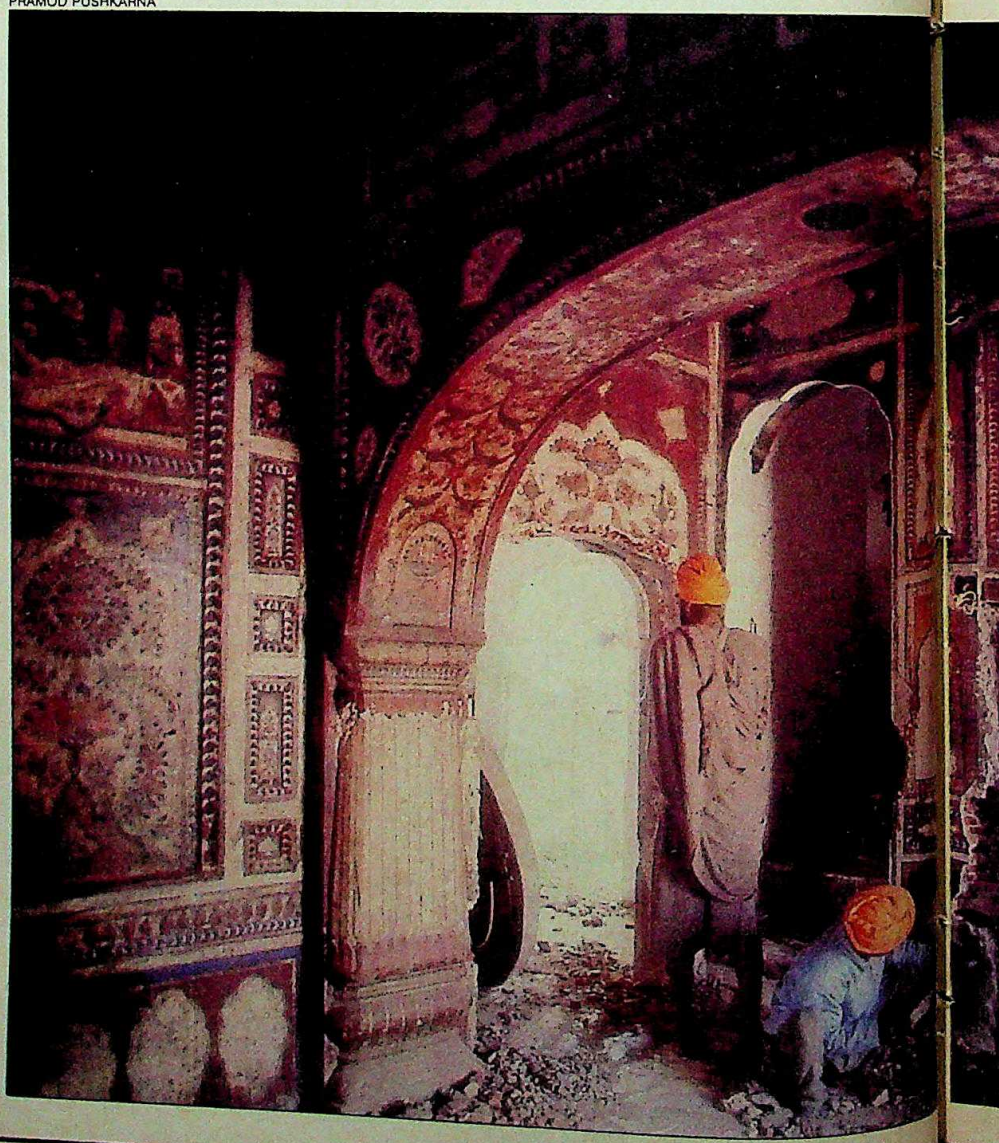
The Temple takeover was the boldest resurgence of extremist activity after Operation Bluestar, fraught with violent repercussions. The saffron flag emblazoned with the name "Khalistan" fluttered atop the Akal Takht, mocking both the state Government and the Centre. The national tricolour had been burnt in the Akal Takht on the day of the takeover, a new 'hate list' was brought out, and the slogans were as bad as in the days of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

Sikhism itself faced an unprecedented crisis. The SGPC, created by law 61 years ago to look after gurudwaras, found itself unseated and had to abandon Amritsar and meet in Anandpur Sahib. The jathedar of the Akal Takht as well as the head priest of the Golden Temple were unable or afraid to go back into the complex, so that even the *path* (reading of scriptures) was in the hands of the hotheads. Indeed, the hotheads had 'appointed' extremists on the Government's wanted list, or people in jail, to key posts as a further jaunty challenge.

The crisis began with the insistence of the Damdami Taksal, the fundamentalist

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA





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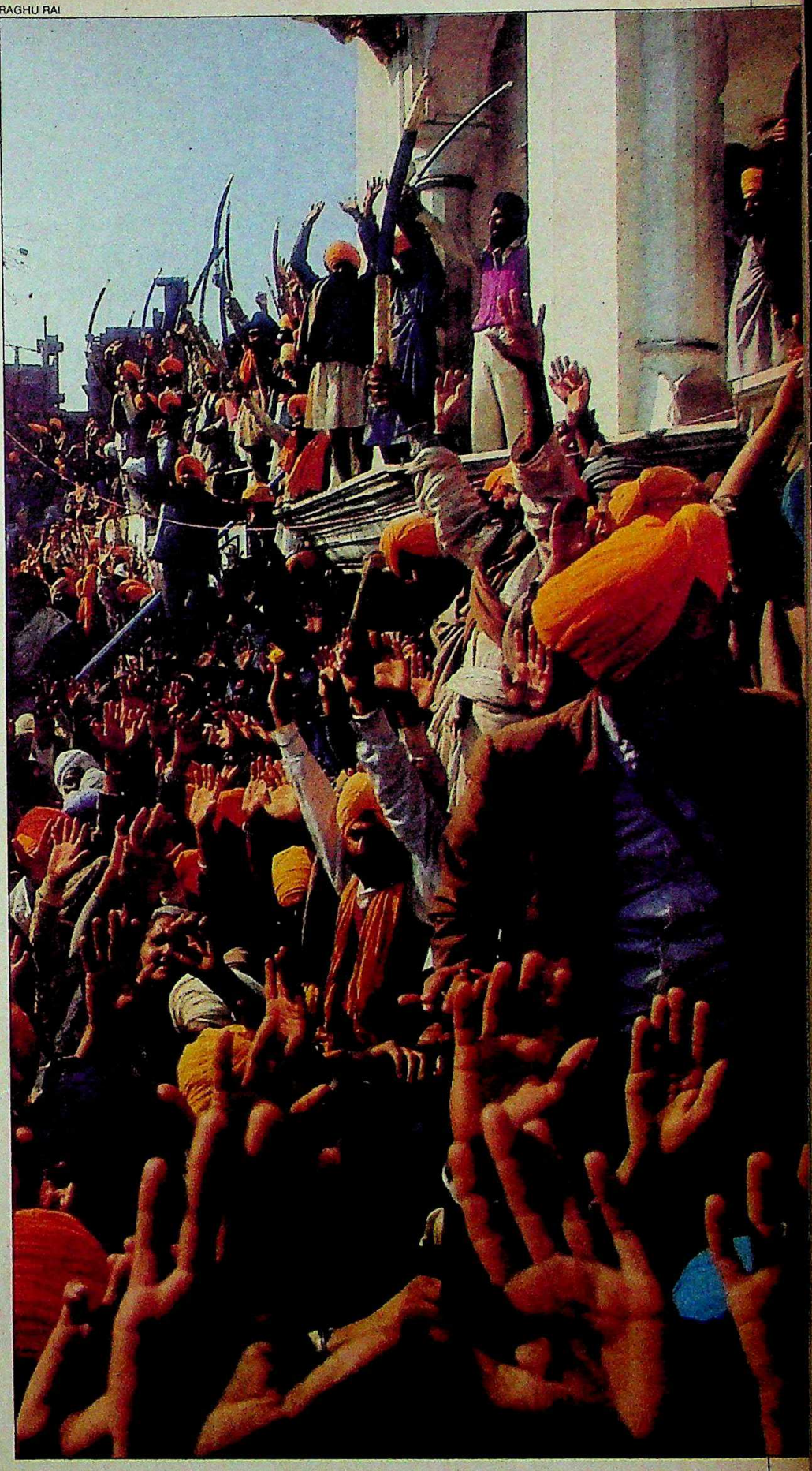
seminary once headed by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, that it would perform the *kar seva* (reconstruction) of the Akal Takht, where Bhindranwale and many of the Taksal's students had died 19 months ago during Operation Bluestar. The SGPC resisted, then caved in through a face-saving compromise that talked of a joint *kar seva*. Once inside the complex, the Taksal and AISSF quickly took charge: even before the first volunteers started the *kar seva* a Taksal spokesman announced before a large crowd the disbandment of the SGPC, dismissal of the Takht and Golden Temple head priests and a host of other steps attacking the state and Central Governments. For added measure, there was the disturbing presence of determined, sword-wielding youth.

As alarm bells rang in Chandigarh

Gold comes off Akal Takht dome (left); chipping away the interior (below); and the *sarbat khalsa*: fresh crisis

RAGHU RAI



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'I thought my wardrobe was comprehensive. Until I saw a new suiting range that proved me wrong.'

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The only drawback is, that now, more connoisseurs of the good life will get to hear of Gwalior Suiting and Shirting and I won't be able to keep them to myself.

But this is what democracy is all about, isn't it?'.

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M.A.K. PATAUDI

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and Delhi, the Akali Dal held an emergency meeting in Chandigarh and exhorted the SGPC to "take solid steps to bring about unity among the Sikhs and defeat this nefarious game". As a contingency measure that brought the prospect of violence and bloodshed disturbingly close, security forces moved into some houses around the complex and sandbagged fortifications. Meanwhile the Akal Takht was being knocked down with not an SGPC *sewadar* in sight.

The response from the SGPC has been confused, muted and cautious. Its saturnine president, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, was visibly rattled in Chandigarh on the day the Golden Temple was taken over. But a couple of days later, at the SGPC meeting in Anandpur Sahib, he seemed more sure of himself. Nevertheless, the only action proposed so far is a campaign to "educate the Sikh masses" (implicitly recognising that the SGPC is not very sure of the community's response and mood) and then the calling of a second, bigger *sarbat khalsa* to overturn the decisions taken by the hotheads. This meeting is likely to take place in the Golden Temple on February 16. But by then the youngsters will have been in control of the temple complex for all of a fortnight, and the possibility of a confrontation looms large. So far only swords are in sight in the temple complex, but the guns may be hidden away.

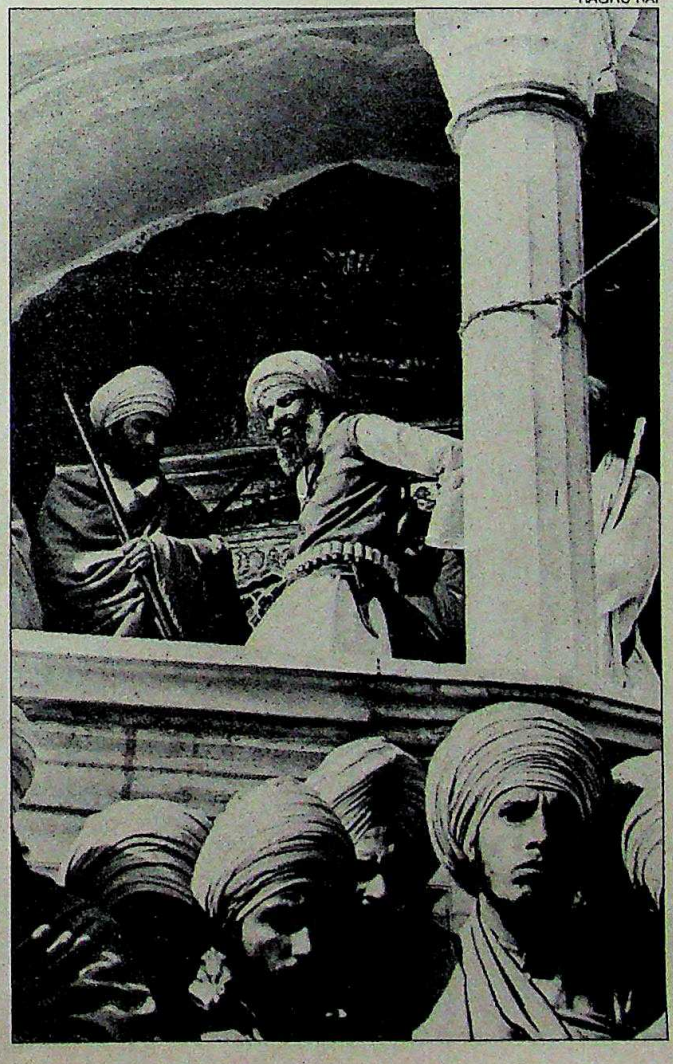
The state Government has been reluctant to act, and Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala is anxious to avoid having to send in the police: such a step, reminiscent of Bluestar, might win sympathy for the Taksal and AISSF.

Meanwhile, pictures of Bhindranwale are hot-selling items in the complex. These were available even after Bluestar, but they used to be hawked surreptitiously; the sellers would sidle up and offer to sell the pictures and recorded cassettes of *Dhadis* narrating the whole saga of the Sant's last stand at the Akal Takht. Now there is nothing surreptitious about this trade. Large colour blow-ups of Bhindranwale, Major General Shubeg Singh in army uniform, and Bhai Amrik Singh crowd the facade of the *kar seva* office and pavement stalls.

NEW NAMES have also been added to the extremist pantheon. Alongside the martyrs of Operation Bluestar are newer pictures of Beant Singh and Satwant Singh, Mrs Gandhi's assassins, one dead and the other sentenced to die. The new star on the premises last fortnight was Bimal Khalsa, widow of Beant Singh. She had camped in Room 24 of the Guru Nanak Niwas, just above the SGPC secretary's room. Every time she ventured out of her room into the temple parikrama she was surrounded by a dozen saffron-turbanned, sword-wielding AISSF activists shouting "shaheed Beant Singh zindabad". In the middle of this armed escort, she managed to look slightly self-important; she has obviously overcome her earlier modesty and is no longer embarrassed at being lionised by the AISSF youth.

Gun-toting *sewadars* at the Akal Takht: militant revival

RAGHU RAI



The domination and control of the Taksal and the AISSF over the Golden Temple complex was complete. The Taksal's nominees as head priests were ceremonially installed. Tohra had hurriedly left town and in his absence it was left to an ill-at-ease Bhan Singh, the dimunitive and amiable SGPC secretary, to fob off enquiring newsmen. Bhan Singh shrank in his chair when asked how the SGPC had virtually acquiesced in the temple takeover: "We don't want to enter into any controversy. We have made a little sacrifice for a good cause." Now more force will probably have to be used to oust them than would have been needed to prevent them from entering the complex in the first place.

Most politicians and observers of Punjab affairs say Tohra's actions in the face of this latest challenge to his authority are of a piece with his previous record of avoiding any direct conflict. In the past he refused to stand up to Bhindranwale, and this time too he chose the easy path of cobbling together a loose compromise with the Damdami Taksal on the *kar seva* issue. The SGPC had announced it would start *kar seva* on January 27, but the Taksal at its meeting at its Chowk Mehta headquarters passed a resolution that it would come to the Temple complex and start the *kar seva* on January 26. Faced with the Taksal challenge, the choice before the SGPC—the statutory body which alone has the right to repair, knock down, or rebuild the gurdwaras under its control—was either to prevent the Taksal volunteers from entering the complex or to advance its own *kar seva* to January 26. The SGPC did neither.

Long before that, there had been ample warning of impending trouble. But Tohra remained inactive when the Taksal opened a *kar seva* office in the complex on January 14 in defiance of an SGPC ban. Two days later, Taksal volunteers started a chain of *akhand paths* outside the Akal Takht. The SGPC's failure to respond to even these challenges further emboldened the Taksal and the AISSF. In large posters put up in many towns as early as

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January 20, the Taksal had proclaimed its resolve to "liberate" the gurdwaras from the SGPC. And then on January 21, Bhindranwale's father Baba Joginder Singh moved into a room adjoining the Akal Takht after exhorting the people to be ready for "any sacrifice" in connection with the *kar seva*. Suing for peace from what had become a position of weakness, Tohra went to the *dera* of Baba Kharak Singh—a veteran of many *kar sevas*—for a meeting with the acting Taksal Chief Baba Thakar Singh. They agreed on a compromise: the Taksal chief would be the "patron" of a a five-man committee.

But Taksal spokesmen made it clear the very next day that the SGPC had no role in the *kar seva*, supervisory or otherwise. Tohra preferred to wait out the storm in faraway Chandigarh and the five-man committee appointed for the *kar seva* merely served to distract attention from the real designs of the Taksal and AISSF. Even when the five Babas took the stage at the *sarbat khalsa* meeting on Republic Day, they could not prevent the proceedings from degenerating into a denunciation of the SGPC, the Punjab and Central Governments, the president, ministers and the press as traitors, enemies and

DAMDAMI TAKSAL

Up in Arms

BEGUN two centuries ago as a centre for training Sikh priests, the Damdami Taksal in more recent times has become synonymous with fundamentalism and violence. It was started in the 18th century by the legendary Sikh hero Baba Deep Singh, who felt the need for an institution which could develop into an authority on the Granth Sahib. His choice of the name for the seminary was indicative of his ambitions for the school—the word Damdami was taken from the Damdama Sahib gurudwara, where Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth guru of the faith dictated the Granth Sahib in its present form, and Taksal means mint, implying that it produced unalloyed Sikhs.

History has it that when Ahmed Shah Abdali's Afghan army desecrated and looted the Golden Temple, the Baba emerged from scholastic retirement and rallied together a peasant army of 5,000 drawn from hamlets and small towns on the road to Amritsar. Armed with rustic weapons, they were a poor match for the mighty Afghan army and were prevented from reaching the Golden Temple. But Sikh legend has it that though the Baba's head was severed during the fighting, he still managed to reach the Temple, sword in one hand and head in the other.

It was to the Taksal—in the village of Chowk Mehta off the Jalandhar-Amritsar highway— that Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale came as a boy of 11 to study the scriptures. Generally, boys between five and eight years of age are offered by their parents to the Taksal and initiated into a traditional and highly ascetic way of life. A rigorous 12-hour schedule of learning Gurbani, the different ragas on which it is based and the art of swordsmanship, is maintained even today. The last of these acquired an ominous twist when Bhindranwale—upon succeeding Kartar Singh as head of the Taksal—added martial training to the subjects being taught. The Taksal articulates Bhindranwale's essential appeal: that Hinduism will swallow Sikhism if proper measures are not taken to safeguard it.

Damdami Taksal headquarters: fundamentalist teaching

BHAWAN SINGH

The Taksal acquired a new militancy under Bhindranwale in 1978 when a bloody clash with the Nirankaris claimed 14 lives on Baisakhi day in Amritsar. "The time has come to take up arms and meet the challenge. Death has never daunted us," Bhindranwale had declared.

The Taksal has yet to decide on a successor to Bhindranwale and presently, Baba Thakar Singh is in charge. "The Sikhs were ordained to take up arms to get justice and if all other methods fail, they will once again fight," says Thakar Singh. The Taksal also plans to "cleanse" the historic gurudwaras as well as major rural gurudwaras.

The message of medievalism and militancy that Bhindranwale taught went down so well that after Operation Bluestar several youngsters arrested in the temple, when asked to identify themselves, said: "Our father is Guru Gobind Singh and we live in Anandpur Sahib." This simplistic determination makes the young cadres of the Taksal easy tools in the hands of leaders with messianic missions.

—TAVLEEN SINGH
with GOBIND THUKRAL

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anti-national. The five elders went up to the second floor of the Takht and chipped away some of the cement on the balcony parapet to symbolically begin the *kar seva*. Thereafter they took a back seat, allowing Mohkam Singh, the young, new spokesman of the Taksal, to take over. As far as could be seen, they did not protest when Mohkam Singh read out the resolution which disbanded the SGPC, dismissed two head priests of the Akal Takht and the Golden Temple, called upon the remaining three high priests of Sikhism to resign, excommunicated President Zail Singh, Rural Development Minister Buta Singh and Nihang chief Baba Santa Singh (who had helped in the *kar seva* after Operation Bluestar).

About 100 SGPC members gathered at Anandpur Sahib responded by accusing the Taksal and the AISSF of starting "a civil war among the Sikhs. In the guise of *sarbat khalsa*, these people have violated the basic Sikh tenets and principles, insulted the Guru and the Golden Temple." Tohra ruled out government help: "The Sikh masses are strong enough to thwart any mischief."

Inevitably, Tohra became the butt of general criticism for having failed to pre-

G.S. TOHRA

"A childish anti-Sikh action"

FOR THE first time since the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) was constituted by law in 1925 to take charge of gurudwaras—following six years of Sikh agitation—the historic body and its chief strategist Gurcharan Singh Tohra are fighting for control of the holiest of Sikh shrines—the Golden Temple and the Akal Takht.

The eight resolutions passed at the sarbat khalsa *(a general house of Sikhs which issues edicts for followers of the faith) on Republic Day created a crisis. Tohra spoke to Senior Correspondent* GOBIND THUKRAL *about it:*

Q. *How do you react to the* sarbat khalsa *and the fact that the Damdami Taksal and* AISSF *are controlling the Golden Temple?*

A. The congregation was organised to start the *kar seva* under Thakar Singh and four other respected Sikh sants. It had no authority to pass any other resolution. Only the jathedar of the Akal Takht can summon the *sarbat khalsa*. It was only after a valiant struggle by the Sikhs that the SGPC was constituted under the law in 1925 to manage the affairs of gurudwaras. It cannot be dissolved by a few thousand people. This is a childish, anti-Sikh action by some misguided people.

Q. *It seems the Taksal totally ignored the* SGPC *in the matter of* kar seva. *Neither you nor any* SGPC *representative was present at the ceremony.*

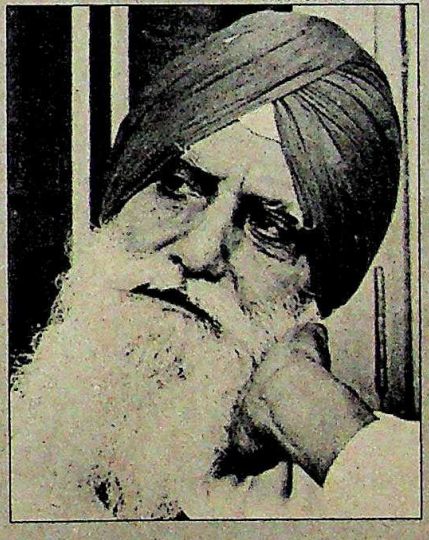
A. The *kar seva* is being organised under the SGPC's authorisation. I had agreed that Baba Thakar Singh of the Taksal, whom we hold in high esteem, should lead. It seems he could not control the youth there, who turned the holy occasion into a farce. Tomorrow five lakh people can gather in Delhi and dissolve Parliament. Can an institution be dissolved like that? I have requested Baba Thakar Singh to repudiate these resolutions and bring the misguided youth back to the right path.

Q. *Suppose he cannot do that?*

A. Let us wait. Why jump to conclusions?

Q. *The Taksal claims a supreme right over the* kar seva *and has declared*

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Tohra: trouble ahead

that only "amritdhari" Sikhs will be allowed to participate. It seems even you will not be allowed to participate.

A. No, it is the five-member committee under Thakar Singh that will carry on the day-to-day *kar seva*. The SGPC shall have over-all control. All believers in Sikhism can participate.

Q. *The Taksal and* AISSF *appear to have taken control of the Golden Temple complex and your writ does not run there.*

A. The SGPC is a constitutionally elected body and it does not cease to exist because someone declares that it does not exist. We are very much there. Our efforts to maintain peace are being interpreted as if we have surrendered. I have appealed to the Sikh panth to be united and vigilant at this critical hour.

Q. *The Akali Dal and the general house of the* SGPC *have given you a mandate to accept the challenge. What do you propose to do?*

A. We are not running away and we shall certainly establish the authority of the SGPC. The jathedar of the Akal Takht, in consultation with the four other high priests, will summon the *sarbat khalsa* in the Golden Temple complex. All Sikh sants will be invited to participate, along with Sikhs from all over the world, to consider the critical situation arising out of the mischief of these misguided youth. I take it as a challenge to the very existence of the Sikhs.

Q. *Your* sarbat khalsa *will be a challenge to the Taksal and* AISSF. *Won't that cause confrontation and bloodshed in the holy premises?*

A. We have done everything to prevent a confrontation and a civil war situation from developing. There may or may not be a confrontation leading to bloodshed; our attempt will be to avoid it. I am trying to make these people see reason and desist from implementing their resolutions. On *kar seva* we accepted Baba Thakar Singh and four other Sikh sants, but the way they are conducting things it is hardly a *kar seva*. It is an attempt to destroy the pious traditions of the Sikhs.

Q. *Suppose the Taksal and* AISSF *do not heed the command of your* sarbat khalsa?

A. This is for all Sikhs and the *sarbat khalsa* to consider and decide. I am totally against bloodshed there. We have had too much of that already. If anything bad happens, it will be tragic. But these young men who are playing into the hands of the enemies of the Sikhs will be responsible for it.

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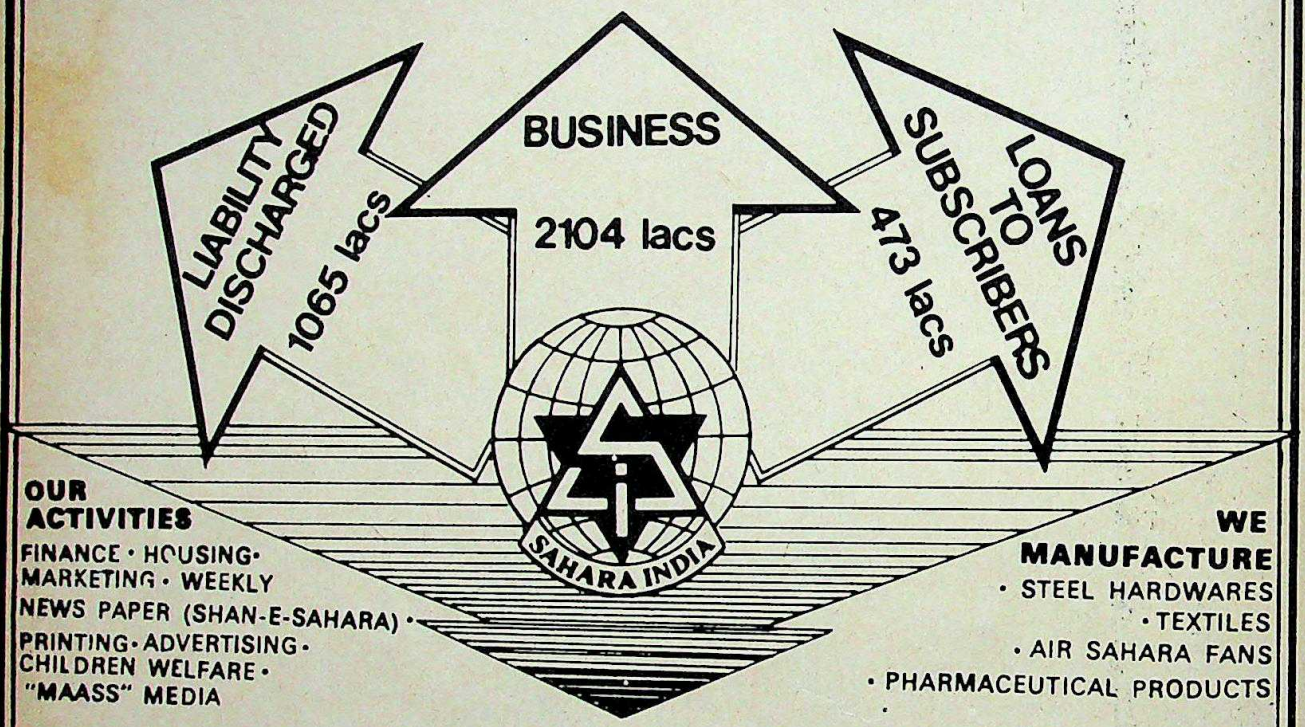
SAHARA INDIA'S
7 YEARS OF HARD TOIL



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SUMMARY OF BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30-9-85 (Rupees in Lacs rounded off)

LIABILITIES		AMOUNT	ASSETS	AMOUNT
CAPITAL		11.00	FIXED ASSETS	211.00
SECURED LOANS		NIL		
UNSECURED LOANS		NIL	CURRENT ASSETS	274.00
SECURED LIABILITIES				
Subscriber Deposits	2104.00			
Less Liability Discharge	1065.00	1039.00		
OTHER LIABILITIES				
Current & Outstanding Liabilities & Provisions		22.00	LOANS & ADVANCES	
			Secured Loans paid to subscribers	473.00
			OTHER CURRENT ASSETS	114.00
TOTAL Rs.		1072.00	TOTAL Rs.	1072.00

Command office, Lalbagh, Lucknow

CHHABI-85

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vent the crisis in the first place. "Tohra was trying to be too clever. Now he is stuck. There will be a scuffle and Tohra will have to face the music," remarked INA veteran and former Punjab minister Captain Rattan Singh. "Whoever controls Amritsar controls Sikh politics," argued Amritsar industrialist Dilbir Singh, "but today Tohra cannot hold his SGPC meeting in Amritsar." Kirpal Singh, Janata party MLA from Amritsar and president of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, used an Urdu couplet to sum up the SGPC's action in surrendering without a fight what the community had achieved after great sacrifice: *Chaman ko chhorh dain, yeh dillagi bhi khoob rahi, Hamara khoon baha hai kali kali kay liye* (To abandon the garden now? What a joke! When we have shed blood to nurture every bud). Tohra's explanation for his inaction and subsequent strategy was that he "wanted to avoid a bloodbath".

While the SGPC had remained a silent spectator during the build-up to the denouement, Akali Dal President Barnala and his main strategist Balwant Singh were preoccupied in New Delhi with the tangle over the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab. Into this vacuum jumped Barnala's impulsive son Gagandeep. He led a few hundred members of the Akali Dal's youth wing to the Golden Temple to expel the Taksal and AISSF activists. Three *sewadars* of the Damdami Taksal were injured in an exchange of fire outside the Akal Takht, and eye-witnesses said the public present on the premises disarmed the Akali youth and drove them out. As the aged father of Bhindranwale, Baba Joginder Singh of the United Akali Dal, described it: "The youth tried *jabr* (force) and we replied with *sabr* (patience)."

This entire episode did little to help matters, for it alerted the activisits to the possibility of violence. If they were to intervene at all, they should not have withdrawn without wresting control of the complex, or at least expelling the Taksal members. Consequently, said one AISSF leader, a day before the *kar seva* the Taksal brought in about 200 young volunteers prepared to lay down their lives in the event of a clash. S.P.Singh, a lecturer in Punjabi at Amritsar, tells the story of a young Taksal activist, Jasbir Singh, who advanced the date of his sister's wedding from February to mid-January because, he told his friends, he was not sure he would survive January 26, the day the Taksal had threatened to forcibly start the *kar seva*. Committed Taksal men like him will confront anyone trying to recapture the temple complex.

The Barnala Government and the Akali Dal, meanwhile, face their own predicament. If the Government intervenes and there is bloodshed, the people might well start equating Barnala with someone like former Congress(I) chief minister Darbara Singh. One academic argued that "The youth have seen their counterparts in Assam forming a government, whereas in Punjab they have been left out in the cold after the elections." Many in the Akali Dal, therefore, oppose sending in the police. "These are our own children, how can we shoot them down?" asked one senior party legislator.

Captain Rattan Singh was certain last fortnight that the Taksal would not be able to sustain their actions as the people would boycott the controversial *kar seva*. This may well happen, because on the first two days there was almost no public participation in the *kar seva*. Relatively few people visited the Temple, and even those that came stood at a distance and watched the Akal Takht being dismantled. Those wielding the crowbars were almost exclusively AISSF men or Taksal activists. Also, not all is well between these two organisations. With authority not clearly defined, and no one in a position to coordinate their actions, the AISSF and the Taksal often worked at cross-purposes, one not sure what the other was up to. Both Mohkam Singh and Harinder Singh Khalsa, the AISSF convenor, said that the five-man committee would sit with the engineers to decide how much of the Takht building was to be demolished. But early next morning, before the committee could meet, young Sikhs of both organisations climbed the building and started hacking away at it. In the space of a few hours the dome had been shorn of its gold, revealing naked green cement. That day an elderly *sewadar* asked Taksal worker Lakha Singh to instruct the boys doing the *kar seva* to be careful while uprooting the expensive marble from the raised platform around the Takht. But Lakha Singh merely chided the *sewadar* and said: "Don't stop the *sangat*. The people will give enough money for new marble."

The day before the *sarbat khalsa*, Baba Joginder Singh had said: "I am not aware of any move to replace Kirpal Singh (head priest of the Akal Takht)." But the next day, in the presence of Joginder Singh, it was announced that Kirpal Singh had been removed. The AISSF too was annoyed that its advice was not being heeded by the Taksal. Hearing of the move to expel the priests and challenge the authority of the SGPC, the AISSF brains trust had advised Mohkam Singh to stick to the *kar seva* and not to expand the area of confrontation. This advice was not heeded. Moreover, the five-man committee named by Mohkam Singh to "guide panthic affairs" included some proclaimed offenders. All decisions were apparently being taken by one man—Mohkam Singh.

If Barnala believed in astrology he could have blamed all this on a malefic configuration of the planets. It did seem as if events were conspiring to gang up on him as he struggled to fend off attacks on all flanks—personal, political, inter-

RAGHU RAI

Mohkam Singh

RAGHU RAI

Thakar Singh

Baba Thakar Singh and the four elders allowed Mohkam Singh to take over and did not protest when he read out the resolution disbanding the SGPC.

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state, and intra-state. He was politicaly weakened by the failure to secure the transfer of Chandigarh in time, the first major step towards implementing the Rajiv-Longowal accord. While facing up to Bhajan Lal, who clamoured noisily for Fazilka and Abohar, and the Central Government which insisted he give 90 villages to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh, Barnala had to keep looking over his shoulder at the ugly confrontation building up in Amritsar. To make things worse, his son Gagandeep was seriously injured in an accident while driving to Delhi.

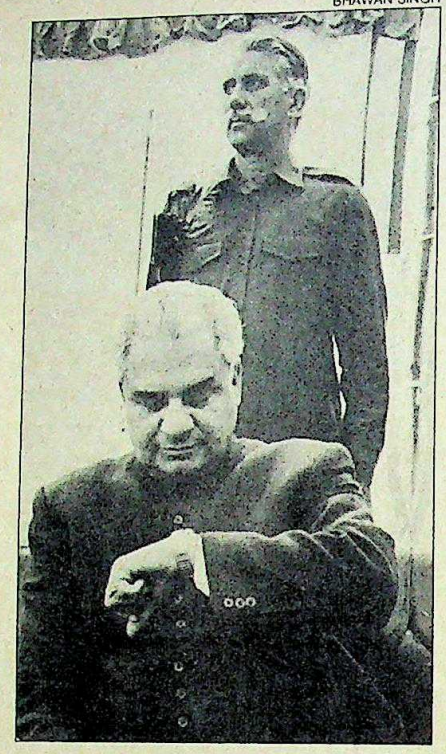
Over the coming days and weeks, the chief minister's political predicaments will mount. In the first flush of electoral victory, he had ordered the release of a number of youngsters arrested earlier on extremist charges. Now some of them are in the Golden Temple complex, and others have been named as the new high priests. Barnala may soon be forced into a corner where he has to take a tough stand against terrorists, lest law and order break down in the state (65 people have been killed in recent weeks), and yet not give the impression to his voters that he is no different from the Congress(I). As political tightropes go, this is a particularly difficult one to tread. But Barnala has no easy escape, because New Delhi must already be breathing down his neck.

Meanwhile, the extremists got a fresh opportunity to seek out martyrs when Pakistan announced a death sentence for five Sikhs who hijacked Indian Airlines flights to Lahore and when Satwant Singh and two others were sentenced to death in Delhi in the Indira Gandhi murder case. Mohkam Singh threatened from the *sarbat khalsa* stage: "If Satwant, Balbir Singh and Kehar Singh or the hijackers are hanged, they will become the first martyrs for the cause of Khalistan." Joginder Singh called for observance of February 2 as a day of protest against the "unduly harsh" sentences.

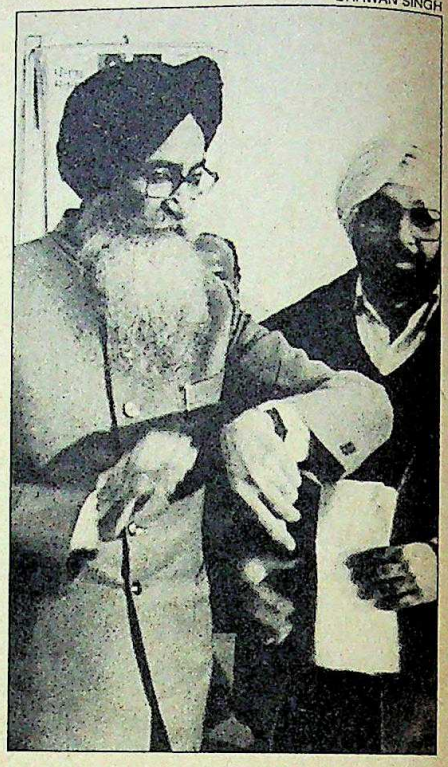
While these might be dismissed as the rantings of men on the extreme fringe of Sikh opinion, Barnala had to hop from Chandigarh to Delhi and Amritsar, interspersing state business with discussions with party advisers and central ministers. The string of setbacks appeared to be dissipating the euphoria of his election victory in September. And now he must put the Punjab accord back on the rails and restore control of the Golden Temple to the SGPC without too much violence or bloodshed. That is an onerous agenda, but there are no easy solutions in Punjab. Not last year. Not now.

—RAMINDAR SINGH with bureau reports

BHAWAN SINGH



BHAWAN SINGH



PUNJAB & HARYANA

The Bungled Accord

IT WAS a chilly night on January 25-26—the mercury had dipped to 5.5 degrees—when two cars carrying the chief ministers of Punjab and Haryana sped away from North Block, the seat of the Union Home Ministry. Inside the cars, Surjit Singh Barnala and Bhajan Lal sat stiffly, their eyes reflecting the anger inside. Left behind was their host, Home Minister S.B.Chavan, who had just had an infructuous 45-minute meeting with the twosome in his room.

The long silences that punctuated the meeting had been broken only by the ticking of the clock. It was literally the eleventh hour, and in a short while Republic Day would dawn on a country waiting for the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab and of some Hindi-speaking areas from Punjab to Haryana. These were to mark the first step towards implementing the Rajiv-Longowal accord of July 24 last year.

But the ticking of the clock and the racing of hearts led to no solution. A day earlier, the Mathew Commission had delivered an unexpected anti-climax after a fortnight of mounting tension, drama and suspense, and said that 83 Hindi-speaking villages and two Hindi-speaking towns in Abohar and Fazilka tehsils of Punjab could not be transferred to Haryana because they were not contiguous with Haryana's border: the Punjabi-majority village of Kandukhera stood in the way.

The meeting in Chavan's office had been the last of a long run of parleys aimed at finding a way around the impasse. A compromise had been sought by transferring villages elsewhere on the Punjab-Haryana border, but the two chief ministers could not agree on this either.

So Republic Day dawned to a stalemate, the Government slipped up on its schedule for implementing an accord which holds the key to ending the Punjab problem, and the future suddenly looked uncertain once again.

Undeterred, both chief ministers decided on the morning after to put a brave face on events. Barnala claimed credit for having prevented the transfer of Fazilka and Abohar to Haryana, stating that this had "vindicated our stand", and added that "Nobody can stop us from getting Chandigarh, today or tomorrow." Bhajan Lal in turn thundered that he had prevented Chandigarh from going without his getting the territory that he wanted.

The fact is, of course, that this is nobody's victory and everybody's defeat. And Rajiv Gandhi's only defence can be

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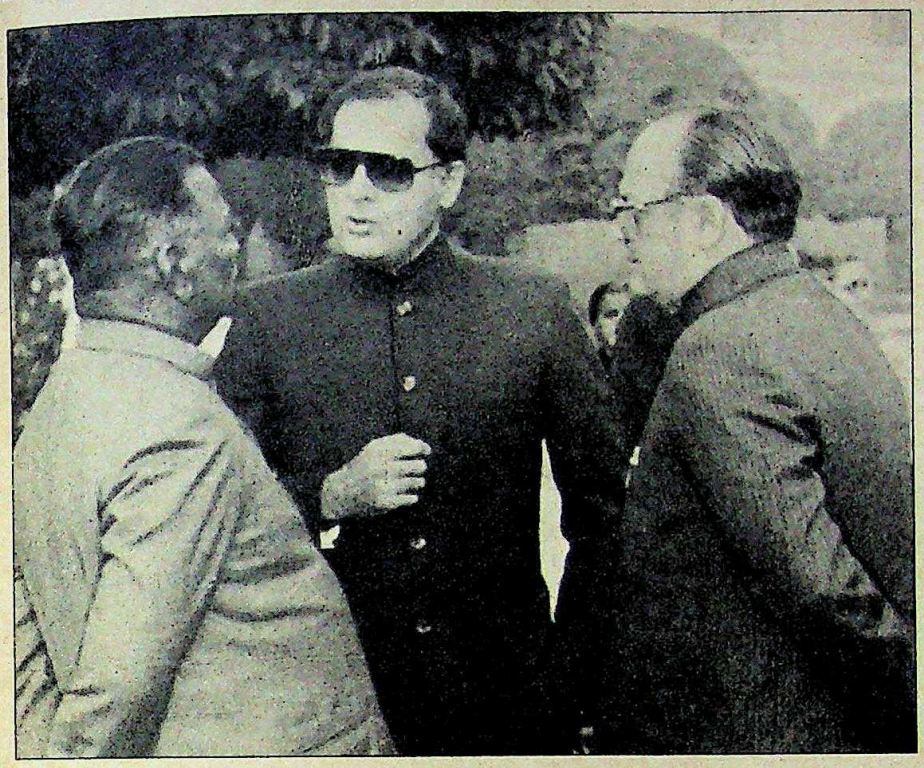

Chief Ministers Bhajan Lal and S.S. Barnala; Rajiv Gandhi with S.B. Chavan and Arjun Singh: continuing stalemate

that he tried his best. He had deputed Arjun Singh, Arun Nehru, Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh and the newly appointed Commerce Minister P. Shiv Shankar to monitor developments. Arjun Singh, camping in the Punjab Government's hostelry in New Delhi, Kapurthala House, met Barnala and Balwant Singh no fewer than six times in 10 days and conferred twice with Bhajan Lal. To maintain complete secrecy, the meetings were held at the prime minister's residence, 7, Race Course Road, a venue which had the additional advantage that Rajiv himself could be consulted at short notice. And maintaining his basic optimism despite the stalemate, Arjun Singh said: "Our endeavour has always been to hammer the point that only mutual accommodation will see the accord through. We are still hopeful. Let the anger evaporate in the air and reason will have its day."

But the country's attention was focussed for the moment on the setback that had just occurred and the bungling that caused it: the raising of passions in both states through the process of linguistic enumeration, the communal divide this caused in the villages being enumerated, the building up of tension before the commission gave its no-go verdict at the last minute, and much more. There was the Congress(I)'s failure to keep Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal in check even though he raised the banner of revolt as early as December, and the Punjab Government's go-slow on the canal project that will take water to Haryana.

For Rajiv Gandhi, there was the unhappy prospect of either losing Haryana to opposition parties in state elections due next year or finding an unhappy Punjab losing faith in the Akali Government and turning to hard-liners if it felt it hadn't got justice. And over-riding everything else, there was the stark fact that the peace process had suffered a setback.

INDEED, with both states readying to claim large chunks of each other's territory when the second land commission is set up under the terms of the Rajiv-Longowal accord, and when the river waters tribunal starts apportioning the waters of the Ravi-Beas system to Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, there could be much louder thunderclaps over a troubled part of the country, and agitations far more difficult to handle than the thoroughly convincing *rasta roko* campaign that paralysed Haryana for a day last fortnight.

The slide began with the Mathew Commission being given defective terms of reference, which enabled Bhajan Lal to claim more than 400 villages in Punjab even though they were not territorially contiguous with Haryana (one of the qualifying conditions included in the Rajiv-Longowal accord). The commission then declined to go into the question of giving Haryana territory from parts of Punjab other than Fazilka and Abohar (as Barnala had offered), and the commission's report itself was delayed by more than three weeks after it sought repeated extensions of its December 31 deadline: this after long periods that Justice K.K. Mathew spent in Kerala. But perhaps the real culprit responsible for the delay was the Government, because Mathew had asked for linguistic enumerators as early as the middle of November. The Government's response came two months later, in mid-January.

In New Delhi, leading political figures seemed to be playing their own games, with Punjab beginning to believe that some of the leading lights of the Rajiv Government were playing Haryana's card. Barnala once refused to show up for a meeting with Bhajan Lal and a central minister, who waited for hours for a joint session that never materialised.

It was not an atmosphere in which sensitive issues could be amicably sorted out. And the same Haryana legislators who had formally welcomed the accord six months ago by voting in support of a resolution on the subject in the Haryana Assembly, now began voicing directly contradictory opinions.

For a while centre-stage was occupied by Bhajan Lal, who in a desperate effort to stave off the political challenge from the Lok Dal, ended up by creating an atmosphere in which no accord was possible. And when he realised that Kandukhera would come in the way of his claiming the villages, he quickly initiated moves to exchange territory with Rajasthan in a manner that would give Haryana continguity with Fazilka and Abohar. But Barnala served notice of going on the offensive when he said that "Kandukhera is like a Khyber pass. This village provides us contiguity with 500 other Punjabi-speaking villages in Haryana's Sirsa and Hissar districts."

Bhajan Lal had raised his banner of revolt as early as December, at the Bombay centenary celebrations of the Congress, when he delivered a hard-hitting speech within Rajiv Gandhi's earshot. He thundered to the response of an applauding contingent from his state: "Haryana is a state of peace-loving people, but it will not tolerate any injustice. It will not accept the Mathew Commission's award if the award is unjust to Haryana." Added Chiranjilal Sharma, a senior party MP from Haryana at the same venue: "The politeness of the people of Haryana must

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not be mistaken for cowardice." These comments might normally have been dismissed as matters of no import, except that Rajiv sat there in indulgent silence.

Even at his press conference at the AICC(I) headquarters a week before Republic Day, Rajiv evaded probing questions about Bhajan Lal's role. When asked why he could not prevent the Haryana unit of the party from making discordant noises, he said everything would be all right after the Mathew Commission gave its verdict.

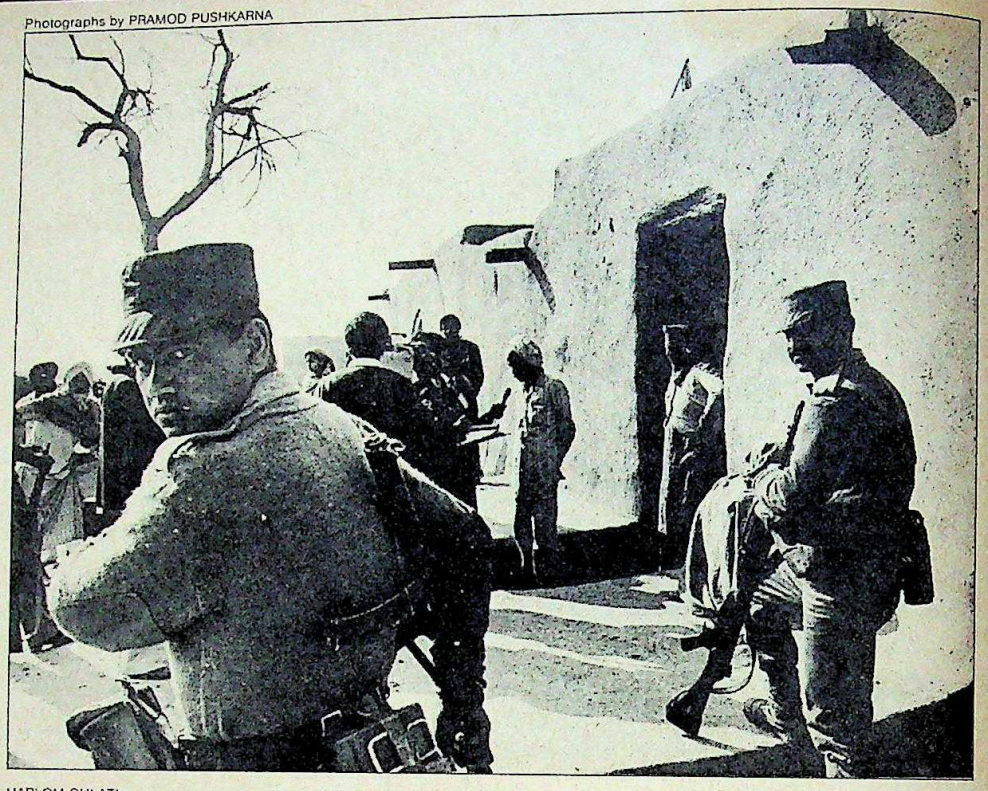
Delhi finally sat up very late in the day. While the term of the Mathew Commission was extended one last time, till January 25, negotiations began to try and save the accord. Arjun Singh met Barnala twice on January 24, and was then closeted with the prime minister for over an hour. Both Arjun Singh and Chavan made desperate efforts to get the two chief ministers to meet each other half-way, but Chavan finally declared: "We were preparing ourselves for a happy ending. But time was ticking away and we couldn't keep to the deadline."

Perhaps, in the last throw of the dice, Rajiv asked the unlikely person of Finance Minister V.P. Singh to take the Mathew Commission's recommendations to President Zail Singh. But the President kept his counsel. Still later, Arjun Singh summoned a meeting of Congress(I) MP's from both Haryana and Punjab, but the two groups spoke on different wavelengths. And Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar summed up the final situation when he said: "By now it is the Punjab accord that has lost its sanctity."

In a statement typical of the mood that resulted at the end of this period of high drama, Bhajan Lal declared that he would not accept even 500 villages in lieu of Kandukhera and added that he would not allow Chandigarh to go till water reached Haryana through the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal. The canal, of course, has nothing to do with the transfer of Chandigarh: the canal is due to be completed only on the next Independence Day.

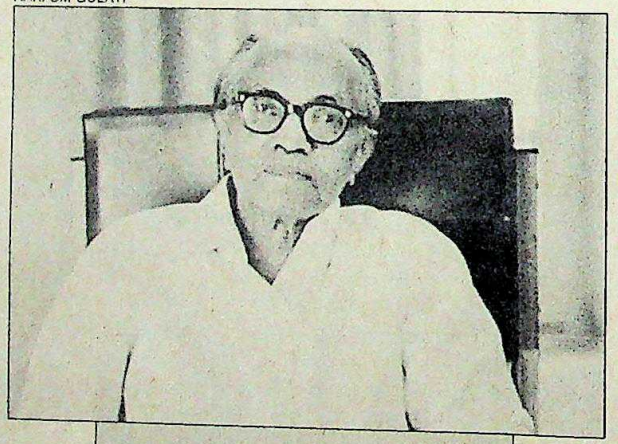
Perhaps the key factor that led to political temperatures rising to a point where no sensible action was possible was the order for carrying out a linguistic enumeration of villages in Fazilka and Abohar, and Kandukhera village in Muktsar tehsil. Two thousand enumerators were rushed to the site, jawans of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) waited on the Haryana side of the border (Punjab refused to have anything to do with them), and additional Assam Rifles personnel were flown in when matters threatened to get out of hand. Finally, the enumerators themselves had to be changed, and replacements from southern India and West Bengal flown in so that impartiality could be assured in a charged situation.

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Enumerator with armed escorts in Kandukhera: tense situation

HARI OM GULATI



The commission's report was delayed by more than three weeks after it sought repeated extensions of time; this after long periods that Justice K.K. Mathew spent in Kerala.

In between, the Hindu sarpanch of Kandukhera, Hanuman Bishnoi, disappeared amid misleading charges of kidnapping. And 300 outsiders who had obviously come to Kandukhera in an effort to be enrolled as local citizens were bundled up and sent packing.

The final result in Kandukhera is unquestionable: Minister of State for Internal Security Arun Nehru had ordered the use of modern technology (video cameras) to record for posterity every bit of the enumeration in the village. But the equally unquestionable verdict is that the enumeration need never have taken place: everyone has always known that the village is essentially Punjabi-speaking. In the event, a momentum built up in both states against any peaceable transfer

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Kandukhera villagers keeping watch: resisting change

of territory.

The situation in Chandigarh, meanwhile, was farcical. Everyone, but everyone, had expected the Union territory to be transferred to Punjab on January 26, and the city decided to prepare for this in style.

For weeks, Chandigarh Administration officials raced against time to complete all the formalities of the transfer. The backlog of files was cleared, and officials did everything to exhaust budgets for the financial year. By midnight of January 25-26, tired officials of the State Bank of India had cleared over 3,000 bills totalling Rs 1 crore by way of salary arrears, medical allowances and overtime bills. Scores of employees whose services had not been confirmed since 1970 not only got confirmation but out-of-turn promotions and increments, and one employee got the selection grade plus Rs 20,000 in arrears. The sports department left everyone aghast by distributing its budget of Rs 6 lakh as awards to sportsmen and sportswomen, and the engineering department ordered new electric fittings and mercury vapour lamps instead of ordinary bulbs on the streets. Numerous cases had to be cleared by New Delhi, and a caravan of cars moved every day between Chandigarh and the national capital. One officer counted 46 visits that he had made to Delhi in three months, to discuss details concerning the transfer.

Officials had also been wrestling with the problem of valuing assets (a matter that should have been sorted out months earlier), and wrangling continued between Punjab and Haryana over who should retain the water heads, the source of the supply of potable water for the city.

BUT AS matters finally turned out, the 18,000 administration employees who had expected to join the Punjab cadre as well as the 4,000 employees who had expected to be reverted to Haryana stayed put where they were, and the entire preparatory exercise took on the air of a bad joke.

Haryana had some legitimate fears too: work on the SYL canal has been slow, and there is every likelihood that it will not be completed by the deadline of August 15, 1986. Haryana claims that it has been paying Punjab for the cost of the project, but that work is not going on apace. In Punjab, the farmers meanwhile had launched an agitation against the alignment of the canal, arguing that fertile land would be ruined by its construction.

Punjab may have its problems, and Barnala complains that "The digging of the canal was stopped by the Darbara Singh regime. It stopped acquiring land, and did not finalise its alignment. Even during President's rule, Haryana and the Central Government did not pay money to Punjab to acquire the land. Now they put all the blame on us. What are we supposed to dig now?"

But the Akali record is not very good either. The Centre has promised liberal funding and told the Government that it will suitably compensate the families likely to be displaced by its construction. But nothing much has happened so far.

If that spells trouble, Haryana has something to be worried about. And Chowdhary Birendra Singh, president of the Haryana Pradesh Congress(I) Committee, said: "Since Punjab is not allowing the digging of the canal, it will only be correct to hold the accord in abeyance till the canal is completed." Later, at a meeting of the state party's MP's and MLA's, a resolution was adopted which said, "The completion of the SYL canal is a question of life and death, and there is no question of the state Government agreeing to the transfer of Chandigarh without a proper settlement of territorial and water disputes." Copies of the resolution were sent to Rajiv, who does not seem to have admonished his partymen for adopting a stand contrary to the terms of the July 1984 accord.

Certainly, Haryana's belligerence was fully in evidence during the *rasta roko* agitation on January 23. Especially in the Jat-dominated districts of the state, the agitation touched a popular chord that resulted in thousands of people with no particular party affiliation pouring out on

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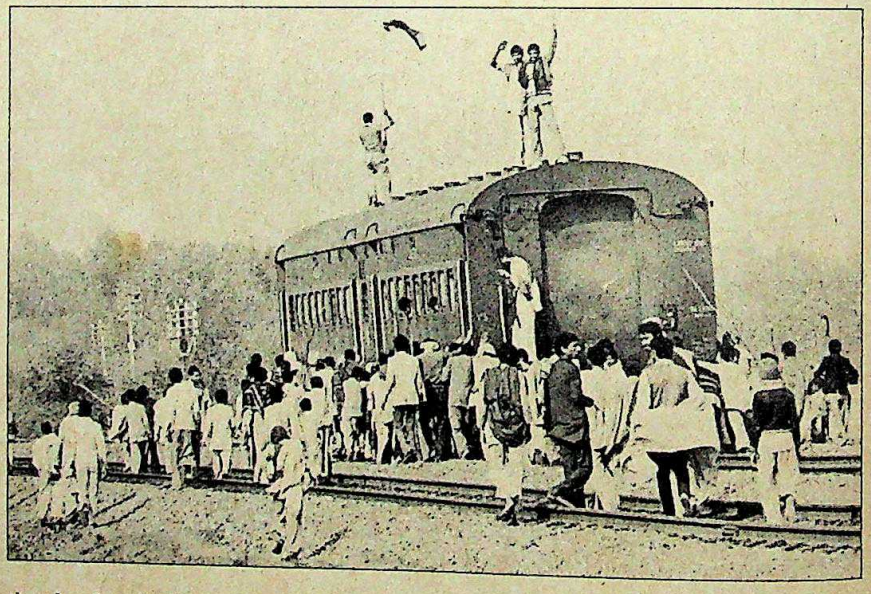
Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

Belligerent Jats blocking the roads and disrupting rail traffic on January 23



to the state's roads, pulling tree branches, boulders and trucks with deflated tyres across the major arteries, preventing all traffic. Trains too were stopped, and in places passenger bogies were detached from trains and pushed along to isolated spots. Five people were killed during the day in police firing. Said retired captain Dewan Singh, an 85-year-old Jat farmer at Rohtak who is anxious to get water on to his farm: "I stand on this road to see that no car passes this way today, and I do it only in the interest of my farm and my family, which depends on it.

Bhajan Lal was more than aware of this mood and the political oblivion it spelt for him if he failed to respond. So he camped for days in the capital, taking his public relations machinery with him. There, they used cyclostyling machines to crank out till the late hours copies of memoranda, appeals and statements addressed to everyone who mattered in the city. Bhajan Lal called on each member of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, and when he met Rajiv on January 13 reiterated his stand that the accord should be implemented in both letter and spirit. Rajiv's response is not known, but Bhajan Lal seems to have been sufficiently encouraged by it to start pressurising the Mathew Commission over its earlier demand of a fresh enumeration in Fazilka and Abohar on the plea that the demographic character of the area had "undergone a sea-change" since the 1981 census.

What was particularly intriguing was Haryana's emphatic rejection of Punjab's offer of villages elsewhere on the states' common border. Apparently, Bhajan Lal had been confident that the sarpanch of Kandukhera, Hanuman Bishnoi, who was his friend, would be able to tilt the balance in some way.

It was probably the Congress(I)'s over-confidence which prevented Rajiv from giving Bhajan Lal a rap on the knuckles early on. If Rajiv Gandhi's greatest triumph in 1985 was the pulling off of the Punjab accord, he needed to cap that in 1986 by anticipating the complications that could come in the way of the accord being implemented, and taking suitable preventive action. But he failed to anticipate the size of the very first hurdle in his way, and came a cropper. He can pick himself up and start again, and it is certainly possible that once passions have cooled, some kind of give-and-take can be worked out. But the only judgement possible last fortnight was that the momentum that had been built up for finally putting the Punjab problem behind the country had been lost, at least for the moment.

—SUMIT MITRA, PRABHU CHAWLA and GOBIND THUKRAL

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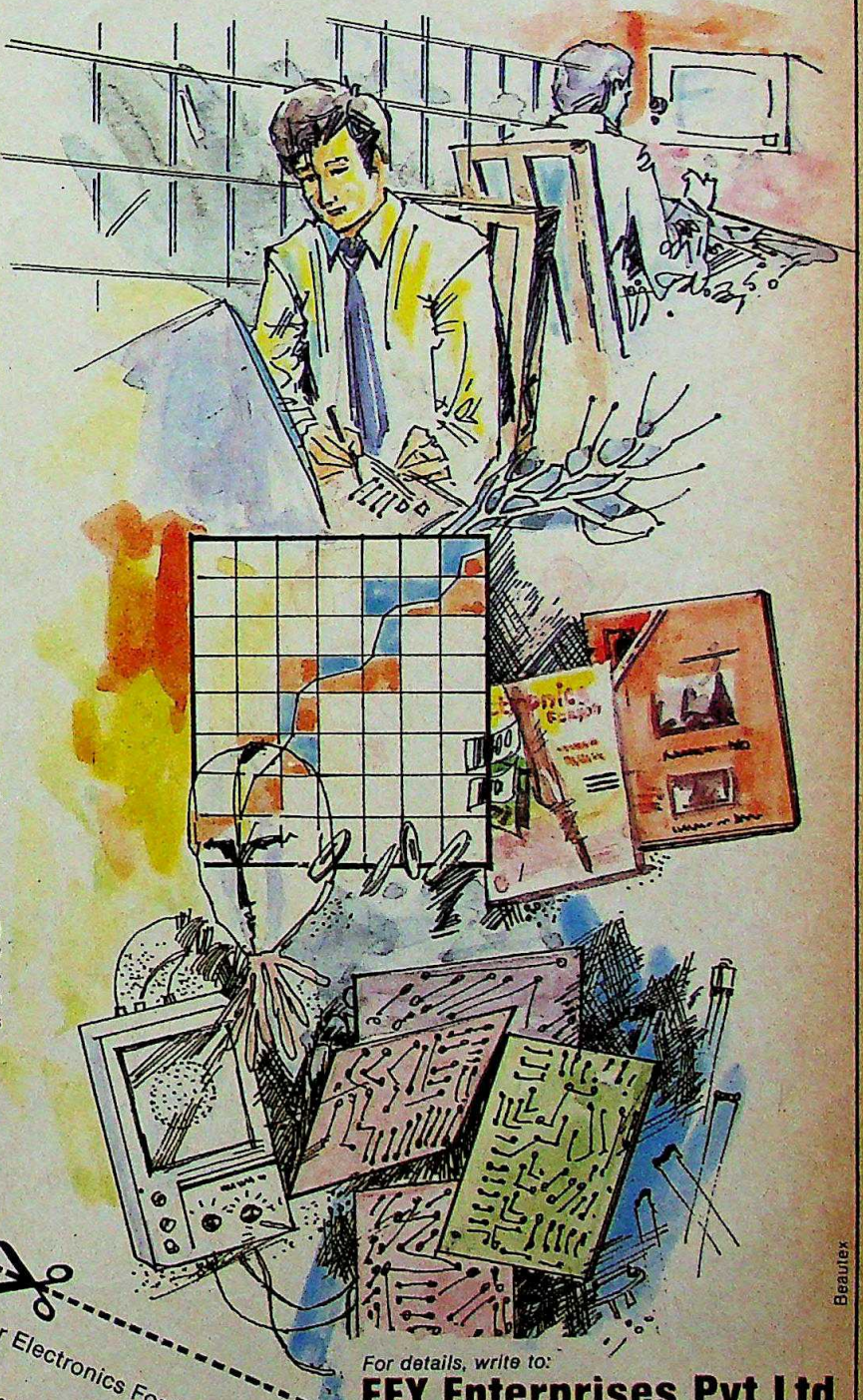

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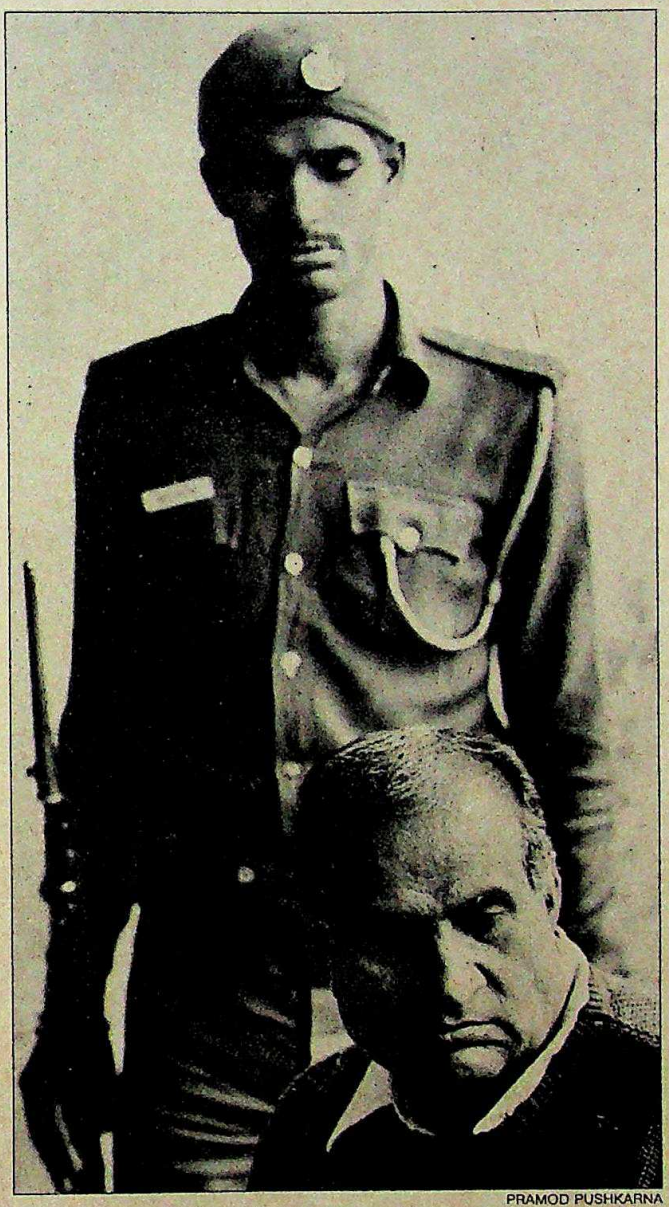
RAMA SWARUP

Double Edged Scandal

THERE is more of the cloak than daggers in evidence in the latest *cause celebre* of the Indian media—the Rama Swarup spy sensation. The case took a dramatic turn last week when two Central ministers of state, K.P.Singh Deo and Chandulal Chandrakar, and Dr M.S. Sanjeevi Rao, chairman of the Electronics Commission, who also holds ministerial status, quit the Government. The resignations, which were promptly accepted, came just one day before Swarup appeared in Delhi's Patiala House courts under heavy police guard for the official filing of the chargesheet against him. The three men have been named in the chargesheet, along with a number of other current and former members of Parliament, as having been sent by Swarup, an alleged spy for US interests, on trips to Taiwan.

Swarup had made it clear in his interview to INDIA TODAY (November 15, 1985) that if he was not granted anticipatory bail he would name prominent ruling party members and MP's who had accepted his generous hospitality on behalf of various anti-communist organisations and the Taiwan government for whom he was acting as unofficial representative. Thus, the resignations were not particularly surprising. But INDIA TODAY learnt that last week's disclosures are only the tip of the iceberg. In a conversation with Swarup during his brief appearance in court, the alleged spy claimed that he is prepared to blow the lid off several scandals involving the Government and its secret dealings with Israel in which he has been involved as a clandestine conduit.

More sensationally, he stated that if he is indeed an American spy, he qualifies as India's first double agent since he was actually working for the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) on and off for the last 20 years. Swarup's claim got no ready confirmation from India's intelligence agencies, so his credibility on the subject is yet to be established. But he provides a fund of convincing detail, and says that he supplied valuable information to DMI between 1962 and 1970 and that he was working for the IB till as late as August 1985. (He was arrested in October).



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Rama Swarup: cause for crisis

Swarup claims to have proof in the form of confidential correspondence, that the then Israeli chief of staff and head of military intelligence were secretly invited to India by the DMI in 1963 in the wake of the border war with China. The DMI, he says, put them up in Rooms 208 and 209 of Delhi's Imperial Hotel while he himself stayed in Room 210. At that time, he was working for the DMI and the Government wanted Israeli help because of the poor quality of Soviet weaponry they were receiving then. He claims that all this was done with the full knowledge of the Government which, during the Janata rule, also used him to arrange a meeting between the then Israeli defence minister, Moshe Dayan, and Prime Minister Morarji Desai in 1978. Since then, he says, he has been used by the Government on numerous occasions to convey secret messages to and from Tel Aviv. He also named the senior officials in the IB to whom he claimed he was passing on information.

If indeed Swarup is the spy in the ointment, as the chargesheet makes out, then he seems determined to apply it where it hurts the most—to the ruling party and the two houses of Parliament. Singh Deo, Chandrakar and Sanjeevi Rao were actually named in the original complaint registered by the special branch from documents seized from Swarup's office, Far Eastern Trade Services (FETS), prior to his arrest. In the latest disclosures, the others named as having accepted trips to various countries from Swarup at some stage or the other are Atal Behari Vajpayee, Kanti Desai, son of former prime minister Morarji Desai, D.S. Jadeja and Arvind Netam (both Congress (I) MP's), P. Upendra, leader of the Telugu Desam Party in the Rajya Sabha, M. Gurupadaswamy, Janata Party MP, and Khushwant Singh, Rajya Sabha member and well-known columnist. Upendra, however, has flatly denied that he

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visited Taiwan through Swarup.

If the Government's objective in naming such prominent and influential personalities in the chargesheet is to prove the extent of Swarup's contacts, the ploy seems to have boomeranged. The resignations of Singh Deo, Chandrakar and Rao have been a serious blow to the ruling party at a time when it can least afford it. Swarup in fact told INDIA TODAY last week that he intends to name more members of the cabinet and ruling party who are guilty of the same 'crime' as the three who have quit. If he is as good as his word, Rajiv Gandhi's council of ministers could soon look somewhat denuded. The Government, in that event, will look particularly silly, because most members of Parliament accept a variety of junkets abroad in between sessions with scarcely a thought about espionage links, or indeed any culpability on this score.

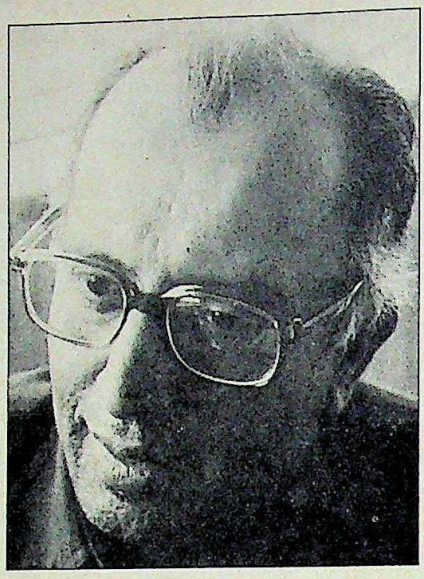
NEVERTHELESS, Swarup is in hot water, as a reading of the chargesheet makes clear. Through Kanti Desai, he is supposed to have got details of the talks between the then prime minister, Morarji Desai, and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev during Morarji's visit to Moscow. This information is stated to have been passed on to US diplomats, among them the man who figured in the Larkins case two years ago.

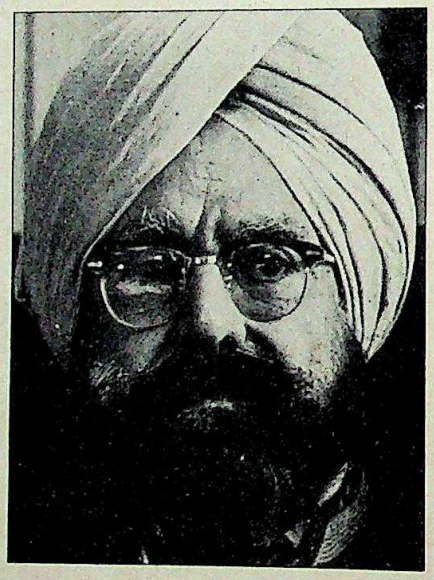
Swarup is also supposed to have used Kanti Desai to try and get the Janata government to put an end to the rupee payment arrangement for Indo-Soviet trade. The matter was apparently discussed by the Janata Cabinet, but shelved following strong opposition by Jagjivan Ram, H.N. Bahuguna and Mohan Dharia.

The other facts and allegations contained in the chargesheet are:

- The passing on of information and profiles on the key political power brokers in the Indira Gandhi and Rajiv governments, as well as the addresses of MP's taken from the *Who's Who*, to the counsellor of the West German Embassy and the Israeli consul;
- The recovery of four documents connected with the air force and a restricted army map from his office premises;
- That he was being "paid funds by the Americans" in exchange for information and for organising anti-Soviet activities.

Swarup and his defence counsel, Pran Nath Lekhi, have taken the line that Swarup has been arrested under pressure from the Soviet Union, against whom some of his anti-communist activities were aimed. In fact, the first paragraph of the chargesheet clearly states that Swarup had been indulging in activities prejudicial "to the friendly relations with foreign states", which, judging by the contents of the complaint, can only mean the Soviets.





Desai (top); Kushwant Singh; and Upendra: exaggerated affair

It is, in the context, entirely likely that the tip-off about Swarup and some of the details of his activities came from the Soviets. The chargesheet states somewhat mysteriously that the original information about Rama Swarup was received by the Tughlaq Road police station on September 28, 1985, from a "reliable source". The complaint goes on to state that "the source also informed that at present he (Swarup) was keeping certain documents which were directly or indirectly useful to an enemy country and unless an immediate raid was done there was every chance of the documents being destroyed". At no stage, however, is the source named.

The surprising thing is that the raid on Swarup's offices, on November 8 when the defence papers were found, came a full five weeks after this tip-off, as the chargsheet itself admits! The delay is inexplicable. It is also inexplicable why a government which believed Swarup to be a high-level spy did not seal his offices or freeze his bank accounts till one week after his arrest on October 28.

It is also unlikely that all the information was obtained by the police, because the detailed information goes back 30 years. The chargesheet relating to Swarup's supposed espionage activities names a series of Swarup's American "handlers" over the decades (only the last names are mentioned). The charges go further and claim that his code name was '72', a number he used to give when he rang up his "handling officer" in the American embassy. He would then ask whether he should come for tea or coffee. Coffee meant 11.00 a.m. and tea meant 3 p.m. It then gives details of how Swarup used to switch cars for his clandestine meetings, when secret documents were allegedly exchanged. All this took place well before the investigating agencies got into the act.

Certainly, the Soviets could not have been happy with Swarup's activities. As an effective lobbyist with influential contacts, Swarup had organised numerous seminars and parliamentary groups which were anti-communist in nature. He was also organising testimony by various people before the Human Rights Commission in Geneva regarding alleged Soviet atrocities in Afghanistan, and had convened an Indo-FRG Parliamentary Group made up of prominent MP's which

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must have been looked askance at by East Germany. And his successful pro-Israeli activities were a further embarrassment.

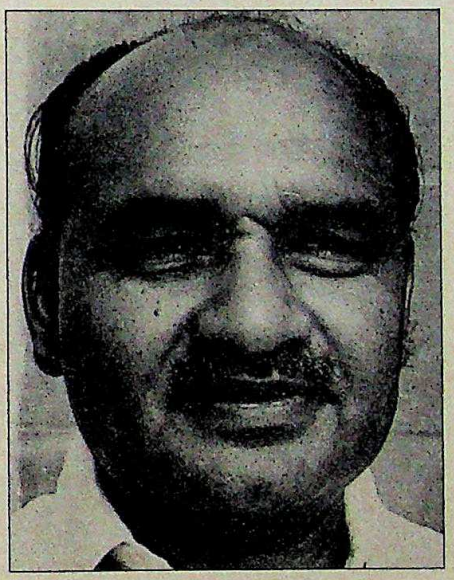
The odd aspect of the case is the arrest of Swarup's teenaged peon, while his manager seems to have been let off the hook. The peon, Javed Siddiqi, has been charged under the Official Secrets Act even though the chargesheet only mentions that the papers relating to the air force and army were recovered from his desk. A more serious charge is levelled against Swarup's manager, Anita Sethi, who, the complaint claims, used to act as a courier and meet the American embassy "handlers" in cinema halls to pass on secret documents, allegedly given to her by Swarup. Yet, incredibly, no charges have been framed against her. Presumably, the prosecuting authorities are hoping that she will turn a witness.

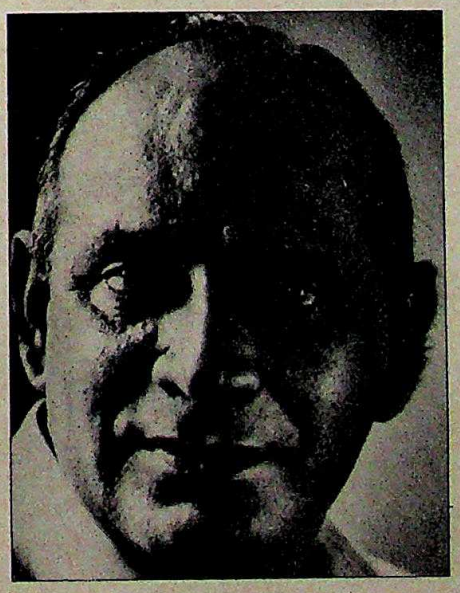
BUT THE real irony is in the fact that Lekhi has himself been named in the chargesheet as having been involved in the whole affair and also as having been paid large sums of money by the Americans. Considering the fact that Lekhi will be fighting the case on behalf of Swarup, this must set some kind of precedent even in the bizarre world of espionage.

Right now, Lekhi and his assistants are planning to argue that the entire sordid saga has been a plant and are demanding that the trial be held in an open court rather than in camera. That is hardly likely, considering that the case involves the Official Secrets Act. But the defence strategy is to ensure that the scandals and names Swarup intends to expose receive due publicity and further embarrass the Government.

Some of that has already been achieved even before the actual hearings have begun, as last week's resignations proved. And it is difficult to understand how the ruling party allowed itself to get into this uncomfortable position. The names of Sanjeevi Rao, Singh Deo and Chandrakar had been mentioned in the original first information report (FIR) filed last September. Why then did the Government wait till the last minute to ask for the resignations, in fact the day before the complaint was to be filed in court and, consequently, appear in the press?

Information from high-level sources indicates that the Government bungled the affair badly. The contents of the complaint were known months ago though it was filed in court on the evening of January 24. Before that, Rajiv had discussed the affair with President Zail Singh on at least two occasions but nothing was decided regarding the action to be taken. It was only on the night of January 26 that copies of the complaint went to the prime minister and Minister of State for Internal Security Arun Nehru. Singh Deo and Chandrakar were summoned by Rajiv the next morning and after some discussion it was decided that the best thing would be for the two to resign. The same day, the issue was discussed at a cabinet meeting where the resignation decision was ratified by all present. But the delay in the action, and the obvious error in timing, only added to the general impression that free junkets to Taiwan had been blown out of proportion.





Singh Deo (top); Chandrakar; and Rao: sudden exits

As some kind of an afterthought, the Government has decided to try and exonerate the three men who have resigned by referring the matter to the Supreme Court and asking the highest judicial body in the land to determine whether a case exists against Singh Deo, Chandrakar and Rao. But even if they are exonerated ultimately, the possibility of fresh resignations is not ruled out.

Meanwhile, both the West German and US Embassies promptly issued strong denials that they had ever received classified material from Rama Swarup at any time. A source in the West German Embassy confirms that they were accepting material in the form of parliamentary proceedings and related matters from Swarup for a nominal payment of a few hundred rupees, but none of the material was classified or not a matter of public record. Almost every embassy receives similar material, notably in a weekly digest called *News behind the News* published by a private Delhi organisation. In fact, the US ambassador in New Delhi has reportedly filed an official complaint with the Ministry of External Affairs denying the charges about Swarup's alleged espionage activities on their behalf.

But if Swarup was indeed a spy for US interests—and it is entirely possible that the circumstantial evidence will be enough for a conviction—any further disclosures are only certain to damage the Government further. Similarly, if Swarup fulfils his threat of producing the names of other cabinet ministers or senior Congress(I) functionaries he had dealings with, the Government after having set a precedent will have no choice but to ask for further resignations. The ultimate paradox will be, of course, if it is firmly established that all along Swarup was actually operating as an intelligence agent for the Government of India.

—DILIP BOBB

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CONGRESS(I)

Shuffle Puzzle

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

IT BORE the unmistakable stamp of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. When newsmen were summoned individually on a chilly Sunday morning by officials of the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I), with the invitation stating that "Rajiv Gandhi will address his first-ever press conference in Delhi as the Congress president", another headline-grabber seemed in the offing. But, as Rajiv took his seat under a makeshift shamiana put up on the grounds of the AICC(I) headquarters on Akbar Road, the proceedings were anti-climactic.

In a move that sparked off more questions than it answered, he reassembled the jigsaw puzzle of who's who in the party, for the third time since he rode into the office as the party's nominated president. The shuffle offered no clues as to how long the party would remain the tail of the Government, and whether the tail would at all wag the dog. The question was specially poignant in a year when Rajiv had firmly resolved to hold the organisational elections, after a lapse of 14 years.

At the same time it was abundantly clear that the well-publicised Sunday afternoon exercise was more in the nature of political jugglery than a serious attempt to hand over the organisation to people of proven integrity and ability to manage what is the largest non-communist party in the world. If the changes announced were any indication, it was evident that Rajiv's attempt was to ensure that only those who owe their political existence to him personally would be the party bosses.

However, Rajiv asserted: "The party will be supreme from now on." And at least the induction of the prime minister's trusted trouble-shooter, Arjun Singh, as vice-president seemed in keeping with this claim. Singh had an hour-long discussion with Rajiv a day earlier and was present under the shamiana. The same day, he resigned as Union commerce minister and returned to the AICC(I) headquarters later in the afternoon to unceremoniously take charge. "Getting Arjun Singh over there signifies that Rajiv means business," quipped an enthusiast. But the other changes he announced seemed to dilute the contention.

To follow Singh, and join a rung below as general secretaries of the AICC(I), were two ministers of state: Nawal Kishore Sharma, who was in charge of the Petroleum Ministry, and Tengthuri Anjiah, in charge of the labour Ministry. Both

Rajiv addressing press conference in New Delhi: political jugglery

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ranked fairly low in the rating of ministerial performance. Sharma's ground was cut from under his feet during the cabinet reshuffle last year when he lost the key Petrochemicals Department to the Industry Ministry. And Anjiah was ill-at-ease from the beginning, unable to instil a new "work culture", as Rajiv had ordained, among the three million employees of the public undertakings.

To keep the duo company was the party's glamour woman, Najma Heptullah, who in her uncomfortable role earlier as the deputy chairman of the Opposition-filled Rajya Sabha, had often behaved as the damsel in distress. "I think I'll do better now," cooed Heptullah. With Harijan leader Ram Dhan and former minister from Bihar Bhagwat Jha Azad brought in as general secretaries, the AICC(I) secretariat has now reached a record strength of eight. Together with a high-powered vice-president, a treasurer emeritus in the form of Sitaram Kesri, and a somnolent "working president" in the octogenarian Kamalapati Tripathi, not to speak of a new seven-member Congress(I) Parliamentary Board (CPB-I) and a 20-member Congress(I) Working Committee (CWC-I), it is now heavily laden at the top.

More significant, however, was the swearing-in next morning of the party's think-tank P. Shiv Shankar, former energy minister who had been put on ice since he had lost the election in his native Andhra Pradesh. Shiv Shankar occupied the seat of the commerce minister that had been left warm by Arjun Singh. As the former counsel for Mrs Gandhi at the Shah Commission, Shiv Shankar's image is a bit too deeply associated with the *ancien regime* to jell with Rajiv's public protestation of cleanliness. Shankar's rehabilitation at the Centre, however, was due to his ability to put the aggressive opposition on the defensive by his well reasoned arguments mixed with sarcastic comments. During the last few sessions of Parliament the Goverment was often embarrassed by the absence of a strong speaker.

While Shiv Shankar came back into the Cabinet like a homing pigeon so did Chandrashekhar Singh, albeit into a smaller room as minister of state in independent charge of petroleum. Singh's rehabilitation could indeed mean cocking a snook at the entrenched Jagannath Mishra lobby in his native Bihar. In fact, one of the main themes of last fortnight's changes was to show the mailed fist to the erstwhile Indira-loyalists who have been steadfastly refusing to fall in line.

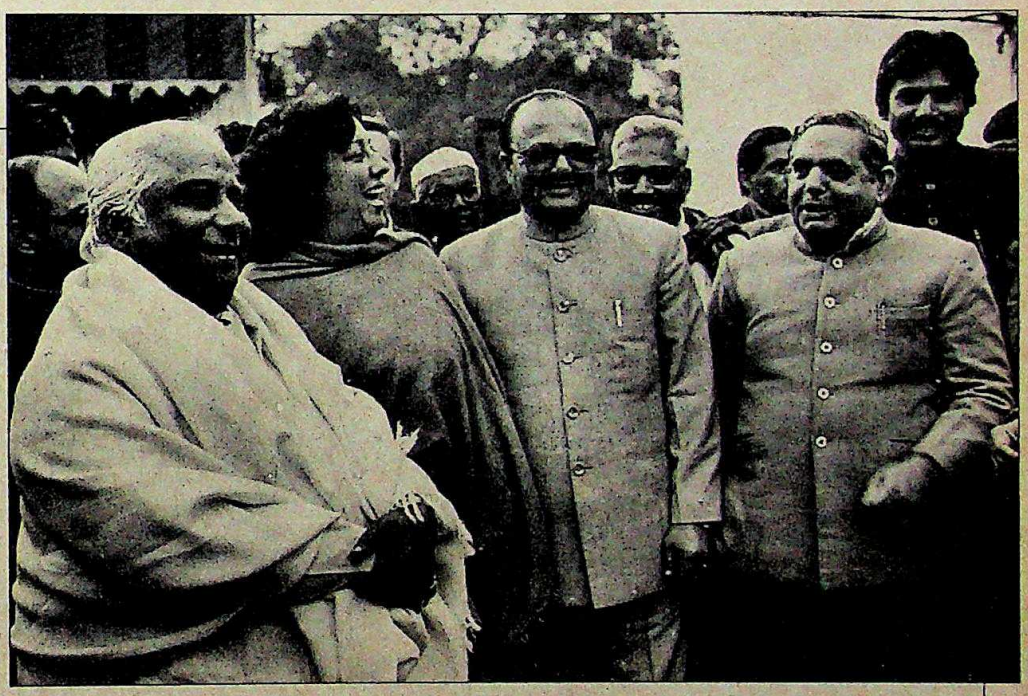
Conversely, the rehabilitation of Singh showed a new spirit of indulgence towards the party's rootless wonders. Singh, a Rajput had been shunted out of the council once earlier and was reinducted only after he had defeated the redoubtable George Fernandes in the Lok Sabha by-election from the Banka constituency. Justified Kesri a fellow Bihari, "Singh is an experienced politician and he has trounced a giant like George. Such leaders have to be encouraged."

But encouragement was certainly not profferred on the diehard Indira-loyalists. Most notable among them is Gundu Rao, the Karnataka strongman, who, after a long wait on the edge of a precipice, finally slid down it as he was dropped from the CWC(I). "I've no regrets," said Rao after his removal. And equally stoic seemed Pranab Mukherjee, the former finance minister, who was dropped not only from the CWC(I) but also from the CPB(I). Rao got the chop despite an hour-long meeting with Arun Singh, minister of state for defence and Rajiv's neighbour, barely 48 hours before his unceremonious removal. Yet another notable evacuee from the CWC(I) was Buta Singh, the solitary Sikh in the Union Cabinet.

The pep talk surrounding the reorganisation had a keyword: autonomy. "Everyone of my colleagues will have autonomy," declared Arjun Singh in the first flush of assuming the party office. But it is doubtful whether that will be possible in the case of Ahmed Patel and Oscar Fernandes, the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern duo in the Prime Minister's Secretariat who were sent out to Gujarat and Karnataka respectively to head the Pradesh Congress(I) Committees (PCC-I) there. Fernandes' pitch was queered right away when four state-level party leaders sent in their resignations from the party in protest against his appointment.

There were thus glaring contradictions between Rajiv's pronouncements and his

The shuffle offered no clues as to how long the party would remain the tail of the Government, and whether the tail would at all wag the dog.



Anjiah, Heptullah, Singh and Sharma: top heavy

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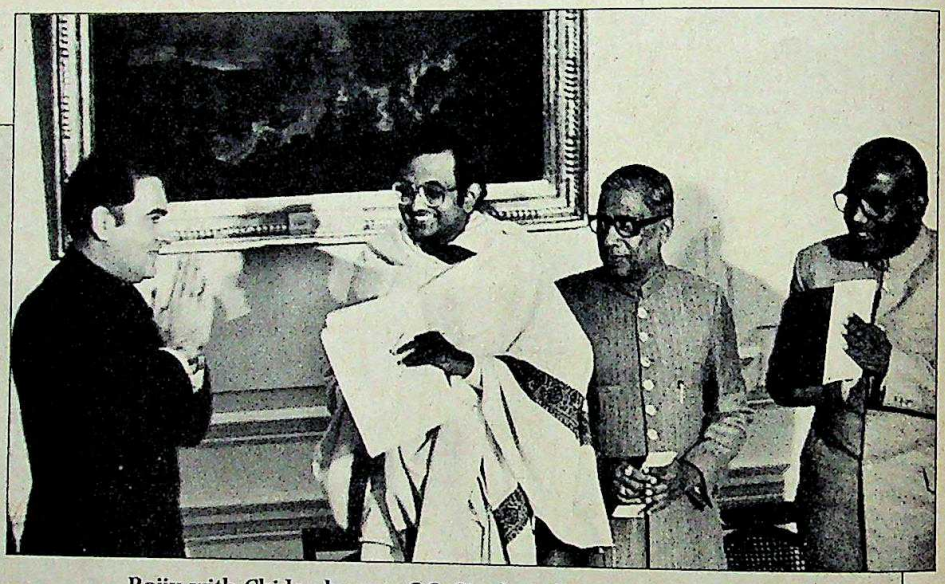
actions. He spoke about decentralisation of the party and drafting people into it who could take decisions by themselves. But the new list of people who filled up the committees showed a preponderance of carry-overs, a trait that he seems to have inherited from Mrs Gandhi. The tell-tale evidence came from the newly-selected CPB(I), supposed to be the highest party forum, which included, barring Tripathi and Arjun Singh, not one name who could boast of even a semblance of following in their own surroundings. P.V. Narasimha Rao, who had lost the elections in his native Andhra Pradesh, retained his CPB(I) seat nevertheless. So did Maragatham Chandrashekhar, almost by proxy, after having been dropped from the Union council of ministers earlier and as AICC(I) general secretary later. K. Karunakaran, who is hard-pressed to retain the chief ministership of Kerala, somehow carried on in the CPB(I). And so did A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Union minister for programme implementation. Even Darbara Singh, a hangover from Punjab's past, stuck to his party chair by what seemed to be a sheer miracle.

"While Shiv Shankar came back into the Cabinet like a homing pigeon, so did Chandrashekhar Singh, albeit into a smaller room..."



Rajiv with Chidambaram, C.S. Singh and Shankar: bad pennies

Equally bizarre was the selection of the octave of the AICC(I) general secretaries, three of whom—Heptullah, Azad and Ram Dhan—had never held even a PCC(I) president's post. In fact Ram Dhan, who had left the Congress in the tempestuous year of 1977 to join forces with Jagjivan Ram, replaced Jitendra Prasad, a Rajiv-loyalist from Uttar Pradesh, as one of the party general secretaries.

The CWC(I) also seems to have lost its weight and importance. Barring the eight general secretaries, the treasurer and the seven CPB(I) members—who are its obligatory members anyway—it did not include any name of importance. Its crowning jewels remained two sitting chief ministers, Bir Bahadur Singh of Uttar Pradesh and Janaki Ballav Patnaik of Orissa, besides the former chief minister of Assam, Hiteswar Saikia. Quite inexplicably, the state organisations that were seething with dissension were either ignored or were given only theoretical representation. Like Heptullah, for the state of Maharashtra where dissension runs to the grassroots. Or Khan Chowdhury, for West Bengal, where the Congress(I) is riven with dissensions and infighting.

Rajiv himself kept everybody guessing about his own role in the party "Maybe, may not be," was his double-meaning reply to the question whether he would continue as party president once the three million or so of its members are properly enrolled and a new AICC(I) is elected, hopefully, in April.

Even a political sophomore could realise that Rajiv was not willing to take any risk at this juncture and that he would gladly respond to the 'unanimous appeal' from the newly elected members of the AICC(I) to become an elected president. But the mechanics of the party elections begins now since in a few weeks from now the enrolment of members will be complete.

Thus the dominant groups will have the ultimate sway over the basic electorate—the primary members—who will in turn elect the block committees, and, further up, the District Congress(I) Committees and the PCC(I)'s. The PCC(I)'s will subsequently elect the AICC(I), the final electoral college for the party presidentship. It was in this context that the selection of new office-bearers made some sense. Had Rajiv left the conduct of the organisational elections to weak leaders and those of doubtful loyalty, the hawks in the party could have grabbed control of the various party wings. In fact as soon as the process of election began in October last the AICC(I) headquarters were flooded with numerous reports about the enrolment of bogus memberships to the party from all over the country.

With Arjun Singh at the top, Congressmen hope, the fear of 'bogus membership' will not cramp the prime minister. Arjun Singh has been given absolute power to cancel any membership which he suspects is not in order. In addition, the entire election process will be handled by observers to be appointed by Singh. In turn the election to the various bodies will be on the basis of the membership certified by these observers.

The Congress(I), with its three million members, is itself bigger than the aggregate of four fairly large and mixed Lok Sabha constituencies in the country—with at least as many shades of opinion, interests and loyalties. Rajiv, thus, cannot afford to lose control. But, in order to win the party election, and legitimise his own position as president, much will depend on the leadership newly nominated by him. Their failure will ultimately be his.

—PRABHU CHAWLA and SUMIT MITRA

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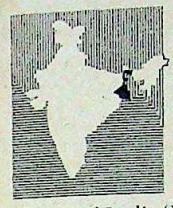
WEST BENGAL

A Sensational Exit



"I AM NOT a gentleman, I am a communist," Ashok Mitra had once snapped at a crusty bureaucrat in 1979, two years after his affair with the Communist Party of India(Marxist) (CPI-M) had begun. Last fortnight, when the acerbic 58-year-old economist resigned as the finance minister of the CPI(M)-dominated Left Front Government in West Bengal, the gentleman and the communist seemed once again to be switching roles.

Mitra attributed his bombshell decision to indifferent health, and spoke in his resignation letter about his "acute and long-standing allergy". While he remained incommunicado thereafter, his "allergy" caused political goose-pimples in his party and government. And a day after driving out of the Writers' Buildings for the last time into Calcutta's wintry smog he also resigned from the state Assembly and the CPI(M).

Mitra, who had been elected to the party's powerful state committee only a month earlier, suggested with a hint of *double entendre* that his ailment was not just physical. He mentioned in his two-paragraph exit note to Chief Minister Jyoti Basu that his doctors had advised him a "stress-free existence".

The fall of a fellow-traveller from West Bengal's leftist bandwagon would normally have received only passing notice. But Mitra's departure created ripples that reached well beyond the party and the state because the ex-finance minister is no ham leftist. His own stature was never circumscribed by the many ideological compromises made by the Marxists during their nine-year rule in West Bengal. First as a left-supported independent MLA and finance minister between 1977 and 1982, and then, as a full-fledged party member and finance minister since 1983, the bespectacled, dhoti-clad Mitra had been both respected and feared for his vitriolic campaign against the Centre's fiscal policies as well as for his opposition to economic populism in his own state.

In 1980, it was Mitra who was largely responsible for the militant anti-Centre stance adopted by the CPI(M). He also provided the theoretical ammunition to the party's charge that the Congress(I) had been persistently denying the states their due share of the nation's resources by expropriating colossal amounts as direct and indirect Central levies. The ensuing demand for constitutional reforms to re-define Centre-state relations was picked up by other opposition parties and non-Congress(I) state governments. Said Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde: "Dr Ashok Mitra has been an important soldier in the Indian people's fight against the Congress(I) for justice."

Mitra (centre) at a party meet: free-wheeling thinker

A brilliant scholar who got his doctorate in 1953 at the Netherlands School of Economics under Jan Tinbergen (who later won the Nobel Prize), Mitra has never pretended to be a pure academician nor clung to office at any stage. He served the World Bank for a while, then became chairman of the Agricultural Prices Commission and was for two years the chief economic advisor to the Government of India. In between, he made his mark as a columnist, writing for many years an acid but eminently readable column in the weighty *Economic and Political Weekly*, and penned books on popular sociology, including a collection of articles, *Hoodlum Years*.

For all that, his latest step was unexpected. "Mitra was never an organisation man and is therefore quite unpredictable," said one of his economist friends in the Central Government. His lightning resignation also embarrassed his Marxist colleagues no end, especially Basu. "Why should I tell you the reasons for his resignation," fumed an exasperated chief minister when questioned by newsmen. "What can I do but to accept (his resignation) if a man says that he is dying?" lamented Saroj Mukherjee, the secretary of the CPI(M) state committee to whom Mitra had sent in his resignation from the party and all its forums.

Nevertheless, at least some members of the CPI(M) leadership reacted promptly. M. Basavapunnaiah, politburo member and one of the main ideologues pursuing a new line of non-collision with the Congress(I) on the plea of "national unity", was the first. He said that Mitra had been an "individualist" right through—which is Marxist pejoration reserved for independent thinkers whom the party fails to convert.

But other members of the politburo would not comment till the party forum's next session in the capital, slated for February 17, when Basu is likely to furnish his formal report on the episode. Nor would Mitra speak up—the standard reply from his home before the telephone was slammed down was that "he is not in Calcutta". But what filtered through suggests that Mitra had lately been fighting not so much against Delhi but against bureaucratisation and populism in his own party.

The straw that broke the camel's back could well have been Basu's refusal, the day Mitra resigned, to concur with his decision that principals of colleges should be paid according to the student strength on their rolls, instead of their academic qualifications. But this was not a lone issue. Mitra had been

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sternly resisting wasteful expenditure. He was against the opening of 17 new colleges in North Bengal, colleges that till today have fewer than six students each. He also opposed the showpiece stadium where the CPI(M) held its 12th party congress last year-end, as well as the payment of Rs 10 lakh to the Ramkrishna Mission, the grant of a large sum for opening 16 schools in Midnapore district, and allowing indiscriminate salary hikes to government employees.

SUCH measures should normally have been discouraged by the Marxists themselves, wedded as they are to the objective of providing as much relief as possible to the common man (and not merely to clerks in the Government). But ironically, their recent tendency to prolong their rule through what Mitra might term populism has been masterminded by a crop of young economists who have not been seeing eye to eye with him. The highfliers among these are Ashim Dasgupta, 41, member of the State Planning Board and Mitra's former student who received his doctorate from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Biplab Dasgupta, an economist in his mid-40s with a doctorate from Sussex University. The two Dasguptas have lately been riding high on a subtle anti-Mitra wave both within the party and the Government. Ashim Dasgupta was recently made a member of the West Bengal state committee, simultaneously with his teacher-comrade. And Biplab Dasgupta went a step higher last year when he was elected to the central committee of the party.

Earlier, Mitra had resigned once six months ago, and gone abroad on some academic assignments. Mukherjee and Basu had rushed to his house and tried to dissuade him from quitting. But this time Basu did little to hold back his mercurial ideologue. Mitra himself did not wait for such Marxist niceties as reporting to party forums. The news was leaked to *The Statesman*, edited by a long-time friend, Amalendu Dasgupta. Said an evidently irked Basavapunnaiah: "This behaviour (of rushing to the 'bourgeois' press) is particularly galling." Both the party and the Government accepted his resignation without fuss.

The differences between Mitra and the Dasguptas could have been swept under the mat had his ties with others in the Left Front Government been better. But public works minister Jatin Chakravarty alleged that he could not

"Why should I tell you the reasons for Mitra's resignation?"

JYOTI BASU
chief minister, West Bengal

repair the state's roads because the Finance Ministry would not give him funds. Then, at a recent meeting for determining plan spending, Mitra argued against increasing the fleet of buses run by the loss-incurring Calcutta State Transport Corporation and instead demanded better maintenance of the existing fleet, most of which is in a state of disrepair. But he was shouted down by Ashim Dasgupta, who almost like an authoritative commissar told him: "Your casual cynicism is no substitute for hard empiricism." In today's West Bengal, "empiricism" is shorthand for generating unproductive employment.

The irony is that for all his hardheadedness on such issues, his period as finance minister saw the budgetary position deteriorate—despite unprecedented levels of additional taxation. His heroic resource mobilisation effort came to nought because the money was frittered away on avoidable expenditure, and by the end of the sixth plan West Bengal was the only state that failed to spend close to 40 per cent of its allotted Plan outlay. From a zenith of 21.89 per cent of the state's total expenditure spent on plan investment in 1976-77 (the last full fiscal year of Congress rule in the state), the figure has now plummeted to around 12 per cent. Party insiders claim that Mitra had been fighting to reverse this trend, but was hamstrung by opposition from his colleagues.

"This behaviour (of rushing to the 'bourgeois' press) is particularly galling."

M. BASAVAPUNNAIAH
politburo member

But, of all the harsh words that are being dredged up from Marxist demonology to condemn him, the one that perhaps fits him like a glove is that he is an individualist. It was individualism that had egged him on all along, prompting him to move from the World Bank to the Government of India to Marxist politics. His melodramatic exit from the Union Government in 1972, an action he never bothered to explain, followed controversy over the fact that a speech that he ghost-wrote for Mrs Gandhi had been culled from an article by Mahbub-ul-Haq, then a World Bank expert and now Pakistan's finance minister.

A free-wheeling thinker, Mitra probably enjoyed writing more than anything else. "I'm itching to write," he often told his callers while seemingly buried under files in his ministerial chamber. In office as finance minister, he had to discontinue his *Economic and Political Weekly* column, "Calcutta Diary", which he signed A.M.

Nevertheless, he kept making occasional forays into journalism. A recent three-part article on Indira Gandhi, timed for the first anniversary of her assassination got him into further trouble with the party bosses. He struck a discordant note when he wrote: "At the personal level, I feel cheated: How much I would have enjoyed the spectacle of Indira Gandhi being humiliated at the polls, a second time and forever. Instead she went out a martyr..." Basavapunnaiah found this in "bad taste", and complained to Basu.

The CPI(M) perhaps needed a friendly outsider like Mitra in 1977, to set off the long history of alienation from the middle class intelligentsia and gain a broad-based acceptance in Bengal's *bhadralok* society. This was specially so because most of the leading intellectuals had opted out of it in two instalments, having chosen to stay with the Communist Party of India (CPI) during the split in 1964, and, later on, joined the Naxalite bandwagon in 1969-70. But Mitra, despite his Marxist commitments, is too deeply cut in the nutty-professor mould to be absorbed into any system. Inevitably, therefore, the dialectics of instinct and discipline ensured that the party was over for the fiery academician.

—INDRANIL BANNERJIE

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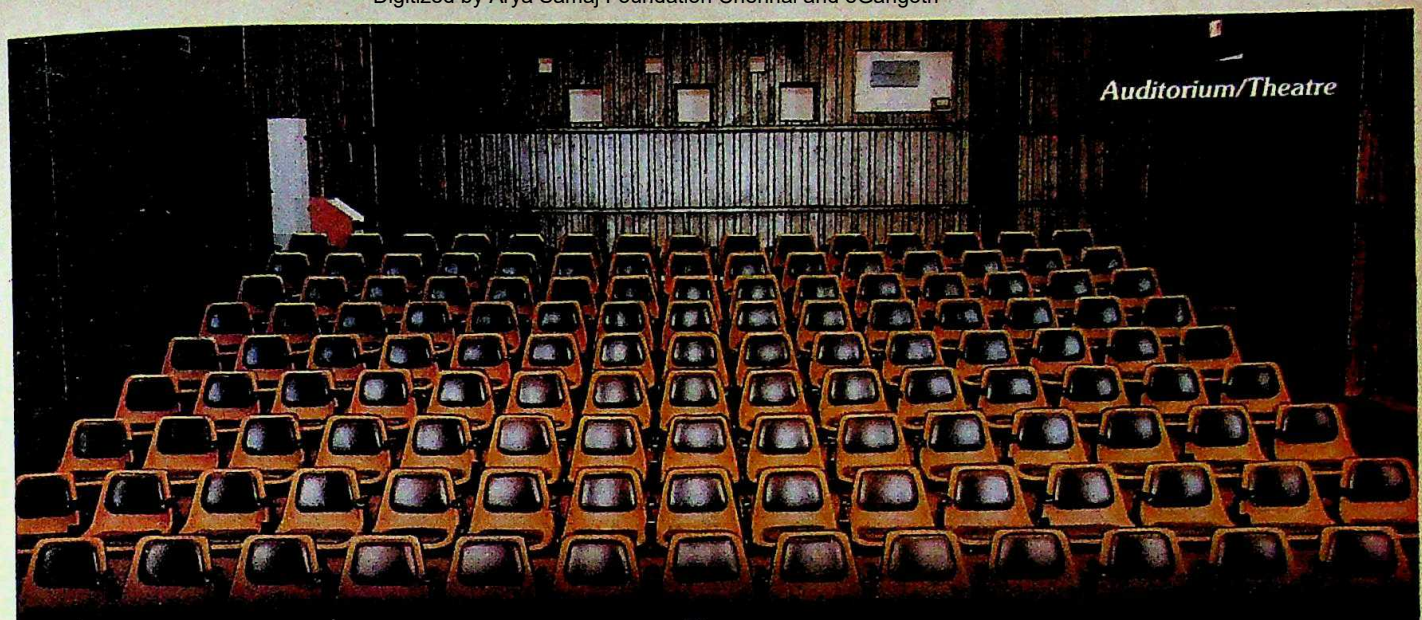

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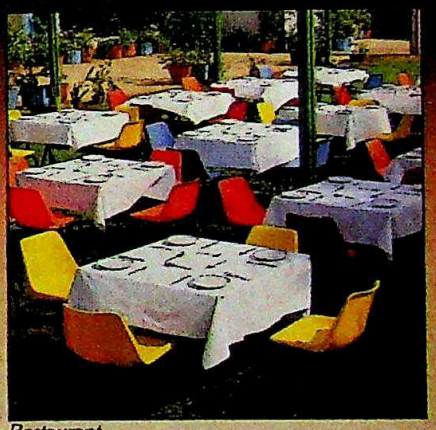
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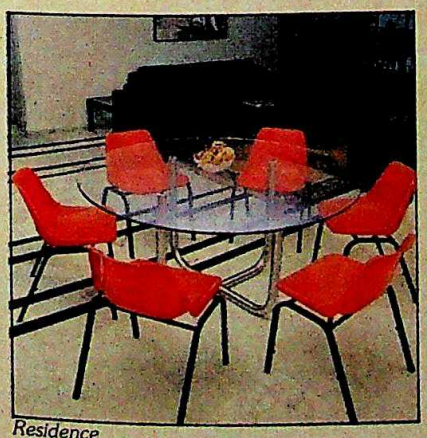
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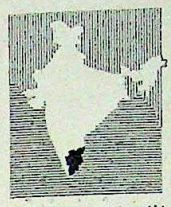
TAMIL NADU

Tables Turned



IN THE continuing game of upmanship between political foes Jayalalitha and R.M. Veerappan, the wheel seems to have come full circle. Five months ago, the charismatic film star-turned-politician seemed to be on top when State Endowments Minister Veerappan was stripped of the prestigious information portfolio even as she was restored to the post of the propaganda secretary. But last fortnight it was obvious that Veerappan, the Chanakya of AIADMK politics, had come bouncing back. Not merely was the information portfolio restored to him and three more subjects added to his care, partymen were directed by MGR to disband all fans organisations and associations named after Jayalalitha.

In a signed statement on the front page of *Anna*, the party's official newspaper, the chief minister said: "Associations like Jayalalitha Peravai (Jayalalitha assembly), and Jayalalitha Narpani Manram (Jayalalitha good deeds club) and similar associations started in Ms Jayalalitha's name should be immediately wound up. The starting of such associations is a breach of party discipline, and persons who continue to run them will face disciplinary action." In an explanatory note, which gave the declaration a ring of finality, he reminded his partymen that this directive was only a reiteration of his earlier warning issued in December 1983.

Jayalalitha herself chose not to react, making herself incommunicado in the confines of her plush residence in Poes Gardens. However, her supporters' reacted curiously if not ominously. In the past, any such adverse dictat has met with the response that they still continued to have faith in the leadership of MGR. This time around Salem Kannan, Jayalalitha faction MP and spokesman, surprised political observers by a statement that the manrams cannot be disbanded because the members were not primary AIADMK members at all in the first place. This is a clear case of flouting party discipline.

The Veerappan camp was understandably jubilant. Said a senior leader close to Veerappan: "Our leader has now definitely put a full stop to Jayalalitha's political career in the party. Otherwise, as the party's propaganda secretary, she should now have been vociferously making announcements about party programmes and functions. In fact, she hasn't even gone to the party office in the last few months."

Jayalalitha's fade-out has been unexpected. When she was reinstated to her earlier post of propaganda secretary in September last year it seemed the chief minister was planning to bring her back to centre-stage. He also issued two statements asking partymen not to criticise Jayalalitha and openly showed his displeasure of Agriculture Minister K. Kalimuthu for his diatribes against her.

But thereafter, as she went off for a one-month cure at the nature cure institute in Bangalore, the tide turned against her. A Veerappan camp loyalist V.Kuppusamy, was given the AIADMK ticket to fight the Cheyyar assembly by-election in the North Arcot district last December. Confident that she was only next to MGR in drawing crowds, Jayalalitha half hoped that she would be invited to campaign for the party. The invitation never came as the Veerappan faction made it a prestige fight, intent on showing their leader that they could win without her campaigning. Kuppusamy won by a large margin of 20,000 votes over his nearest rival, 8,000 votes more than in the last elections.

A Veerappan associate crowed triumphantly: "Cheyyar, if anything, conclusively proved that MGR is the only leader in the party who matters. All this talk about Jayalalitha's crowd-pulling talents is bunkum." Party sources say that complaints were also carried to MGR that Jayalalitha Manrams were making conscious efforts to promote the former actress' image, even at the expense of the party and the chief minister. The manram's, they told MGR, were trying to create the impression that Jayalalitha was indispensable for the party's future survival and popularity.

Veerappan: bouncing back

Going by MGR's latest decisions, it is clear that R.M. Veerappan has stolen a march over his political foe, Jayalalitha

Jayalalitha: slow fade-out

Going by MGR's latest decisions, the point seems to have been taken. Jayalalitha's name was not on the party panel for selecting candidates for the local body elections scheduled for this month. In a cabinet reshuffle, MGR gave molasses and deputy collectors, previously under his care, to Law Minister C. Ponnaiyan, now a staunch Veerappan associate. And slowly party heavyweights began deserting her camp. "MGR's actions are now clear. You can draw the obvious conclusions from them and you will be right," said a minister who had once been close to her.

The writing on the wall is clear. What isn't is Jayalalitha's game plan. Will she be content to wait in the wings hoping that her beloved chief minister will in the end reward her patience? Or will she breakaway? Veerappan has again managed to overtake her in the race to the mantle of MGR's successor, but the real contest is for the people's hearts. That decisive battle is far away. Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu awaits the next turn of the giant wheel.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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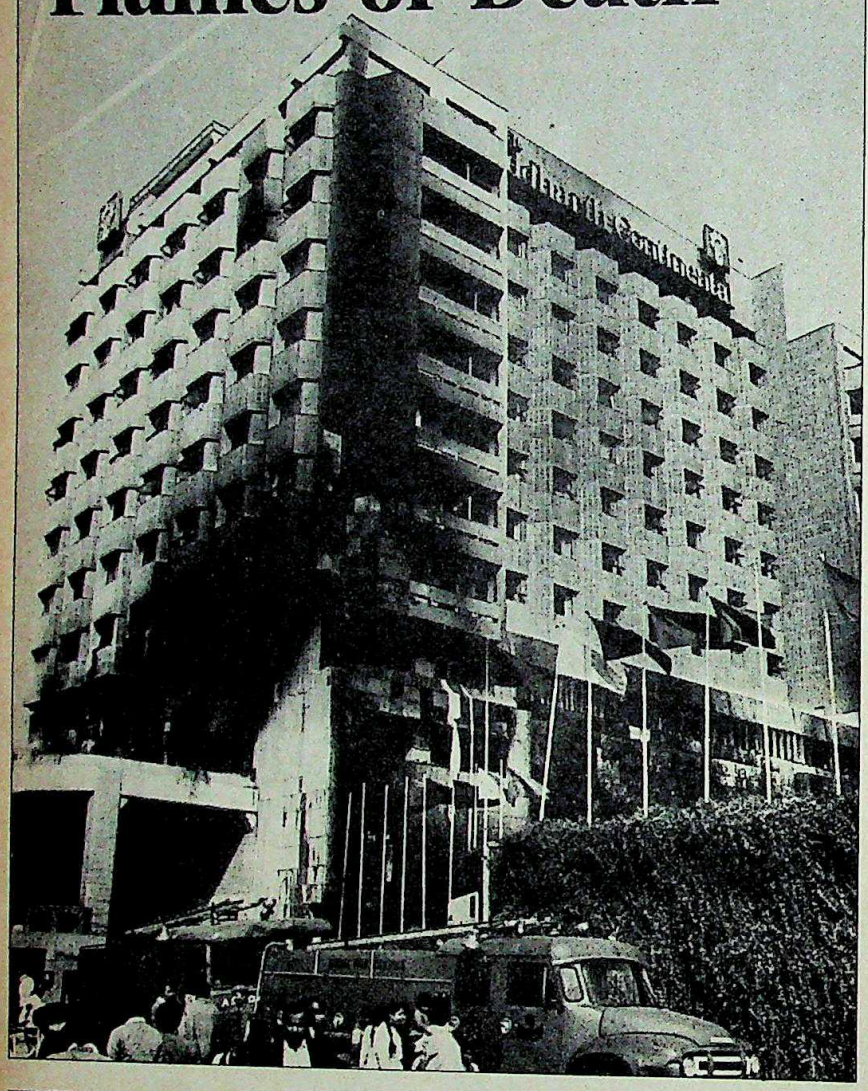
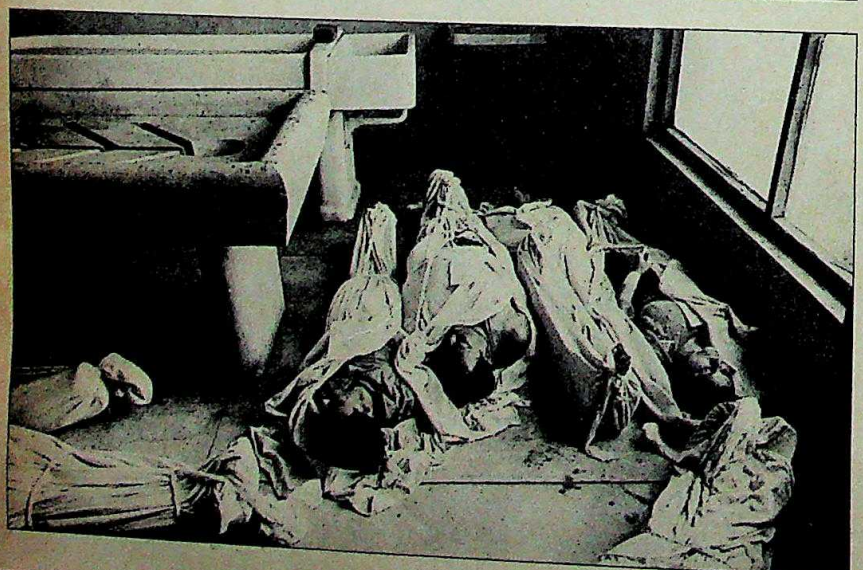
SIDDHARTH CONTINENTAL

Flames of Death





Photographs by HARI OM GULATI

MANY had seen it happen in *The Towering Inferno*. Some had read about the 1982 fire in the MGM Grand casino at Las Vegas that consumed 468 lives. But, for most people in India, disasters of that variety were almost an alien proposition, belonging to the fast-moving, modern western world. The illusion was shattered rudely on January 24.

Suddenly, the kind of horrifying spectacle that many in India thought belonged entirely to the unreal world of Hollywood films became a real proposition where it was least expected, in a spanking new five-star hotel standing proudly in south-western Delhi flanked by the exclusive Vasant Vihar locality on one side and the upper middle class Munirka Enclave on the other. Within a few hours, the lower half of the nine-storey Hotel Siddharth Continental, owned by a private firm called Jaiprakash Associates, was reduced to a sooty, blackened shell and the casualty count was mounting to finally touch a mind-boggling figure of 37 dead and 46 injured. In one cruel blow the most disastrous fire in the capital's history had exposed the inadequacy of its fire-fighting machinery and the fire risks literally built into the numerous high-rise buildings which have mushroomed in Delhi.

Coming at the height of the city's busy tourist season the disaster also put the Indian tourism industry through a traumatic ordeal by fire. There was no getting away from the fact that many of the victims were foreigners, including tourists who customarily descend on Delhi in winter. Besides the usual complement of Indian businessmen, large groups of Russians and Japanese had checked in. Most of the remaining rooms had been taken up by a pharmaceutical company INFAR for a conference. To add to the embarrassment there was the odd diplomat couple, staying at the hotel till more permanent lodgings could be found.

Many of them never made it out of the hotel alive. Among the victims of the blaze that first began in Mandala, the banquet hall in the basement, and then consumed the lobby and first three floors of the hotel were some representatives of the pharmaceutical company. West German diplomat Guenter Gerlach and his wife were discovered dead in their beds. The body of a young Australian girl Eva Funnel was the last to be carried out of the smouldering hotel nearly ten hours after the fire had started. Also among the dead were: V.

The blackened hotel (above); and the dead in Safdarjung Hospital: an inferno

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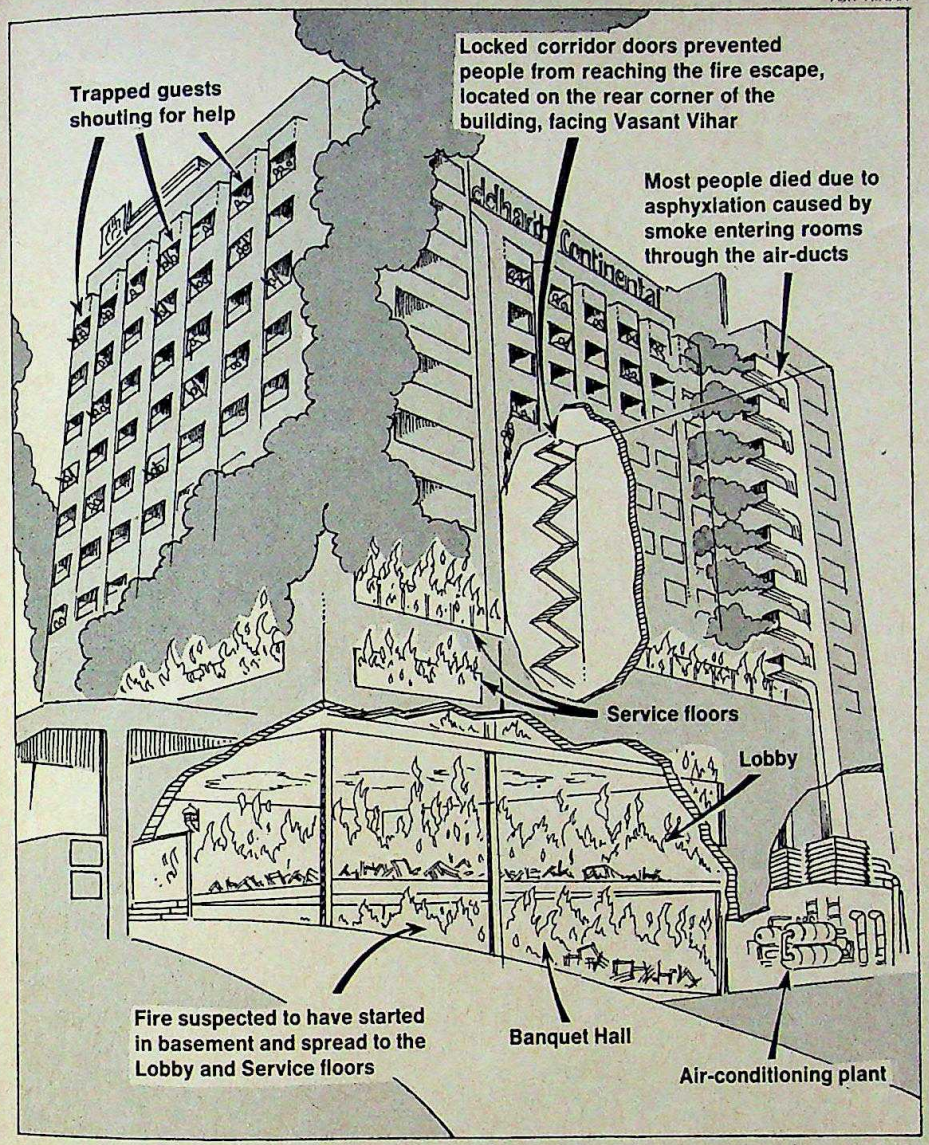
AJIT NINAN



Subramony, managing director of the Rourkela Steel Plant, Argentine dilplomat J.J. Rinaldini , Kirloskar company executives R.B.Naik and A.S.Limaye, three Japanese experts working with Maruti, a couple from Bahrain who died leaving their two daughters, aged seven and five in a state of delirium, two Iraqi women, two Englishmen, and a victim each from Pakistan, the US, France, and the USSR. Identification was not made easier by the fact that the registration books and records kept in the lobby had been destroyed in the fire. While going through the rooms the police recovered some passports, including that of an American, and efforts were underway to trace its owners. Most of the foreigners staying in the hotel were either vacationing or on a business trip.

Till three days after the disaster, the evidence of the panic and the desperate longing for life that must have seized those in the burning concrete monolith still hung out of many windows, long makeshift ropes made up by stringing together bedsheets and linen, a device that brought instant death to some when loosely-tied knots slipped and opened.

THE MOHANTY family, in Delhi on its way to Montreal, was one to run into mixed luck. Jai Gopal Mohanty, a biochemistry researcher at Montreal University was busy, along with his wife and two sons, aged 12 and 8, packing for the 3 a.m. flight to Montreal when he suddenly noticed smoke sneaking into the room "perhaps from the false ceiling" and realised that something was wrong. "We rushed out, but the corridor was full of smoke and we felt suffocated, so my wife said let us rush back to the room," he now recalls with a forlorn look in his eyes. Soon the family had the mortification of seeing that the ladder put up by the fire brigade people was too short to reach their eighth floor room. Says Mohanty: "At this stage people below shouted to us to use bedsheets to get down and we sent the children first." He succeeded in lowering his two sons to the ledge below from where they were picked up and rescued. But disaster followed. Mohanty fell unconscious halfway to safety but was rescued. But his wife choked to death in the room.

The superstructure of the hotel still stares down bleakly at the vast expanse of desolate blocks of flats filling up the horizon in the south-west, the direction from which the murderous breeze came in on that fateful evening, fanning the flames and, more importantly, churning up large clouds of smoke that choked the nostrils and blinded eyes of the helpless guests and firemen giving the sense of panic a suicidal quality. Three persons jumped to their death from windows.

Amidst all the controversy, there is no doubt on one point, that most people died of asphyxiation, suffering brain death as carbon monoxide, loaded in the smoke emitted by the fire filled their lungs and bloodstream and overwhelmed the brain—according to experts at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the brain cannot survive without oxygen supply for more than three minutes and though a person's heart may keep pumping, he is clinically dead.

Large-scale asphyxiation was possible because of the panic created by the fact that the hotel was plunged into darkness. The first casualty of the fire was the lighting. Either they were switched off or they went off and the stand-by generator in the basement never came on. The result was that even those guests woken by the smoke groped about the hotel corridors trying to locate the fire escape. The doors leading to the fire escape were locked and in the dark the helpless guests could not locate the keys kept in glass cases along the corridor.

Asked a fire service officer: "Anywhere in the world you will find good hotels having separate power supply system for the fire alarms, there was none here. There wasn't even an internal public address system on which we could tell the inmates what precautions to take." In desperation, the firemen and some hotel staff members even thought in terms of calling up each inmate on the internal telephone exchange individually but the phone operator had gone off to sleep along with the keys. Firemen themselves were hampered by the lack of snorkels and cushioning nets on which they could get people to jump.

In retrospect, a lot of people could also

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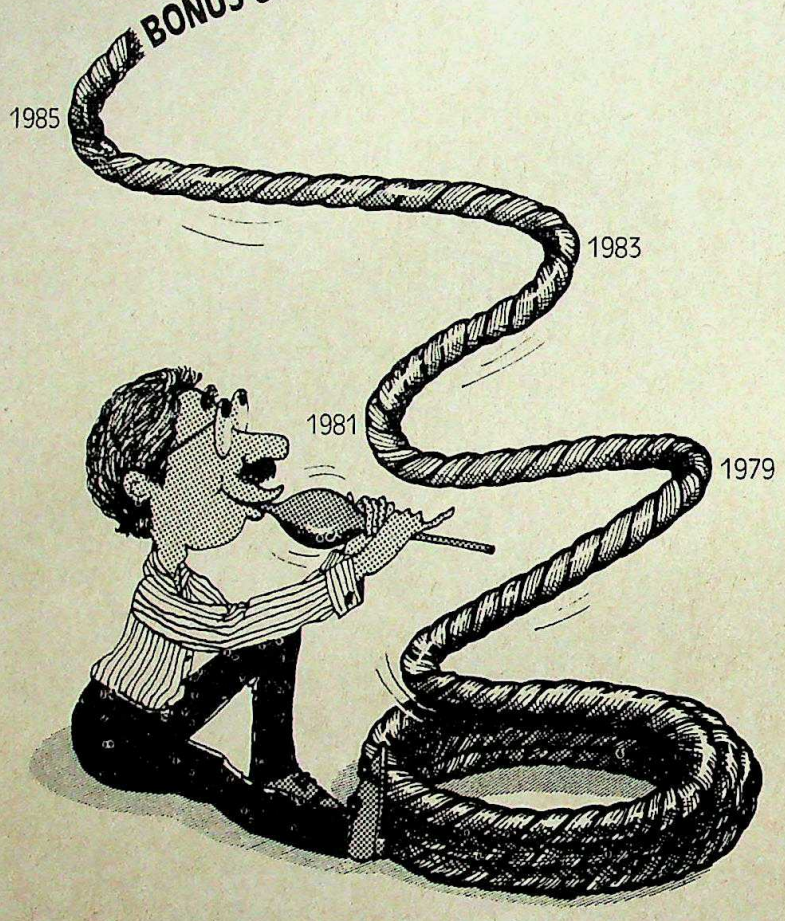

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have survived had they had any previous training in fire-fighting—something most Americans learn. Four of them, executives of the Gillette company, survived merely by consigning themselves to filled up bath-tubs after sealing all the main points of ingress for smoke and flames with wet linen and towels. They waited there till help came. "Most people could have survived if they just tried to breathe through wet towels or linen, or had they not made the error of opening windows and doors for an instant and then shutting them in panic, thus trapping the deadly smoke in the rooms," a fireman said.

These afterthoughts, now, have no meaning. But one mystery that needs to be solved is what caused the fire in the first place. The first suspicions, obviously, were on the power supply system but others talk in hushed tones of sabotage, a theory floated by the hotel management.

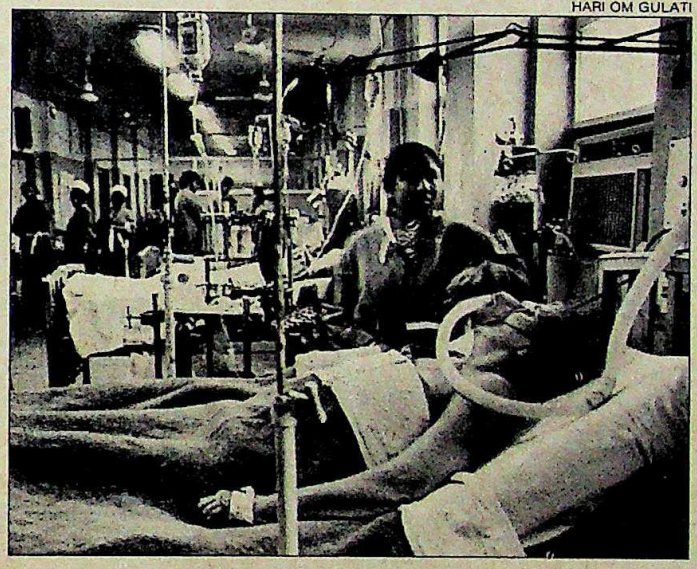
Hotel General Manager J.S.Malhotra and architect S. Jain tended to think it was sabotage. Malhotra said: "Sabotage cannot be ruled out." Said Jain: "I think it was sabotage." Both found it difficult to understand how in a matter of 15 to 20 minutes the fire had engulfed four floors. "It's difficult to visualise, there was no wind and the air-conditioning was not working. How did the smoke get into all the rooms so fast?" asked Jain.

He also said there was no connection between the (air-conditioning) ducts of the banquet area in the basement, where the fire is believed to have started, and the ducts in the upper floors where the guest-rooms are located. But fire brigade officers said the smoke had risen and probably entered the rooms through the ducts from the lobby, the service floor above it and the third floor, where the fire raged.

Even Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jagdish Tytler, who visited the site, seemed to have a fixation on the sabotage theory. He was informed by fire brigade officials that the body of a hotel steward Shekhar had been discovered in the banquet area where the fire is believed to have started. He questioned the firemen on how they could be sure the charred body was that of a staff member and not of a saboteur. It was only after

R.K. DAYAL

HARI OM GULATI



Victim being rescued (above); and at the hospital: painful ordeal

they told him that the victim's nameplate was still on his chest and the papers in his pocket and watch he was wearing was identified by his colleagues that he relented. The fire brigade men informed Tytler and Works and Housing Minister Abdul Ghafoor who also spent some time examining the wreckage of the banquet area, that several gas cylinders were stored in a kitchen near the banquet area and some of them were suspected to have been leaking.

But the cause of the fire is a relatively insignficant aspect of the disaster at the moment. The key question, on the other hand, is how adequate were the fire precautions and survival equipment in the hotel. It is well-known now that the smoke alarm did not function, that the hotel did not have sprinklers nor a system to efficiently guide the inmates to the fire-escape. And it is not as if the inadequacy of the hotel's fire-fighting equipment was not known to the authorities. Since 1982 the hotel had been functioning on temporary licences of the kind granted to many other five-star hotels in Delhi, including the Government-owned Ashok and Kanishk, and the new Meridien on Janpath, none of which meet safety requirements.

This cavalier attitude upsets the Delhi firemen a great deal who say they get the blame everytime a major fire takes place while nothing is done to enforce safety regulations. "Once a fire begins, no fire brigade in the world can put it out without any damage. But casualties of this kind only take place due to ignorance and callousness," said a senior Delhi fire service officer. The fire also exposed the Delhi Administration's own callous disregard for the fire risk in the numerous high-rise buildings in Delhi. In early 1983, there was a furore after the Gopala Towers fire and it led to the formation of a committee headed by retired major-general H.C. Singhal which drew up a list of over 200 multi-storey buildings with a fire risk. Hardly one of the committees' recommendations has been implemented so far. Delhi firemen say that even more than the hotels the fire threat today exists in commercial buildings which are very heavily populated during working hours when the electric systems also have a massive load, particularly during summer when the air-conditioners are on. "One of Singhal committees' recommendations was that at least 450 more men should be added to the Delhi fire brigade. Has anything been done about that?" asks S.K. Dheri, the city fire chief.

Sure enough, even this time, the Government's immediate reaction to the tragedy was the formation of yet another committee to investigate into the fire. Union Tourism Minister H.K.L. Bhagat also flew in from Bombay and ordered a review of all the five-star hotels in the country. But this time in the background of a perennial terrorist threat in the capital there is a new sense of urgency. And unless it results in a substantial improvement in safety conditions in the high-rise building the capital could see many more morbid encores of the tragedy.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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ASSASSINATION TRIAL

Day of Judgement

IT WAS not as if the verdict was unexpected. When Pran Nath Lekhi, 60, Satwant Singh's ebullient lawyer, visited his client the day before the judgement on the Indira Gandhi murder case was due, he told him to be prepared for the worst. The same evening Lekhi told journalists that the judgement by Additional Sessions Judge Mahesh Chandra was going to be 268 pages. Lekhi was wrong by six pages: the 52,000-word judgement on the most important case of its kind since Nathuram Godse took up 262 pages.

Yet, when Chandra announced his sentence the next day, condemning Satwant Singh, Balbir Singh and Kehar Singh to death for the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984, the defendants and their lawyers reacted with a mixture of either simulated or genuine outrage and disgust. Satwant got up from his stool to tell journalists: "*Yeh faisla to pehle se ho chooka tha*" (This was a predetermined judgement). Charged Lekhi: "This judgement is a farce." Added Prem Prakash Grover, 55, counsel for Balbir Singh and Kehar Singh: "This is an unacceptable judgement."

However, the prosecution lawyers and the judge have no doubt that the guilt of the accused has been established beyond reasonable doubt. Said Special Public Prosecutor Kundan Lal Arora, a sprightly 73-year-old who came into prominence when he appeared for the State in the Vidya Jain murder case: "This was the most brutal case of assassination I have handled. It is the prosecution's duty to help the court by producing all the evidence and I am glad we could do this conclusively."

Relaxing in the sparsely furnished drawing-room of his government flat off Tilak Road, guarded by armed policemen equipped with metal detectors, Mahesh Chandra, 57, admitted that the tension of hearing the case over 113 drama-filled sittings had left him with a blood pressure problem. But the death sentence, his first ever, does not weigh on his conscience: "We don't think as much that a life has been lost but that by some mistake of ours no more lives should be lost. We never return a verdict which cannot be supported by evidence. We don't take our responsibility lightly, no matter what others say."

But Lekhi was infuriated that Chandra had already pronounced his verdict before he could enter the court, and told newsmen while Chandra was writing out his sentence: "We have not read the judgement. Even the court has not read the judgement. He is reading it now." But Chandra and Arora were just as dimissive about the quality of the defence. Said Chandra: "It is difficult to say what Lekhi was aiming at." Arora maintained: "Till today I don't know what was the defence."

The prosecution's case, as accepted by Chandra, was straightforward. Kehar Singh, 54, an assistant in the Directorate General of Supplies and Disposals, Balbir Singh, 45, a Delhi police assistant sub-inspector, Satwant Singh, a constable in the Delhi Armed Police, and Beant Singh (the last three on duty at Mrs Gandhi's house), had entered into a criminal conspiracy to kill Mrs Gandhi. "In furtherance of the said conspiracy," said Chandra in his judgement, "on October 31 at 9.10 a.m., accused Beant Singh (deceased) and Satwant Singh...while posted on security duty at TMC gate in No.1 Safdarjang Road, New Delhi, had fired firearms bullet shots upon Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India, from their service arms...and as a consequence thereof she sustained grevious and dangerous injuries which resulted subsequently in her death."

The judge found Satwant guilty of murder mainly on the testimony of three eyewitnesses: head constable Narain Singh, assistant sub-inspector Ramesh-

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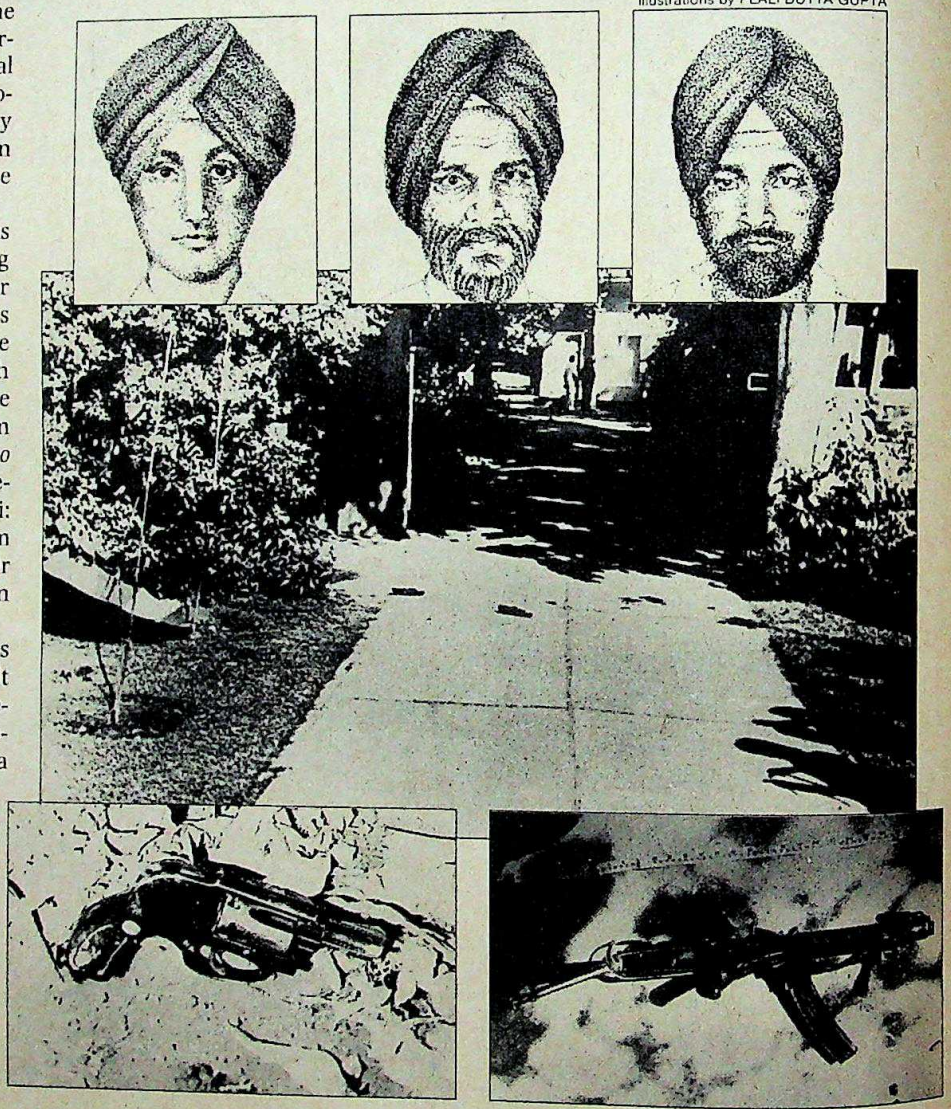

The murder site; and (inset clockwise) Satwant, Kehar Singh, and Balbir Singh; and the murder weapons: brought to book

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war Dayal and personal attendant Nathu Ram. Narain Singh was shielding Mrs Gandhi with an umbrella while Dayal and Ram trailed along with Rajendra Kumar Dhawan and Makhan Lal Fotedar. All five, said the prosecution, saw Beant and Satwant fire on Mrs Gandhi. The judge accepted that Beant and Satwant had both changed duties to be together near the TMC gate and that the bullets that killed Mrs Gandhi had come from the firearms known to be with Beant and Satwant.

Despite being faced with such damning evidence, Lekhi argued that:

- Of the 148 witnesses the prosecution had listed, 75 were eventually not called. These include two crucial eyewitnesses, Dhawan and Fotedar.
- In his police statement Dhawan had not mentioned Ram's name as an eyewitness.
- There were no blood samples at the spot where Dayal claimed to have fallen. He had been trained to fire, why then did he try to jump on the alleged assassins? According to the standing orders, nobody lower than an assistant sub-inspector could be in the inner security cordon at the prime minister's residence. So how could head constable Narain Singh have been near Mrs Gandhi?
- The two bullets which killed Mrs Gandhi had no traces of human tissue.
- Mrs Gandhi's body had three exit bullet wounds. Four bullets had been found in her clothes. This, according to Lekhi, proved that bullets had come from all sides.
- Satwant's fingerprints had not been found on the murder weapon.
- Hospital records show that Mrs Gandhi was given blood after the post-mortem is supposed to have started.

How significant these arguments are is open to question. For, in his judgement, Chandra said Lekhi had not been successful in casting doubt on any of the crucial evidence. Said he: "Men may tell lies but the circumstances do not. Apart from direct evidence, the prosecution has also produced circumstantial evidence and the chain of circumstances is so well-connected that no element of doubt arises...Minor discrepancy here and there in the testimony of a particular witness does not dislodge the case of the prosecution, rather such discrepancies are natural."

CREATIVE EYE

"We never return a verdict which cannot be supported by evidence. We don't take our responsibility lightly, no matter what others say."

MAHESH CHANDRA
additional sessions judge

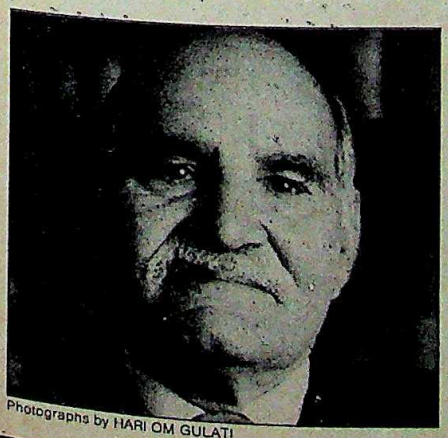
ARORA argued that he did not produce all the witnesses listed because he found he didn't need them. Besides, he asked: "If you do not believe three witnesses, are you going to believe the other two?" Chandra concurred: "Evidence has to be weighed rather than counted. Multiplication of witnesses is meaningless."

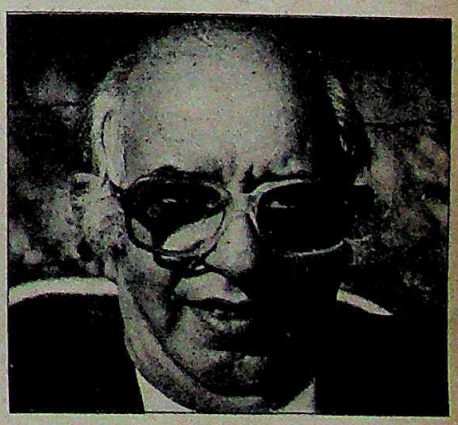
Lekhi had of course gone off at a tangent, arguing in court that Rajiv Gandhi himself was implicated in the murder. And he had asked for 34 witnesses to be summoned, including Rajiv and President Zail Singh. But Mahesh Chandra turned down the request as irrelevant. Said Chandra: "My brief was to find out if these four had entered into a criminal conspiracy to kill Mrs Gandhi and if Satwant and Beant had killed Mrs Gandhi as a result of that conspiracy. Whether there was another conspiracy was not something this court had been asked to judge."

It is clear that, confronted with the evidence, Lekhi had decided that offence was the best form of defence. And Rupinder Singh Sodhi, 40, Satwant's original counsel who later roped in Lekhi, accepted as much when he said: "We faced two main problems. Firstly, since the prosecution's witnesses had all appeared before the Justice Thakkar Commission they knew what they had to say and we had to work very hard to pick out discrepancies. Secondly, since they were hiding witnesses we had no option but to try and flush them out by levelling allegations against them." But it was always a losing battle. As one lawyer commented: "It is very difficult to defend somebody who was caught in the act and arrested from the spot of the crime."

In contrast, conspiracy cases are never easy to prove since direct evidence is rarely available. Recognising this, Chandra explained: "All that the prosecution has to do is to present a set of interrelated facts from which a conspiracy can be deduced." Chandra is convinced that the prosecution established this. But the defence lawyers and the families of Kehar Singh and Balbir Singh continue to argue against this. Said Grover: "If you will believe the evidence presented against my clients you will believe anything."

The crucial bits of evidence against Kehar and Balbir, which Chandra found





Arora (left) Lekhi; and Grover: a bitter battle

Photographs by HARI OM GULATI

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HARI OM GULATI

Satwant's family after the verdict: grief, surprise and anger

convincing, were:

► The testimony of Inderbir Singh, a Sikh, who said that he had overheard Kehar Singh console and exhort a sobbing Beant Singh: "*Ro mat, badla lo.*" (Do not cry, take revenge). This happened at the Moti Bagh Gurudwara when they were listening to the famous ragi, Professor Darshan Singh.

► The testimony of Amarjit Singh, a colleague of Balbir and Satwant, that Beant and Balbir used to often say they wanted to kill Mrs Gandhi. When a *baz* (falcon) appeared near Mrs Gandhi's house, Balbir and Beant had offered *ardas* (prayers) taking it as a sign from Guru Gobind Singh that they must "do something". In early October, according to Amarjit, Balbir told him that Beant "was very *garam* and he had won over a sepoy". Later that month Kehar Singh had taken the two for an *amrit chakhna* ceremony.

► A handwritten note, which an expert testified was in Balbir's hand, which has the months July to October on the left side while the right side has damning notings like "Army operation", "felt like killing" and the names of all the accused in various compromising contexts.

Doubting this, Grover and members of the two families point out that:

► The testimony of Inderbir was recorded seven months after the case had started. Arora admitted that they had got on to Inderbir after a report in *The Tribune* in June. But asks Satwant, Kehar's son: "Inderbir says he did not tell anybody about this incident, not even his father. Then, how did the police come to know about it ?" Asks Grover: "Is it likely that a conspirator will openly and loudly exhort a co-conspirator?"

► The testimony of Amarjit Singh, who has been twice suspended, indicting the three accused was not contained in his first statement to the police. That, said Grover, came in subsequent statements on November 24 and December 13. "After a murder, wouldn't a responsible police officer immediately rush to his superiors if he knew the details of such a conspiracy?" Grover charged that Amarjit, whom Satwant had named and who was detained along with many other suspects, was turned around by the police after he agreed to testify against Balbir and Kehar.

► The prosecution says that the note was found with Balbir Singh when he was arrested on December 3 by Chief Investigating Officer Rajinder Prakash Kochar. Asked Grover: "Is it logical for a police officer who knows he is a suspect to carry around such a damning piece of paper which is as good as a death warrant?" But Chandra maintained: "A lot of people get caught because they think they are very smart."

Meanwhile, the judgement caused grief, surprise and anger among the families of those who stood condemned. Pyar Kaur, Satwant's mother who had come down from Dharamkot in Punjab's Gurdaspur district to hear the judgement, was a picture of grief as she emerged from Tihar Jail. Slumped in the back seat of her lawyer's car, her face was stained with tears and even a battery of mikes could not coax her to voice her grief. Later, sitting in a room in Gurudwara Sisganj on Chandni Chowk, Satwant's father, Trilok, spoke for the family: "We have lost our faith that we can get justice in this country. We know our son is innocent."

Kehar Singh's son, another Satwant Singh, said: "We had great expectations from Mahesh Chandra because we had heard that he does not give any punishment more than necessary. But he has really disappointed us." And Balbir Singh's wife, Devender Kaur, 36, who has been staying with her husband's brother since they were turned out of the official accommodation in the police lines, cradled her two-year-old daughter and said: "We didn't expect this at all. My husband is absolutely innocent. How can they call him a *kattar* Sikh when the fact is that he has never even been to Amritsar. They say he was very upset after Operation Bluestar but do you know that he used to play badminton with Rajiv Gandhi's children even after that?"

The times are tough on these family members. Trilok Singh has had to mortgage three of his 18 acres of land to raise money for the case. Kehar Singh's family has been asked to leave their Ramakrishna Puram flat.

In Tihar jail, security around the three was tightened after the judgement. The three were reportedly shifted to death row and all personal articles, including chappals, taken away from them. Their families complained that they had been left with only one blanket to counter the cold.

But their lawyers continued their valiant battle. Even as the death sentence was referred to the high court for confirmation, Lekhi and Grover moved the court against the judgement, calling it unexecutable because Chandra had not specified the manner of execution. But, asked Chandra: "Where is the need to specify that when there is only one manner—hanging—being followed now?"

Lekhi may not have covered himself with glory, given the manner in which he conducted the defence. But as the first act in the ongoing case of the murder of Mrs Gandhi came to an end 247 days after it had started, it was difficult to resist the feeling that for all the mountain of evidence presented—1400 foolscap pages of testimony—the prosecution had struggled to prove what everybody thought was an open and shut case. The High Court upheld the appeals on the ground that Chandra had contravened the Criminal Procedure Code by not specifying the manner of execution. Now it is for the High Court to decide whether the conspiracy case is in fact thin, or whether all three men will die for the assassination of a prime minister.

—AJAY KUMAR

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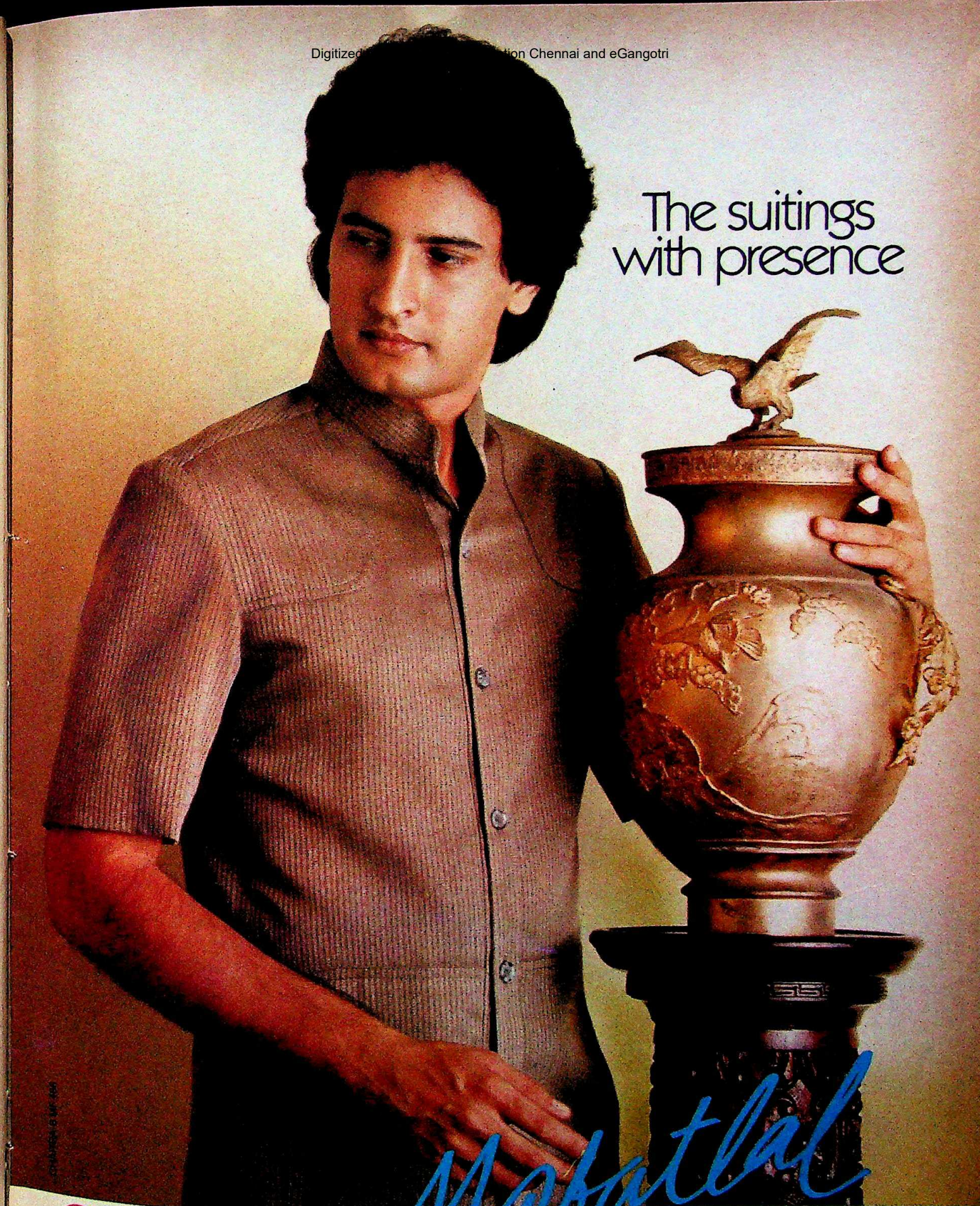

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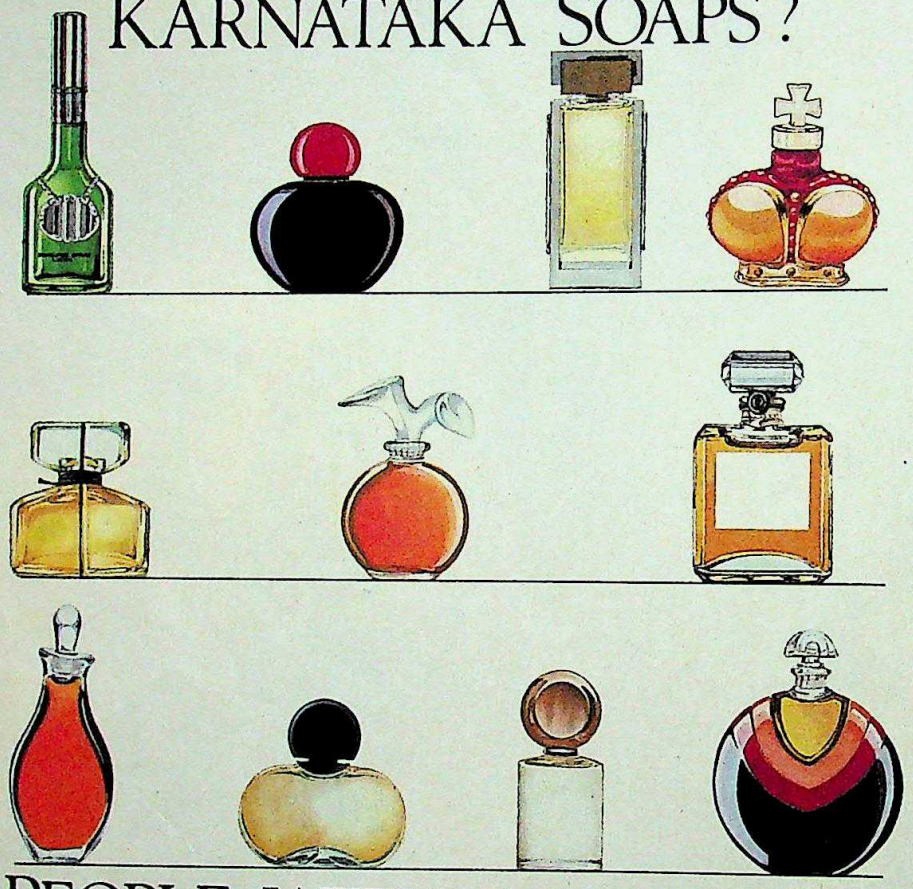

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RAJASTHAN

Marriage Mystery

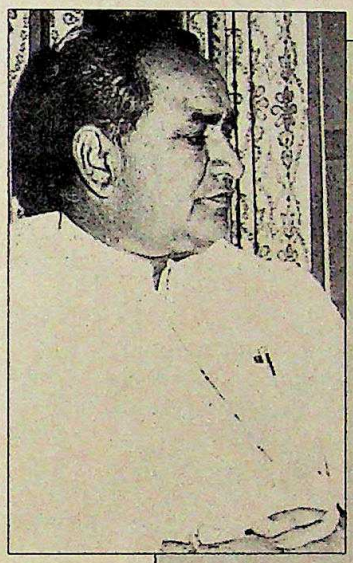
INDRA Vishnoi is one of the lucky few whose birthday falls on Republic Day, January 26. However, when she celebrated her 20th birthday last week, the circumstances were anything but happy. For she found herself embroiled in an ugly controversy which threatened to mar the career of her 50-year-old father, Ramsingh Vishnoi, Rajasthan's minister of state for animal husbandry. To Vishnoi's good fortune, however, the opposition parties somehow seemed uninterested in making an issue of it.

It all blew up when a two-part article in the Jaipur edition of *Navbharat Times* alleged that her father had married Indra off when she was barely seven years old to a three-year-old boy. Claiming to be based on an interview with Indra and backed with extracts from desperate letters written by Indra to a Jaipur lady lawyer, the article recounted how the family had subjected her to torture to make her accept the marriage. Her husband came to fetch her in November 1984 and though she went with him under coercion she continued to offer resistance; with the result that humiliation and beatings, especially at the hands of her father, only multiplied.

Vishnoi's denial was quick in coming. "These allegations are nonsense," he said. "It is a well-known fact that I never lie." Indra, he said, had been married last year when she was 19; but when asked on what precise date, he fumbled and could not provide an answer. Nonetheless, he insisted: "My daughter is absolutely free." And to prove that he had Indra brought over from their hometown Bilara in Jodhpur district and presented before the press at his Jaipur residence. A nervous and tense Indra repeated her father's version and flatly denied giving any interview to *Navbharat Times* or writing any letters.

The real drama came later. A furious Vishnoi abused Manimala, the young social activist-turned-reporter who had written the articles, calling her a blackmailer and threatening to settle scores with her. Later, when Manimala wanted to play a tape which carried her interview with Indra in late December, Vishnoi leapt up and snapped the tape-recorder's cord.

MANOJ/Navbharat Times



Ramsingh Vishnoi Indra Vishnoi

Indra Vishnoi found herself embroiled in an ugly controversy which threatened to mar the career of her father, Ramsingh Vishnoi, Rajasthan's minister of state for animal husbandry.

As it transpired, there was more to come. Bharati Chaturvedi, the lawyer Indra reportedly wrote to asking for help, alleged that Vishnoi had threatened her with a pistol just two hours before the press conference. According to her, she had visited Vishnoi's Jaipur residence the same afternoon in response to Indra's repeated sos's. She was permitted inside but had barely begun talking to Indra when a livid Vishnoi allegedly barged in, pistol in hand, and threatened to shoot her. He had to be restrained by some of his men. While Vishnoi denies the incident, Chaturvedi claims that she has written and posted a first information report (FIR) to the superintendent of police, Jaipur.

Next it was the turn of the paper. On January 26, *Navbharat Times* carried an article claiming that Indra had filed an FIR at Bilara Police Station on August 26, 1985, complaining of having been married off as a child, physical abuse and the danger to her life. The case had been closed, but if all was indeed well, why then had she made a formal complaint to the police.

In retrospect, it does seem Vishnoi had overreacted. Since more than a year has passed after the alleged child marriage he could never have been prosecuted. In any case, the case seems to have hardly created a ripple in the normally voluble circles: the opposition parties and the other sections of the press. Only the BJP's Pushpa Jain and the Janata Party's Manik Chand Surana tried to raise the issue in the Assembly but, said a disappointed Surana: "Some important questions are being raised but we are not discussing them; we are quietly swallowing them." Leader of the Opposition Bhairon Singh Shekhawat rationalised that since the allegations had been denied by Indra herself, very little remained to be said now. Said he:" How can one raise questions based solely on newspaper reports? We are trying to verify the whole affair."

The unfortunate reality is that child marriages are not news in Rajasthan. Even official statistics have it that the average Rajasthani girl marries at the age of 14-and-a-half and a boy at the age of just over 19. And since official figures in such matters are usually watered down, the actual average is probably much lower. The controversy has had one beneficial side effect: it has stirred some kind of a debate into the inadequacies of the Child Marriage Act. For one, the Act fails to answer a basic question: is a child marriage void, voidable or valid? It looks suspiciously that this, however, might be the only good thing to emerge out of the strange case of Indra Vishnoi.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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Company Meeting

GARWARE NYLONS LIMITED

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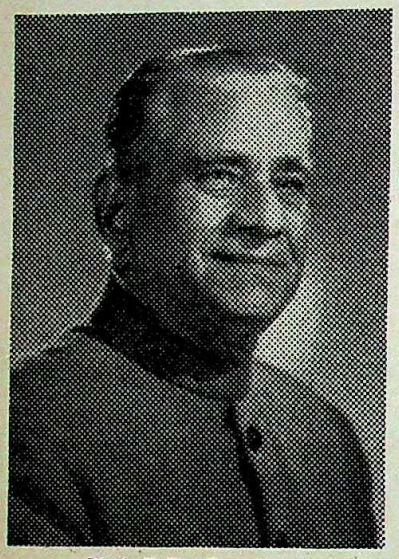

Shri B.D. Garware

STATEMENT OF SHRI B.D. GARWARE, CHAIRMAN, GARWARE NYLONS LIMITED, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 28TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE COMPANY ON 8TH JANUARY, 1986.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have great pleasure in extending to you all a very warm welcome to this twentyeighth Annual General Meeting of your Company.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

2. The Annual Report, together with the Audited Statement of Accounts and the Directors' Report, for the year ended 31st August, 1985 has been in your hands for some time now. I presume that you have had an opportunity of going through the same. I, therefore, take it as read. I am sure, you must have noted satisfactory results during this year.

DIVIDEND

3. The Board of Directors of your Company have recommended, subject to your approval, a Dividend @ 18% (subject to deduction of tax), absorbing a sum of about Rs. 1.75 crores.

EXPANSION

4. The projects pertaining to increase in the capacity of Nylon Yarn to 6000 tons and Polyester Filament Yarn to 3500 tons, per annum, as also the manufacture of Nylon Industrial Yarn/Tyre Cord (2000 tpa) and Tyre Fabrics (1700 tpa) are actively under implementation.

DEBENTURES

5. The Company proposes, subject to the approval of the Controller of Capital Issues, to make an issue of Rights - 15% Secured Non-Convertible Debentures upto an aggregate face value of Rs. 25 crores, to finance, in part, the projects under implementation as also to augment the long-term resources for working capital. I am confident, you will, as in the past, extend your fullest co-operation and support.

ECONOMIC SCENE

6. We are indeed fortunate to have a strong and stable Government at the Centre, with an unprecedented massive mandate from electorate, under the able and inspiring leadership of our young and dynamic Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi. Positive and pragmatic as also youthful and refreshing approach that he brings to bear on the multifarious issues—political, economic and social—is, indeed, most commendable.

The various liberalisation moves initiated by the Central Government have infused a great deal of enthusiasm and have also imparted a new thrust to the economy. The long-term fiscal policy recently announced promises stability, flexibility as also simplicity and rationality in the fiscal legislation. But, as a measure of stimulating investment and economic growth, to my mind, it has lost much of its sharpness due to proposed withdrawal of Investment Allowance with effect from 1st April, 1987, which had amply proved, over the years, its efficacy as a major incentive for capital formation.

EXCISE DUTY— RELIEF/CRUSHING BURDEN

7. The Government has recently announced substantial excise relief for polyester staple fibre and its blends and acrylic staple fibre. The relief is welcome, but I regret to state that the relief granted is partial, in that, it has not been extended to the other equally dominant segment of filament yarn, with which

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your Company is vitally concerned. This has made filament yarn fabrics far costlier than blended yarn fabrics and caused the consequent slump in the demand for filament yarn, so much so that, it has not only reduced its profitability but also threatened its survival. Substantial reduction in excise duty on filament yarn and its fabrics has, therefore, become imperative to restore its health.

There is no justification whatsoever to discriminate between the two segments of the same industry. Despite the surveys—both official and non-official—having established that the filament yarn fabrics are popular among the middle and lower classes due to their inherent qualities, it is a pity, the false notion that such fabrics are consumed by a privileged few still persits. Inspite of the wave of relaxation and liberalisation, the announcement of textile policy as also the series of concessions and reliefs granted under its auspices, the long-standing grouse of the filament yarn industry—the crushing burden of excise duty, which has now acquired entirely a new dimension—still continues to plague it.

BROAD-BANDING

8. Broad-banding facilities, it is heartening to note, have been extended to Synthetic Filament yarn industry including industrial yarn/tyre cord. It is a step in the right direction, which would afford the spinners operational flexibility so as to adjust the product range to the changing pattern of demand.

CAPACITY EXPANSION

9. The existing filament yarn spinners have been permitted to expand the capacity for Nylon Yarn upto 12000 tpa and Polyester Filament Yarn upto 15000 tpa, which will enable them to achieve the economies of scale and the consquent reduction in the unit cost of production. I am pleased to note that the long-standing grievance of the industry that it had to operate with uneconomic size has now been redressed to some extent.

BASIC RAW MATERIALS

10. The supply of the basic raw materials — Caprolactam for the manufacture of Nylon Yarn and Pure Terephthalic Acid (TPA) for the manufacture of Polyester Yarn—of acceptable quality at reasonable prices so as to meet the objectives of the textile policy cannot be overemphasised. The industry has necessarily to depend heavily on imports for its raw material requirements, because of the yawning gap between the demand and indigenous supply. TPA, originally placed in OGL and rightly so, has been now shifted, since May last, to Limited Permissible Items, inspite of the fact that the question of indigenous angle consideration does not arise (TPA is not indigenously produced at present). I would urge the authorities to restore it as also Caprolactam to OGL so as to ensure their steady and regulated flow at competitive prices, so vital to the industry.

HIGH RATES OF CUSTOMS DUTY

11. The textile policy, even though, specifically enunciated to reduce the duty on raw materials, customs duty on TPA, which was already at a high level @ 140% ad valorem has been hiked, since last September, to 190% ad valorem. I would also urge the authorities to reduce substantially this prohibitive customs duty so as to enable the industry to sustain and grow.

CURRENT OUTLOOK

12. In view of the increasing cost of inputs and falling sales realisation, consequent on shrinkage in demand for filament yarn, the margins are continuously under pressure. I am, therefore, constrained, you will appreciate, from making any forecast on the working results for the current year. I, however, sincerely hope that the Government will shortly extend similar fiscal concessions to filament yarn and its fabrics, perhaps in the next phase of relief, as the fiscal levies, as spelt out in the textile policy, are proposed to be reduced progressively. Needless to add, the Management will strive very hard to achieve the best possible results.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

13. Before I conclude, first of all, I would like to express on behalf of my colleagues on the Board and on my own, our warm appreciation of the dynamic role played by your Jt. Managing Director, Shri Ashok Garware, who has initiated various measures to improve operations and reduce costs and is largely responsible for the impressive performance of this year. I am also grateful to my colleagues on the Board for their continued support and valuable guidance.

I also express my appreciation of the services of the functional directors, senior executives, officers, staff and devoted employees who have contributed to the efficient operation of the Company. I would also like to express my sense of gratitude to the financial institutions and bankers for their continued and active support, and last but not the least, I warmly appreciate your presence here this afternoon, which reflects your keen interest in the progress and well-being of your Company.

With the New Year just commenced, I take this opportunity to wish all the Shareholders a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN

Bombay, January 8, 1986.

This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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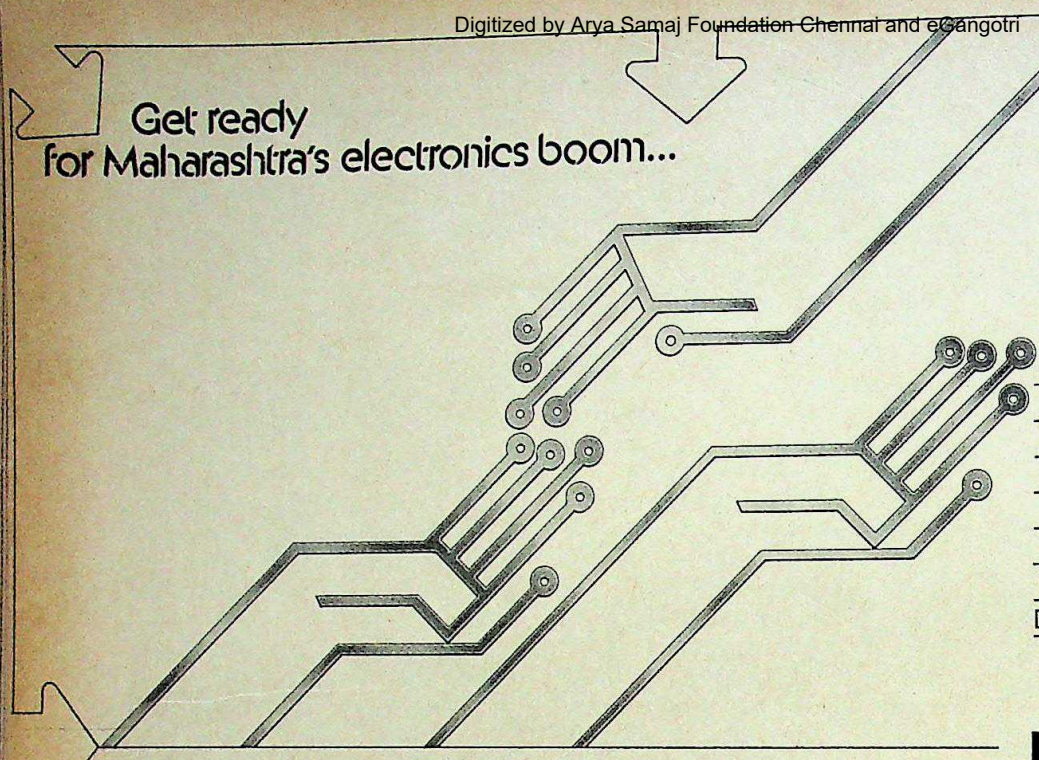
Get ready for Maharashtra's electronics boom...



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So that when you set up your electronic plant in Maharashtra, you'll find the most fertile soil to grow. With excellent sites, trained manpower, the biggest market, total infrastructure and enlightened tax laws. But wait, there's more!

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As a team of chief executives from different development corporations and heads of Government departments, our main function is to liaise with the respective organisations on your behalf.

Whether you're a big industry planning expansion, a medium industry that wants to diversify or a small scale industry looking for help — we, at Udyog Mitra are with you every step of the way.

Come, join Maharashtra's electronics revolution.

Contact SICOM at the above address for further details of this special scheme of incentives.

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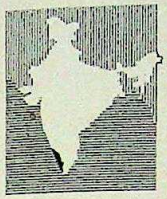
KERALA

Cutting to Size



THE COME down was sudden and caught the firebrand Marxist by surprise. For the last three years, CPI(M)'s Kerala legislature party secretary M.V. Raghavan had lorded it over ruling party and opposition MLA's alike, hogging the headlines and building an enviable following among the state's youth by ceaselessly exposing corruption and nepotism in the Karunakaran Ministry. So when last fortnight Raghavan, along with opposition Left Democratic Front Convenor P.V. Kunhikannan, was suspended from the party membership, the carpet had suddenly been pulled from under their feet. That was not all: seven others of his 'gang of nine' were stripped off their party posts.

But the comedown was not entirely unexpected. For some time now, Raghavan had been openly critical of the party's policies. The differences eventually came to a head at the party's state conference in Cochin last November. According to a party communique after the suspensions, Raghavan and his cohorts had "raised the banner of revisionism" at the conference by presenting an alternative document in defiance of party discipline. Raghavan, the communique added, "boycotted the voting on the official document when he found that his manipulations had not succeeded".

Raghavan: chastised

While loyalists of party General Secretary E.M.S. Namboodiripad and ideologue B.T. Ranadive think that the traitors had it coming, the large section which disagrees with the state leadership's rigid hands-off-communal-parties attitude feels that the politburo has been too severe with committed members who had merely been airing honest differences over the official party line. Said a prominent dissident: "Raghavan wanted the CPI(M) to join hands with the Kerala Congress and the Muslim League to get rid of the corrupt Karunakaran Ministry but the politburo wanted to strike an ideological posture to keep off communal parties and flounder in the wilderness."

There is some truth to this argument. The party policy of not having any truck with the Kerala Congress and the Muslim League was first opposed by former chief minister E.K. Nayanar in the politburo itself, but he was effectively silenced and later dropped from the politburo. This, however, did not deter Raghavan, who went ahead and argued against the party line in the state committee. Perhaps what fortified his courage was his large following among the youth in the party

Namboodiripad: crackdown

For Namboodiripad the action against heretics like M.V. Raghavan is yet another step forward in his campaign against communal politics.

who are just as vehemently critical of the idealistic posture adopted by Namboodiripad and others. The prominent Marxist leader from Palghat, T.Sivadasa Menon, who is one of those stripped off his post, had even gone to the extent of telling Namboodiripad at a party meeting that this official line would reduce the Kerala unit to something like the Communist Party of UK, both politically and electorally.

For Namboodiripad the action against the heretics is yet another step forward in his campaign against communal politics. Namboodiripad characterised Raghavan and his group's stand as the result of falling prey to "the cancer of parliamentary opportunism". He went on to say: "The CPI(M) does not want to mortgage its prestige by aligning itself with communal parties like the Muslim League and Kerala Congress. Nor should these parties have any illusions about basking in the sunshine of power by forging an alliance with the CPI(M)."

But perhaps the real reason behind the whole affair is not revisionism but regionalism. There is a feeling within the party that this is more a fight between the Travancore and Malabar groups in the party. Namboodiripad and the powerful state unit secretary V.S. Achuthanandan are from Travancore, while the majority of the 'gang of nine' are from Malabar. The rumblings in the party over the action may yet snowball into a serious crisis since the party's solid base lies in the northern districts of Cannanore and Kasargod in the Malabar area. To smother this brewing trouble, Namboodiripad and Achuthanandan went on a whirlwind tour of the crucial districts, beginning with Cannanore.

Meanwhile, the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress are now watching every CPI(M) move with keen interest. Said Muslim League MLA P.M. Abubacker: "Our hopes of ever having an alliance with the Marxists has vanished forever with the suspension of Raghavan." Other opposition parties too cannot remain immune to the developments in the CPI(M). Remarked a prominent Congress(S) MLA: "The CPI(M)'s big brother attitude is sickening. It looks like the Opposition in Kerala is going out of electoral politics."

One fall-out of all this has been a sudden affinity among the other opposition groups, who now want to forge a third front without the Congress(I) and the CPI(M). In fact, Revolutionary Socialist Party strongman Baby John and Kerala state unit president of the Congress(S) P.C.Chacko have already started talking to the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress. On the other hand, there are those like the BJP who have commended Namboodiripad's decision to keep communal parties at arm's length. This, despite the fact that the RSS and the CPI(M) were at each other's throats not too long ago.

What pattern will eventually emerge from these shifting alignments is anybody's guess. Last fortnight, Raghavan himself meekly accepted the punishment and went off to his home town Cannanore, while his associates let it be known that they would abide by the party's decision.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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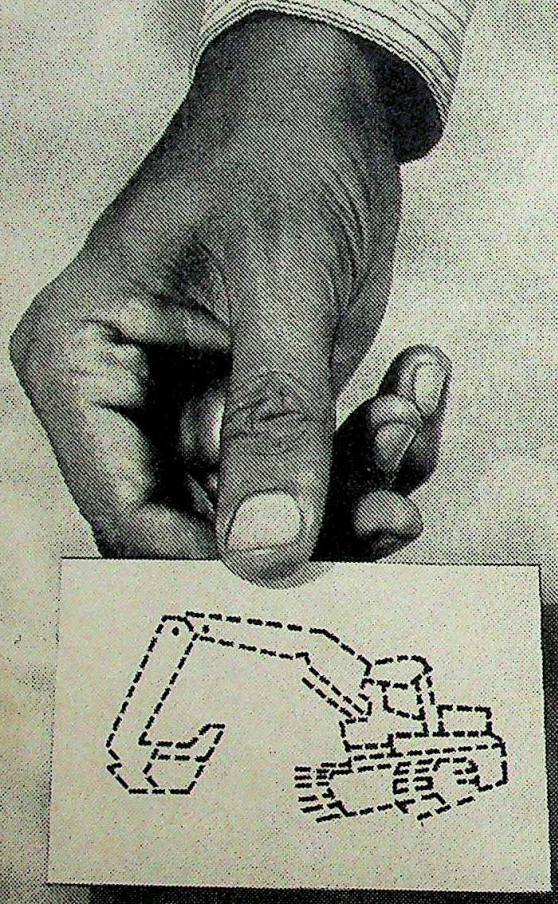

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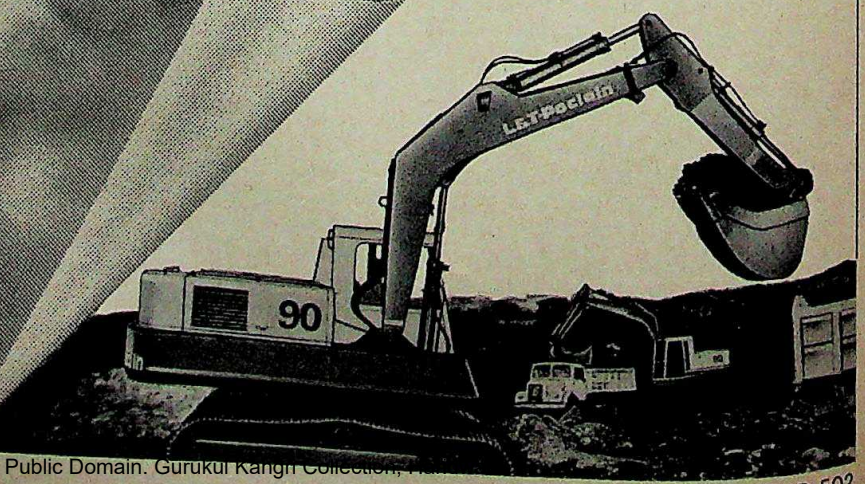

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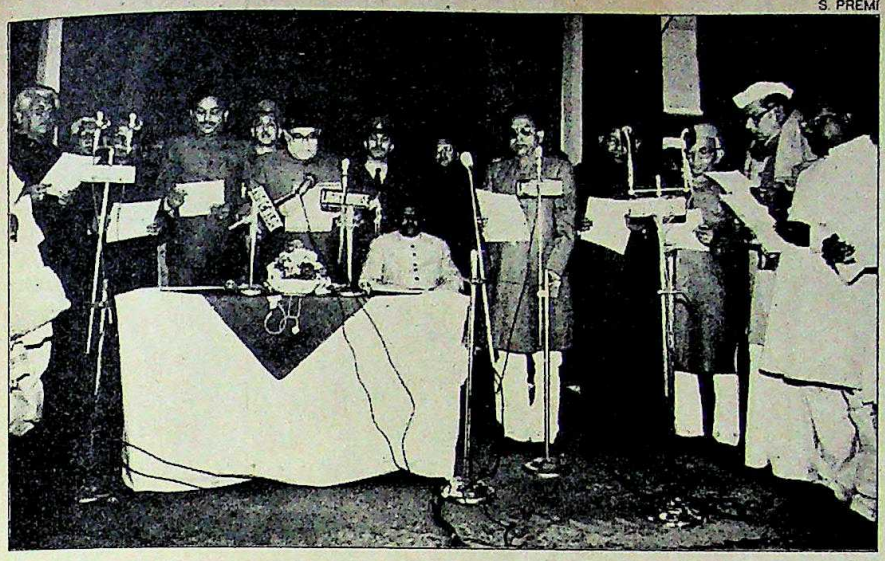

Singh at swearing-in ceremony: coming to terms

UTTAR PRADESH

Cabal Strife

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Virbahadur Singh has not been as good as his word. When he took charge of the reins in the country's largest state last September, he had announced that he would induct new, efficient and young people in his council of ministers. But he faltered just 48 hours later when he included 12 of the 17 ministers of the previous government in his new cabinet. Last fortnight he repeated the performance while inducting 10 ministers of state, raising the strength of the ministry to 27.

Only two of the appointees were new while the remaining eight had been ministers under former chief ministers Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Sripati Misra and Narain Dutt Tiwari. In fact, many of them had been dropped in the past because of non-performance. Said a visibly defensive Singh: "Mine is an attempt to provide a mix of experience and fresh blood. After all, we have to govern the country's biggest state, and administrative experience matters a lot."

Despite his disclaimers, the long-delayed cabinet expansion marked an attempt to come to terms with his formidable detractors in the state, led by Health Minister Lokpati Tripathi, who enjoys the support of not only his own Brahmin community but also the party dissidents. Indeed, this bid to buy peace marked a sharp departure from the chief minister's earlier no-holds-barred attack on those ranged against him in the state Congress(I). Even state government officials who, Singh believed, were aligned with his rivals had got a bit of the stick from the chief minister.

Thus, during his first 100 days in office Singh had transferred over 20 senior IAS officials including the chief secretary, barred his ministers from visiting Delhi without his prior approval and tried to rein them in by insisting on office attendance at the stipulated times and meeting targets that he laid down for them. Then, in a far-reaching move aimed at breaking the well-known nexus between politicians and criminals in the state, he had promulgated the draconian Gangsters and Anti-social Activities (Prevention) Ordinance. As a follow-up, directions were issued to the state police to arrest anyone carrying even licensed arms in public—a move that annoyed many of the party's MLA's.

But Singh's effort at ruling with an iron hand quickly began to come unstuck. His detractors, including senior cabinet colleagues, soon began to openly flout his orders and make frequent trips to New Delhi to convey "their feelings" about the chief minister. The delay in expanding the cabinet did not help matters because over 150 MLA's and MLC's moved in droves to New Delhi, camping there for days on end, and met senior party leaders, central ministers and prominent state MP's to lobby for ministerial berths. And barely 48 hours before the cabinet expansion, more than 20 ministerial aspirants virtually laid siege to the spacious offices of both Industry Minister Narain Dutt Tiwari and Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh, hoping that these senior politicians from the state would be able to prevail on the chief minister.

Earlier, MLA's and MLC's had been sending their assessments about the state Government's performance to Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh and Minister of State for Internal Security Arun Nehru. While charges of "brash behaviour" and the more routine "inefficiency" were aired, others complained of the Congress organisation weakening throughout the state, bureaucratic apathy and lack of any development thrust in backward eastern Uttar Pradesh.

The Opposition added its voice to this chorus of complaints, writing to the prime minister about Singh's refusal to summon the Assembly and drawing his attention to the deteriorating law and order situation. The party high command thus heard very little in praise of Singh. Among his few supporters was K. K. Sharma, Congress(I) MLA from Ghaziabad, who said: "We are impressed by the work done so far by the chief minister. But he can do better if he is given enough freedom and time by us to do things in his own manner."

Even as the central leadership began to take note of the dissatisfaction brewing in an apparently growing section of the party, a barrage of adverse reports, some of them inspired, began appearing in important newspapers, with adverse editorial comment to boot. It was about this time that a beleaguered Singh changed tactics abruptly. Gone now was the stick that was brandished earlier, and instead came the carrot.

He held secret parleys with Tripathi and other leaders of various groups in the PCC(I), assuring them that he would not harm their interests in the state. And anxious to keep track of the currents in New Delhi, he made the national capital a second headquarters: on average, every fifth day found Singh in New Delhi.

If the chief minister had decided that he would stoop to conquer, he succeeded to some extent. The same party high command that had kept his cabinet expansion proposals in abeyance now gave him the green signal and dissolved 14 district Congress committees which were hostile to him. Moreover, changes in the PCC(I) leadership were promised.

But this victory has been at a price. For Singh has had to give the maximum representation in his Cabinet to Brahmins (8), followed by the backward castes (6). While every sixth backward

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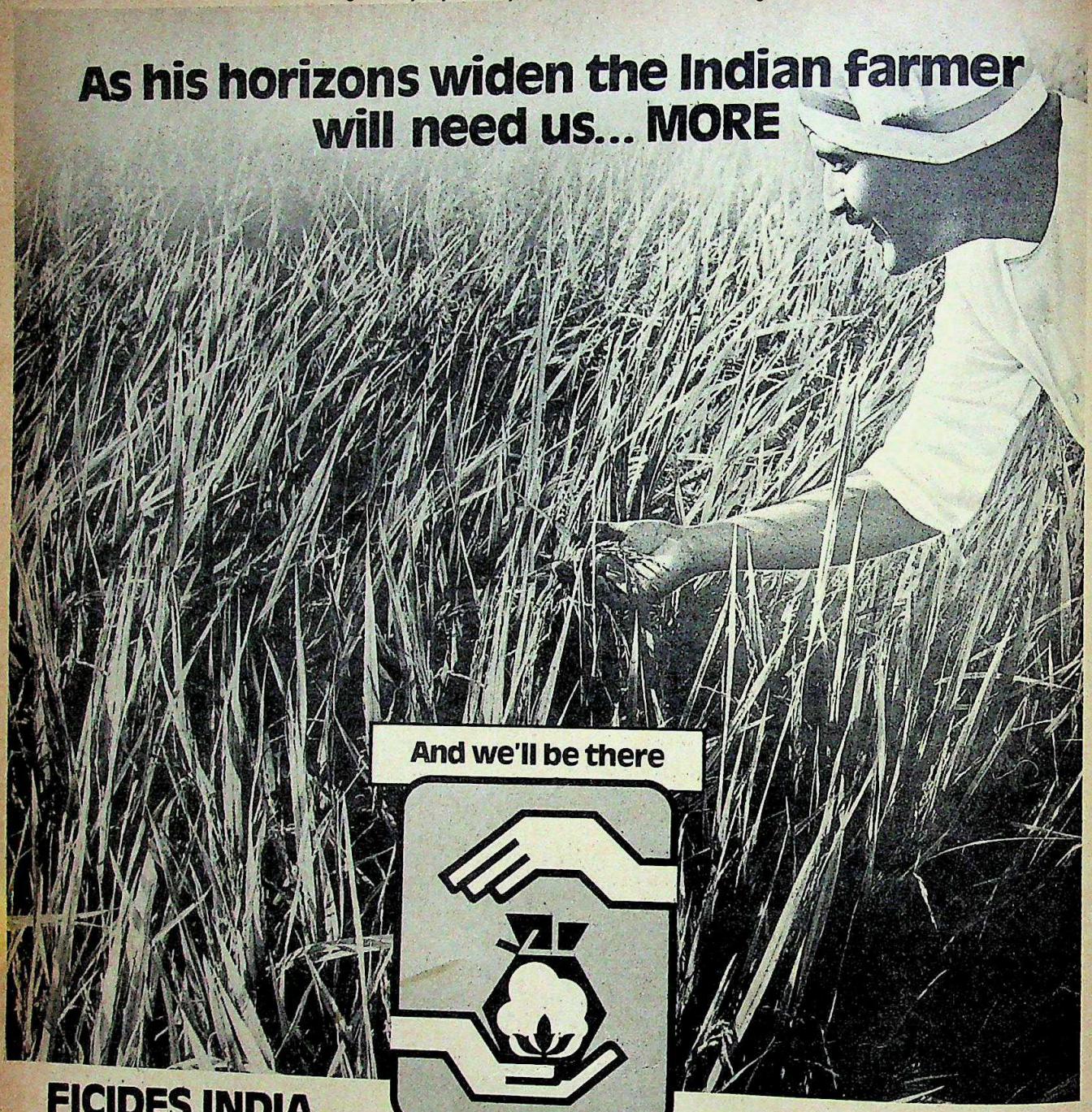

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caste MLA and every seventh Brahmin MLA became a minister, only every 12th Thakur MLA (Singh's community) could be given a berth in the ministry. In his eagerness to woo the Brahmins, the chief minister also ignored the legitimate claims of the 75-member strong group of Harijan MLA's, who got only four berths. Singh insisted last fortnight that "I have selected people on merit and not on any caste basis because I want my government to perform." But this would not wash with anyone even remotely familiar with the state's politics. And state Lok Dal chief Mulayam Singh Yadav asked: "Can he perform with the help of people who have blemished records and represent caste lobbies? The state is already in a mess, with every section revolting against this inefficient and corrupt government."

Yadav certainly has a point, for the state does seem to be in more turmoil than before Singh took charge. Despite Singh's strong-arm methods and the order concerning the carrying of arms, violence of one form or the other continued to make the headlines while disgruntled sections registered their protest in a variety of ways. Advocates clashed with court staff in Lucknow, police killed a pregnant woman at a railway station, and five Harijans were killed in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Government employees, engineers and doctors went on the warpath against the administration and senior officials sat on the chief minister's orders to summarily dismiss or prematurely retire their colleagues. And signalling the limited reach of the chief minister's fiat, decisions taken at his daily meetings were not being implemented seriously as cabinet ministers had their own axes to grind. Said a secretary in one of the government departments: "The chief minister is convinced that he alone can revolutionise the administration. He doesn't know that against his one order, there are 12 contradictory directives from his cabinet colleagues. There is no collective thinking."

The embattled Singh's ability to survive against mounting odds will be tested to the full in the coming assembly session, called for the first time since Singh became chief minister five months ago. And in the absence of formidable speakers and seasoned politicians willing to defend Singh's government, the Opposition is likely to score quite a few points. If that happens, the alarm bells will certainly ring in New Delhi.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

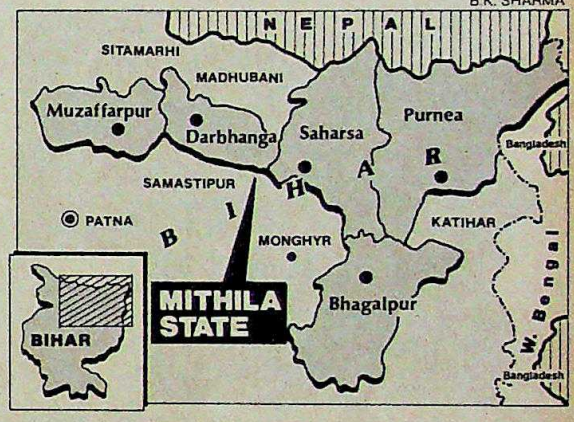
MITHILA

Political Pawn

MITHILA, one of Bihar's most backward regions, has for long owed its sole claim to fame to its internationally known paintings. But it is now painting its name in colours that are ominously darker. Under the aggressive leadership of Vijay Kumar Mishra, the Janata MP from Darbhanga, the region is witnessing a revival of the ancient—and rather dubious—demand for a separate Mithila state comprising the districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Saharsa, Purnea and Bhagalpur.

The revival came in the form of a three-day *rail roko* agitation organised by Mishra, eldest son of the late Congress stalwart L.N. Mishra. Over 5,000 members belonging to local units of the Janata, Lok Dal and the CPI courted arrest in a symbolic attempt to highlight the economic backwardness of the region compounded by official indifference.

B.K. SHARMA



Vijay Kumar Mishra: cat's-paw?

The success of the *rail roko* was, however, more of a testament to Mishra's meteoric rise in the cooperative movement in the state than the seriousness of the separatist call. The fact that he is also the nephew of former chief minister Jagannath Mishra gives him added political clout—he had been elected to the Lok Sabha by the Maithili-speaking voters on his promise of fulfilling the commitments made by his father to improve conditions in area of constant neglect. "The vote for me in the election was the people's sanction for this fight," he said righteously.

With preparations underway for further demonstrations including the call for a general strike in Darbhanga, Mishra threatens to prove a prickly thorn in the side of Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey. Clearly on the defensive, Dubey's spokesmen have stressed the steps taken to remove regional imbalances during the last eight months, but Mishra makes clear that "ours is not a fight against the Government or the Congress(I), it is simply to wake up the Centre and if it fails to respond the agitation will spread."

Mishra's grievances are genuine enough. Most of the districts have no industry worth the name and the entire population pressure has fallen on uneconomic holdings owing to the abject failure of land reforms. But there are also indications that his uncle, the wily Jagannath Mishra, is using his nephew's campaign to undermine Dubey's standing. His Hindi daily, *Patliputra Times*, in a series of news stories has been highlighting the "conspiracy" to perpetuate socio-economic stagnation.

The politics behind such analysis was pretty clear—to buttress the claim that 'Mithilanchal' had been ignored and also, very coincidentally, highlight those decisions which Jagannath Mishra had taken as chief minister. "The development of Mithila has been ignored after I left the Government. All schemes initiated by me have been stopped. I feel disturbed," he says piously.

With the growing popularity of his nephew's campaign, the concept of 'Mithilanchal' has given him just the handle to beat Dubey with. But this time there is a subtle difference—he has left the sabre-rattling to his nephew and his newspaper thereby staying in the background himself. Meanwhile his nephew has been busy storming the region passionately vowing: "This is just the beginning. The people are not in a mood to tolerate injustice any more."

However, the demands can hardly be met by either the Centre or state government overnight. And if the economic backwardness of the region is any indication, the people's strength in sustaining a long-drawn agitation can only be in doubt, specially if it all turns out to be merely a political gimmick of political vengeance.

—FARZAND AHMED

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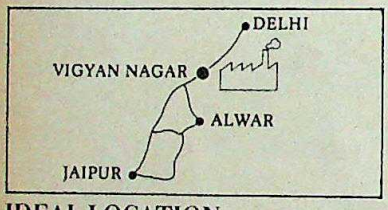

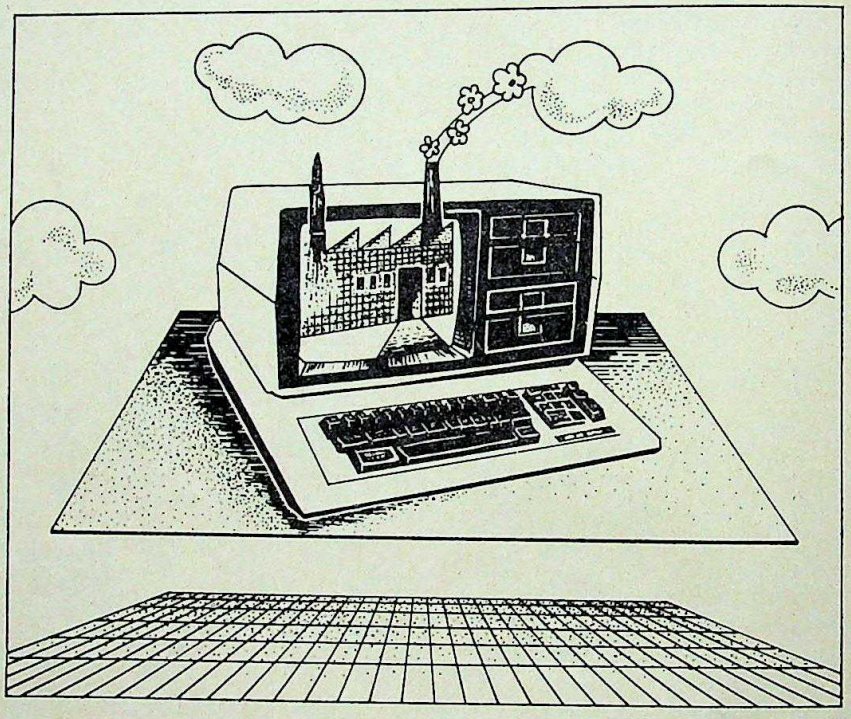

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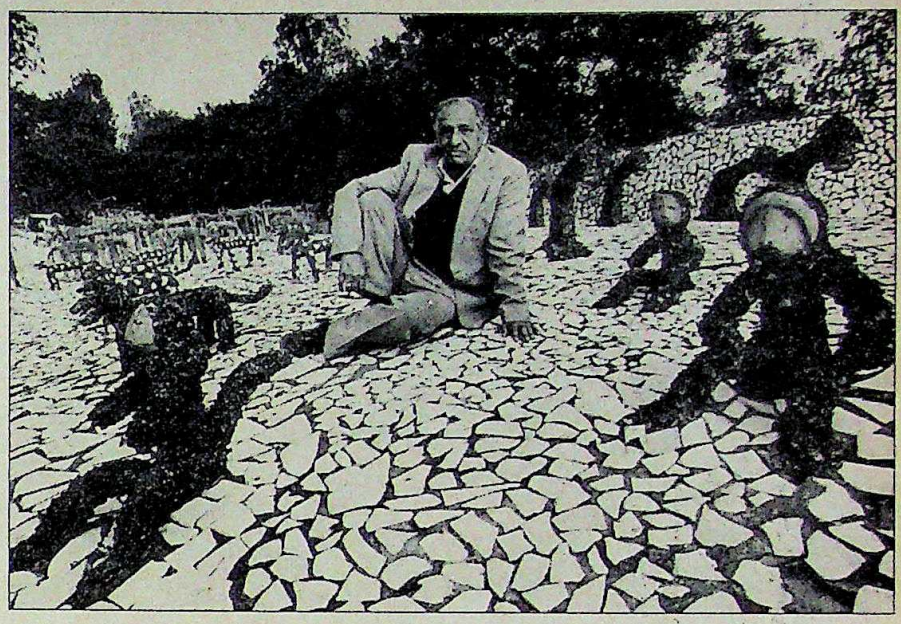
NEK CHAND

Love's Labour



Nek Chand's works: official indifference

THE RETURN of the quiet modest creator of Chandigarh's rock garden, Nek Chand, to his home town from Washington was wreathed in laurels and widespread acclaim. The fantasy garden at the Childrens' Museum in the Capital there won him the Superior Craftsmanship Award of the Washington Building Congress. Made from bits of refuse, the garden has the distinction of being the only permanent Festival of India exhibit in the US.

There were other honours and accolades too. A grateful mayor of the district of Columbia celebrated October 5 as 'Nek Chand day' in recognition of his "magnificent gift to our city". The media praised him as a visionary genius. "I felt as if I was walking through a man's soul," said Ann Lewin, director of the Childrens' Museum. US companies wanted him to sign a 10-year contract to design more such gardens in other cities. But he preferred to return to the rock garden where he spent the most creative years of his life.

But back home, instead of welcoming arms, official recognition and a respectable job, he was greeted with an appointment as a consultant for a pittance of Rs 1,500 a month—the going wage for masons and carpenters. Worse, his contract could be terminated at three months' notice. Not surprisingly, he has yet to accept the offer.

Nek Chand retired from his job as a road inspector in the Public Works Department in December 1984. The job had enabled him to create the Chandigarh garden, and since retirement he was kept going by the Festival project.

Chandigarh's Chief Engineer J.S. Kohli and his colleagues admit the terms are not the best for an artist who has brought home laurels, but blame the Centre. Despite repeated requests, the Union Housing and Works Ministry refused to re-employ him as superintendent of the rock garden.

Nek Chand had no designs, no plans or lay-outs. He accumulated bits of junk, broken glass and china, scrap and rags and from these sculpted figures. He started work on his secret garden in 1958 and kept working quietly for about 12 years.

It was only in 1970 that the Government took note of this work of art and allotted him the land and funds to continue. The first phase was officially inaugurated in 1976 and the second in 1983.

Today, along the paths in the 12-acre plot at the foothills of the Shivalik range are thousands of dancing women fabricated from mudguards of motorcycles and bicycles, birds and warriors made from myriad, colourful bits of broken glass and a life-size cavalry regiment of rag dolls.

The childrens' garden in Washington

But for the help he received from two former chief commissioners and great patrons of the arts, Dr M.S. Randhawa and T.N.Chaturvedi, Nek Chand's garden would have remained unfulfilled, and wouldn't have enthralled the more than 80 lakh people who have already visited it. He now plans further expansion of his garden—he is growing different trees as a backdrop to his extensive landscaping. A theatre is among the proposed fixtures, as also a four-acre garden for children to experiment in, to create and embellish their own figures and images. "There is an artist in each child and I want that artist to flourish," he says.

Whether he will be allowed to accomplish this is a moot point. The local administration doesn't even supply him with sufficient water to keep the waterfalls and fountains in the garden going. A plan to make him chief custodian for life of an autonomous organisation to look after the place could have materialised had Arjun Singh, an admirer who wanted to put a revolving fund at his disposal, stayed on as chief administrator of the city. Nek Chand's admirers have now pinned their hopes on the new administration which will take over on Republic Day. If it too belies their hopes, then love's labour will have been irretrievably lost.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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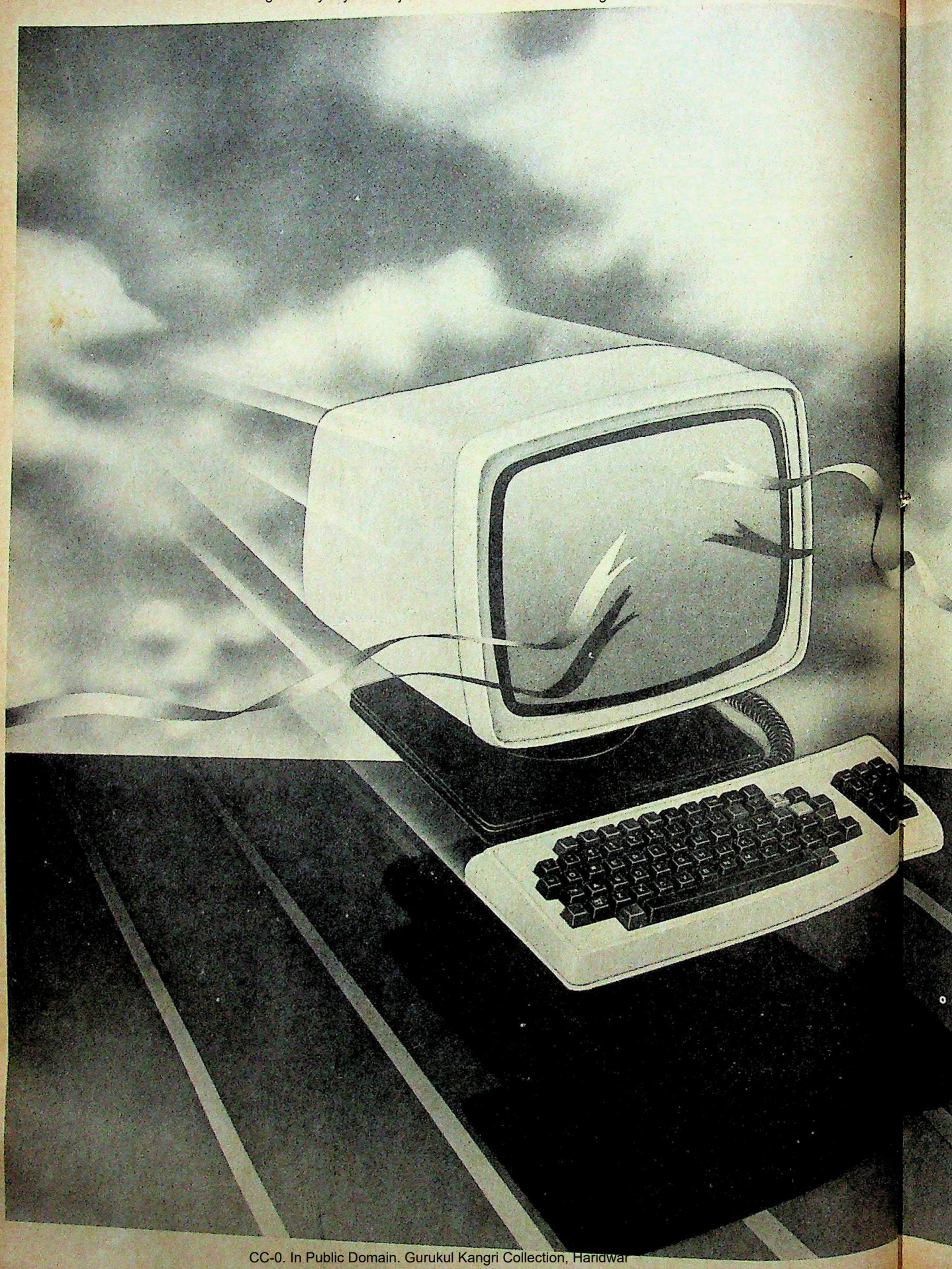

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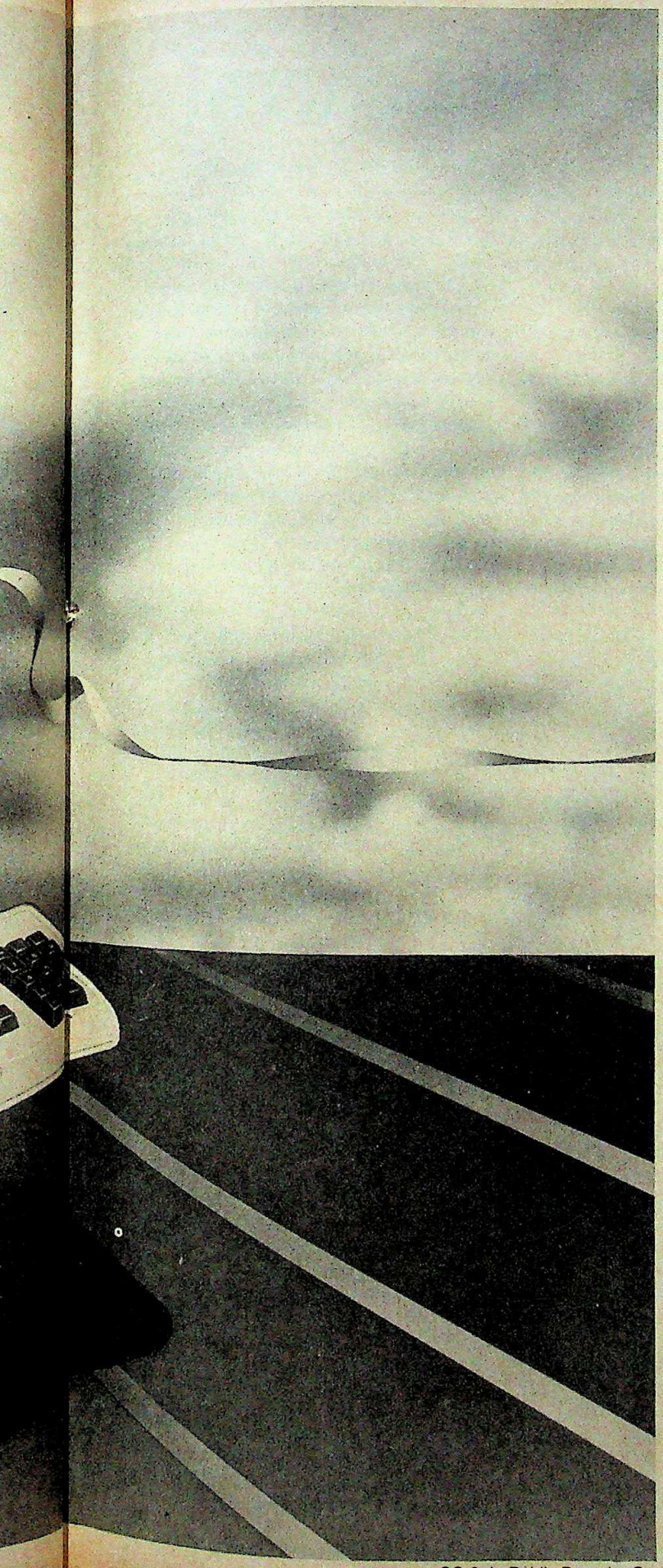

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GENERAL KRISHNASWAMI SUNDARJI

The Thinking Man's General

KRISHNASWAMI Sundarji was sworn in as the nation's fourteenth chief of army staff on February 1 for an 820-day stint during which he promises to usher in major structural and personnel reorganisations within the army. But the 'new look' he has in mind for the army will not be an exercise in cosmetics. Sundarji is commonly described as a thinking man's general—a man with a modern mind who is determined not to let the 21st century catch the army napping in a business-as-usual posture. And in order to hit the ground running as army chief, Sundarji retreated for the last two weeks to a hideout in Goa where he wrote and mulled over position papers and recommendations designed to break new ground in areas such as training, equipment, mechanisation, compensation, computerisation and tactics.

Army officers around the country hailed his appointment because they consider his choice to be a splendid example of selection by merit in the wake of the patchy demoralisation that was palpable during the controversial period of debate over supersessions.

Eminently qualified, Sundarji was, of all things, working towards a zoology degree from his native Madras before he joined the Mahar regiment at the tail end of the Second World War and immediately saw service in Baluchistan. He was posted as a brigade major with the United Nations forces in Congo, and saw action in the Indo-Pak war of 1965 and during the Bangladesh operations. He is a recipient of the Param Vishisht Seva Medal.

At 57, he looks more like the quintessential matinee idol rather than the stereotyped Blimp one expects to encounter. His appearance characterises a life-style in which he combines flamboyance with flair and a disarming informality. Sundarji is known as a formidable and persuasive debater, a man who rarely ducks a challenge or passes the buck.

Perhaps the most spiritually trying, turbulent and cathartic task of his career was launching Operation Bluestar in June 1984 when he headed the army's Western Command. When he discusses that troubled chapter of Indian history he is overwhelmed by obvious emotion. In a refreshingly candid, free-wheeling interview with Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR, *he discusses, for the first time, the Bluestar Operation as well as the changes he sees coming in the army under his command. Excerpts:*

HARI OM GULATI

Q. *You're often referred to as the 21st century General. Where do you see the army headed in terms of modernisation?*

A. Until the last plan we were in the process of modernising discrete weapons systems and equipment. This is now complete in some cases. Now the time has come when we must look at the totality and decide on changes. The changes I see are basically in the areas of man-machine mixes in the plains sector, with the emphasis shifting towards the machine. This would mean greater mobility, better firepower, better command control and intelligence, including surveillance and nightfighting capability.

Q. *Why is this occurring now?*

A. In the past, manpower assets were cheap and plentiful. There was a dearth of equipment, little indigenous capability and little foreign exchange. That has changed dramatically. Men will still be plentiful but are no longer inexpensive. Some 52 per cent of the army's budget goes directly for manpower expenses. Our capability of producing weapons systems within the country has increased tremendously. By the turn of the century, I don't expect any major weapons systems for the army being imported.

Q. *Does this diminish the importance of the soldier?*

A. Don't misconstrue this. Man is most important and no amount of sophistication in land warfare can replace him. What I'm talking about is more mechanisation.

Q. *What can the soldier expect to see on the ground in the future?*

A. Modernisation would first involve restructuring all formations in the plains and in the mountains. In the plains there would be more mechanisations to include tanks, infantry combat vehicles, helicopters of all types, self propelled artillery and assault engineers. Similarly for the mountains the formations will get much greater combat potential.

Q. *How would you handle a nuclear threat from across the border?*

A. There are enough indicators to suggest that Pakistan has achieved or is close to achieving a nuclear weapons capability. This is definitely a cause for concern as it adds a new dimension to the security environment in the subcontinent. The Government is aware of these implications and is taking adequate measures to ensure the security of the country. While it is for the Government to decide on policy regarding our own nuclear posture, we cannot legislate for our potential adversaries. We, in the armed forces, are gearing our organisation, training and equipment in such a manner that it is not only effective in conventional use but in the unlikely event of nuclear weapons by an adversary in the combat zone, we will limit damage both psychological and physical.

Q. *What does this mean?*

A. While for obvious reasons I cannot disclose any details, I am convinced that the measures taken are effective. I am also convinced that not only will the security of the nation be properly safeguarded but our armed forces will not be made to fight in a disadvantageous situation.

Q. *How badly have Operation Bluestar and its fallout shaken the mo-*

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rale of the army?

A. The harder the test, the more difficult the conditions—and if you succeed despite all this—the higher the morale. The bottom line is we're effective as a group, our heads held high.

Q. *But surely you were aware from the outset that you might encounter severe morale problems in conducting the operation?*

A. From the outset it was a very sad thing. All of us hoped it would never come to this. But when I finally was charged with the mission I was convinced at that time that there was no other option. None. It was a duty to be performed.

Q. *What was your message to your troops once the clearance to go in had arrived?*

A. On June 2, before Bluestar, I told my commanders that it was a very difficult mission, a very sad mission and also that we would do our utmost to be fair, humane, and to use minimum force even at the risk of accepting more casualties than we normally would. Having said this I also told them: "I can assure you that we will come in for intense criticism no matter how well we do it. One school of thought will think we used too little force and too late, showed extreme constraint and took too many casualties. Another school would feel we used too much force too soon and caused too many casualties and damaged too many buildings."

Q. *People are still asking those questions.*

A. You can't help this kind of reaction. But at that time I told my commanders that they were to go in and do an honest job, "so that you can come out with a clear conscience. When you look into the mirror and can look straight into your own eyes, it's going to be your only reward". Every man was spoken to by his senior officers. They were told that the army was going in against our own people.

Q. *So what was the emotional upshot?*

A. The very first battalion to enter the Golden Temple was the Tenth Guards—— half its members are Jat Sikhs from Amritsar district. The fact that they went in and did such a magnificient job, notwithstanding the emotional turmoil within themselves, is the best indication of what army morale was like.

Q. *Was like or is like? What about the desertions?*

A. I'll take you up on that. Is like. Much has been made of desertions and mutinies within the ranks. We have a little over 50 battalion-size units which are 100 per cent Sikh and about the same number with a very large number of Sikhs. Instances of mutiny took place in just three units of the first category and in two units of the second.

Q. *But don't officers share equal blame for lack of communication?*

A. I'd attribute the primary cause to poor leadership in these units. There was a failure of command. The second reason was the unprecedented emotional trauma and pressures under which all Sikh troops were when the Golden Temple was entered.

Q. *Did that shake your faith in the loyalty of Sikh soldiers?*

A. The way I look at it is this: I've always held the Sikh soldier in the highest esteem. But after this my esteem for them has risen even higher than ever before. The fact is that the vast majority of them stood staunchly loyal. I don't think any other class of soldier has passed through such a traumatic experience. Some people in the country—and in the service—speak loosely about Sikh loyalty and their need to re-establish their credibility. But the Sikhs have been through fire and have come out flying high. What hurts them are these kinds of patently unjustified doubts. The Sikhs don't need to make any further demonstrations (of loyalty).

Q. *Was this one of the most distasteful experiences of your life?*

A. Distasteful? Of course it was distasteful, but it was a legitimate mission. There was no other solution at that time. However distasteful, a legitimate mission has to be carried out. That is the hallmark of a soldier.

Q. *What about the question of other means being available, such as the use of gas or laying a siege?*

A. Non-lethal CS gas was used. It did not work for a variety of reasons, one of them being the impenetrability of the sandbagged area. Gas as a sophisticated method may have worked if there had been sophisticated circulation, plumbing and ducting in and around the Akal Takht. Our commandos were also asked to go in with non-lethal stun grenades. And behind the assaulting men we sent sappers with two fire extinguishers each—one in the hand and one in the rucksack, to put out fires. They were asked only to fire in self-defence. But that didn't work.

Q. *What about an air drop?*

A. Descent from above would have been suicidal. Slithering down from helicopters would have been sheer folly. The men would have been sitting ducks. Also, there was no underground means of approach. So we were left with four coordinate points of approach. We used three because the fourth—from behind the Akal Takht—was too obvious. Why not a seige? The terrorists inside had sufficient stocks of food and water, even if the langar area had been cut off. They had taken the precaution of stocking provisions—gur, channa, atta—in every battle position. And water was available from the sarovar.

Q. *All said and done, wasn't the timing bad with all the pilgrims in there?*

A. This is not entirely true. Around the end of the previous month there was a continuing firefight between the CRPF and the terrorists. On the first of June or thereabouts some pilgrims were killed. The flow of pilgrims before the army went in, therefore, was nowhere near normal. It had petered down to a trickle. There were no more than 1500 inside and they were concentrated in the serais in the buildings in one corner.

> **Our capability of producing weapons systems within the country has increased tremendously. By the turn of the century, I don't expect any major weapons systems for the army being imported.**

> **I told my commanders that it (Operation Bluestar) was a very difficult mission, a very sad mission, and also that we would do our utmost to be fair, humane, and to use minimum force even at the risk of accepting more casualties than we normally would.**

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We used loudspeakers to persuade them to come out. Many came out, others were prevented by the terrorists from coming out, and some of them were killed by terrorist grenades.

Q. *After Bluestar was over, wasn't there civilian resentment about the army administering Punjab?*

A. At no stage did we ever administer Punjab. We were there to aid civilian authorities. Our role was strictly law and order at that time. And even as far as that was concerned we started handing over districts to civilian law and order authorities in July 1984. By August-September we were in reserve.

Q. *With that behind now, what is your most immediate priority?*

A. The first thing, even more than modernising the material side, is to improve the quality of the man in the army without which no material modernisation will pay off. But the point is, is the army getting a fair share of the available talent in the country? To attract this talent—at every level—the incentives offered, both tangible and intangible, must be adequate.

Q. *You're implying this is not so?*

A. Unfortunately, there has been a steady and inexorable erosion in the compensatory package offered for a career in the army. This package should not be something special vis-a-vis other government services, but it should be equitable. This is not the case today.

Q. *Why?*

A. The single biggest factor that contributes to this is the erroneous principle of relating pay to rank. For functional purposes the hierarchical structure of the army is like the Eiffel Tower—a needle above a broad base. The number of officers or men being accommodated by selection in every successive rank is very small compared to the base at every level.

Q. *What does that mean in practical terms?*

A. For example, if 40 or 50 majors are selected to become Lt.Colonels it is because of the compulsions of structure and not because the other 60 left out are unfit for promotion. Those who continue to perform as majors are the salt of the earth commanding the bulk of the companies, squadrons and batteries. They're not kept on till age 50 as a philanthropic measure. The same applies at every level of rank. I believe that a payband which ensures that an officer who serves for 28 years before he retires should bear a relationship to what any entrant to any other civil service would expect to be earning at that length of service.

Q. *So a major with a certain length of service could be making more than a colonel?*

A. It should be a rank pay and running pay and in sum, equitable with any other service. If this is done for every rank at respective retiring ages the present inequity and lack of attraction will disappear.

Q. *You're saying the army is less attractive to a jobseeker?*

A. We've told this to the pay commission and they are sympathetically aware of the problem. In a recent survey of preferred careers of eight services, the armed forces ranked seventh because of poor cadre progression, low compensation, discipline, unsatisfactory social and family life.

Q. *Surely this must have something to do with morale?*

A. There are also the intangibles such as the the pecking order of ceremonial importance recommended by the Centre. Here the army is degraded enormously. In some states, a brigadier with 30 years of service is ranked junior to a district collector with seven years of service. It's a question of self-esteem. But happily the prime minister has promised a review.

Q. *What can the younger officers expect from you?*

A. I want to give them a chance to get a better feel for technology; to give them greater opportunity to use their initiative, get greater job satisfaction and grow professionally; to develop greater elan and dash and be encouraged to speak up. Finally I would like to help them to develop a better quality of life.

Q. *What about the problem of supersessions?*

A. If the compensatory package is reformed much of the sting will be taken out of the stigma of non-promotion. But we also need some reforms in the method in which complaints are processed in Army Headquarters. The general impression is that the complaint is processed by the same segment against whom the complaint is lodged and therefore the system is seen as prejudiced. I think the system should appear to be fair. Some structural reforms are called for.

Q. *Do you see any resistance to the changes you're contemplating?*

A. Resistance to change is inevitable in any institution. While some resistance may be due to old dogs not wanting to learn new tricks, resistance comes from the fact that changes in doctrine and tactics have to be carefully thought out—an error can be catastrophic in war. One has to articulate the need for change but one cannot take a sledgehammer approach.

Q. *Finally, what would you like to leave behind as your stamp?*

A. An increase in the self-confidence and self-esteem in every man in the army. I have 820 days in which to achieve my goals. My staff already has a tear-off calendar beginning with day one. I find the atmosphere in the government, at the ministerial, scientific, bureaucratic levels, and with my sister services so positive, practical and eager that if I do not achieve all that I set out to achieve I'll have no one else to blame but myself.

HARI OM GULATI

I find the atmosphere in the Government and with my sister services so positive, practical and eager that if I do not achieve all that I set out to achieve I'll have no one to blame but myself.

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When the immaculate taste of aristocracy spills beyond classic cars and stately mansions...

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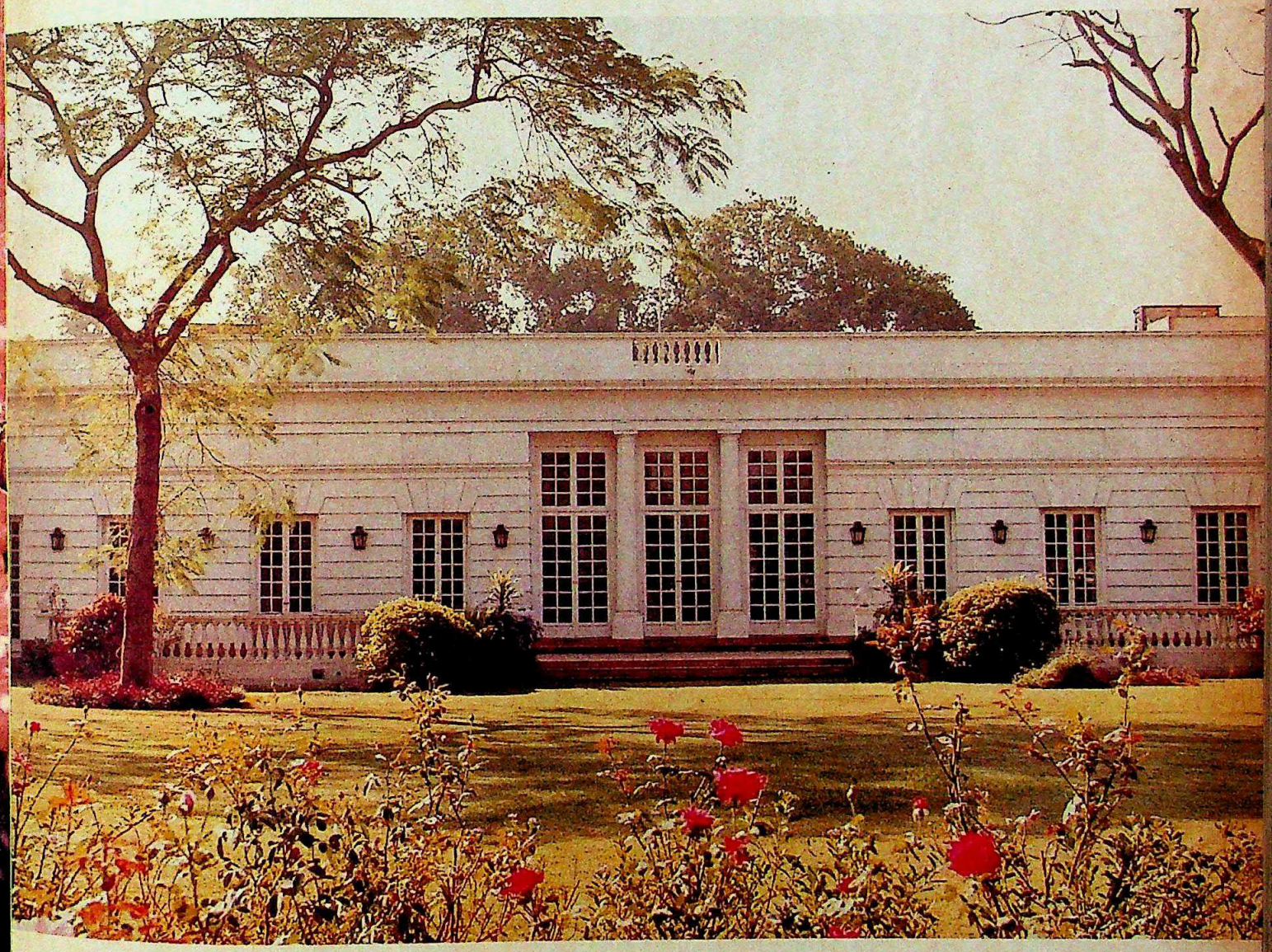
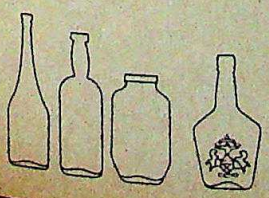


...it finds colour in **Aristocrat**



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to take the rough with the smooth.

Tata Bearings... built to take the load
and the lead... to set new standards
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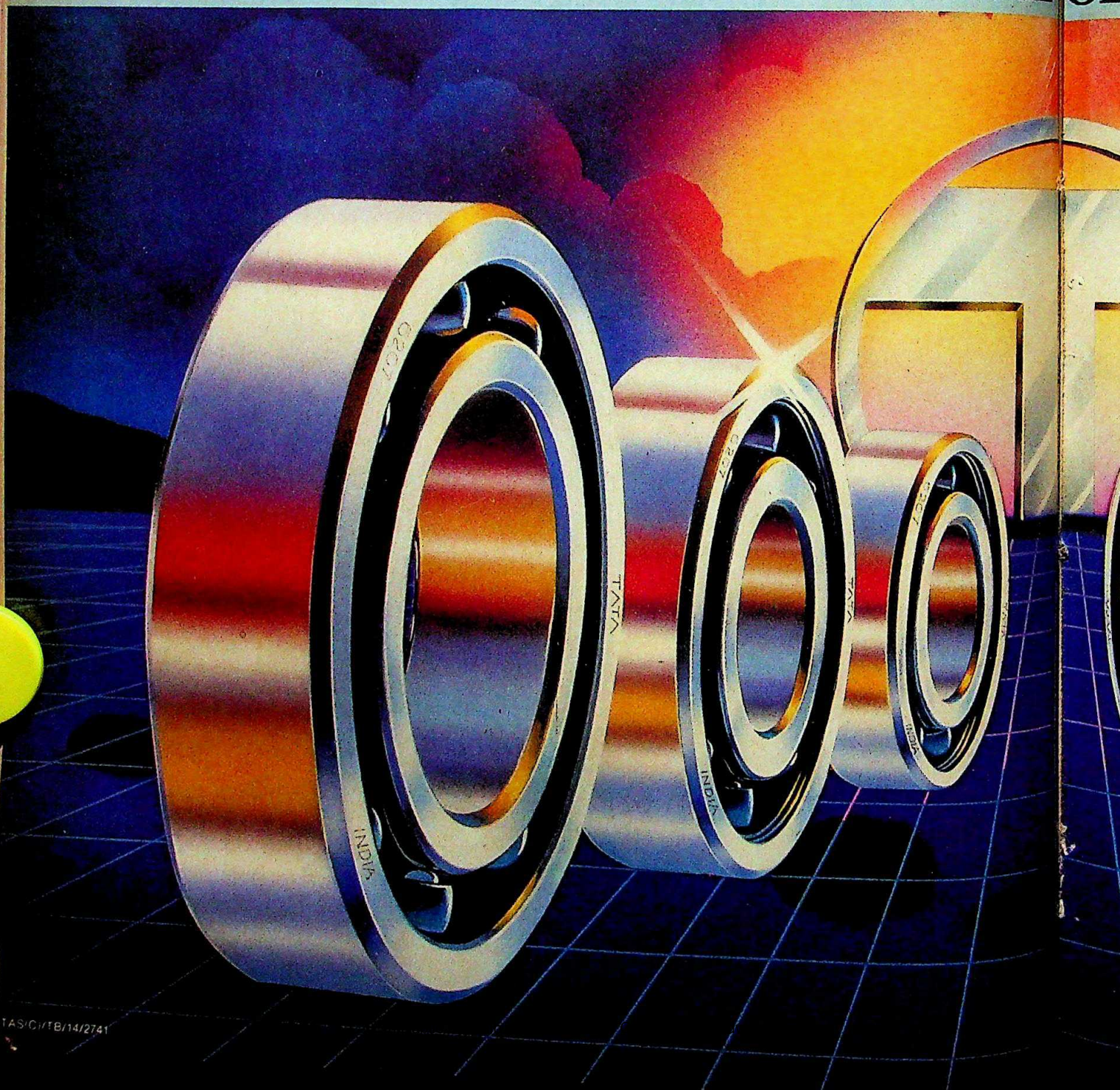
BORN TO START A REVOL



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that will go on... and on...

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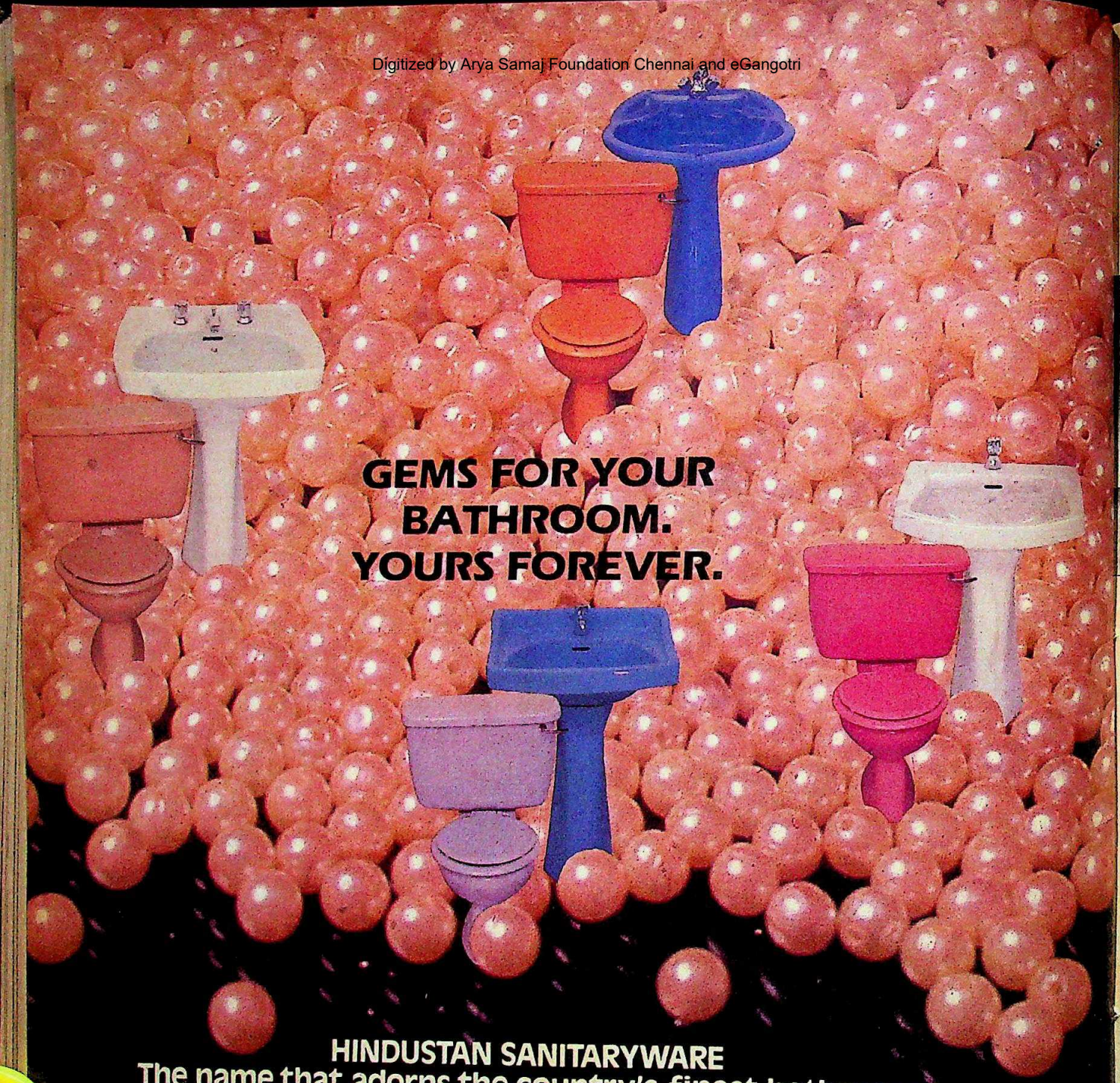

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Winter's Tale

MAKAR Sankranti, as always, was a cold, cloud-smothered day in Bihar this year. But for Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, the chill got a bit too unbearable as he flew to New Delhi on the prime minister's summons to discuss the long-pending expansion of his eight-month-old ministry. Barely had he opened his mouth when the prime minister gave him the cold shoulder and asked him to meet trusted aide M.L. Fotedar, who silently handed him a 64-page charge-sheet listing various charges of corruption, nepotism, inefficiency and financial mismanagement by his ministry. Dubey was asked to reply before he left Delhi. So he quickly extended his stay, flashed an sos to Patna and had state officials burning the midnight oil for nights on end. Finally he returned to Patna, ostensibly with the green signal. But soon he was summoned for a meeting at the Raj Bhawan, after which Governor P. Venkatsubbiah flew to Delhi to brief the prime minister on the situation. If the political weather-vane is to be believed, Dubey still has a lot of rough weather ahead of him.

Dubey: cold snub

Unholy Show

OUR ADVERTISERS know a good thing when they see one. Or, to give them their due, even long before they see one. The latest good thing for them is the Pope's visit—or rather the Pope himself. His Holiness has yet to tread on this native soil but as far as admen go, he is already their catchiest bottomline. Suddenly in Kerala, pretty young things have been replaced by the glowing countenance of the Pope on TV screens in commercial ads. The same face smiles down benignly from larger-than-life billboards, from tiny mementoes and souvenirs and from ads for hotels claiming to be the official hosts to the papal delegation. As an adman in Kerala put it: "All our clients want their products to be identified with the papal visit." But the church frowns over such commercial stunts. Said Archbishop of Veerapalli Joseph Kelenthara: "Unscrupulous businessmen are trying to cash in on the papal visit. We can do little about it, since we don't have the copyright of the Pope's photographs." There must, after all, be a definite line between religion and commerce somewhere.

One of the ads: papal boom

Pen Pushing

ONCE upon a time, there used to be a scribe in Orissa called Janki Ballav Patnaik. But things have changed a lot since. Janki Ballav Patnaik is no more a journalist. He is, of course, the chief minister. And chief ministers, it is known, want very little to do with journalists—especially if they are the wretched type who insist on uncovering embarrassing Kalahandis and Koraputs. So Janki Ballav Patnaik misses no opportunity of making his distaste for this inquisitive breed known. Indeed, he often goes out of his way to do so. Like in the case of a national newspaper's correspondent who was recently told that his application for the allotment of his predecessor's house to him had vanished from official records and that he should kindly see Estate Department officials in this regard, yours etc.... The journalist then rushed to the Estate Department where he was told to please discuss the matter with hon'ble chief minister who was holding his file. Naturally, he gave up in disgust and despite being entitled, as an accredited journalist, to government accommodation, moved into a private house forthwith. This, however, was not the first instance of harassment of a journalist. There have been other equally unlucky scribes in Orissa who have been transferred or shunted back and forth under official pressure for not toeing the Government line.

Patnaik: bad vibes with scribes

Ticklish Issue

IT WAS clearly a case of hair today and gone tomorrow. Six Muslim policemen in Kerala were given a choice between their beards and their jobs. And they chose their beards. So last fortnight, they were suspended—all six of them—and the officers shrugged that there was little they could do about it since the Kerala police manual categorically said that long hair and beards and policemen just didn't go together. The Kerala High Court too, they pointed out, had upheld this in the case of an Alleppey cop, Mohammed Fasi, last year. The policemen shot back that in that case the Sikhs on the force should be asked to not only shave their beards but cut their hair as well. Said Jamaluddin Sharief, one of the suspended policemen: "I realised I cannot be a Muslim without a beard. It would be a sin to remove it now." As for his lost livelihood, he says: "I have faith in God." But the deputy commissioner of police too has a point. "If I allow these six to grow beards," he says, "all the 3,500 men under me will fancy 3,500 ideas and what about discipline?" Now what is the way out of this hirsute tangle.

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In Search

THERE are no distinctions here. There is only faith. A deep, abiding, ageless, palpable faith. Caste, riches, religions crumble to dust. Thousands journey here from distances unknown, from places unheard of—the forlorn, the weary, the wicked, the wretched, the incurably sick and insane, the rich, the landless. They demand miracles—*karishma*. And miracles—if the pilgrims are to be believed—rain down in benevolent abundance.

The *ziyarats* (shrines) of Badaun—one of the holiest of Muslim cities—in western Uttar Pradesh, date back to the mid-13th century. Here lie the graves of two Sayyeds (Muslim saints), Sayyed Hassan, known as Bare Sarkar, and his brother Shah Vilayat Saheb, or Chhote Sarkar. A small distance away, under a canopy of banyan trees, lies their sister, Banno Bi.

It is *Jumeraat* (Thursday)—a day of

Believers gather at the *ziyarats* to pray and meditate

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n of Miracles

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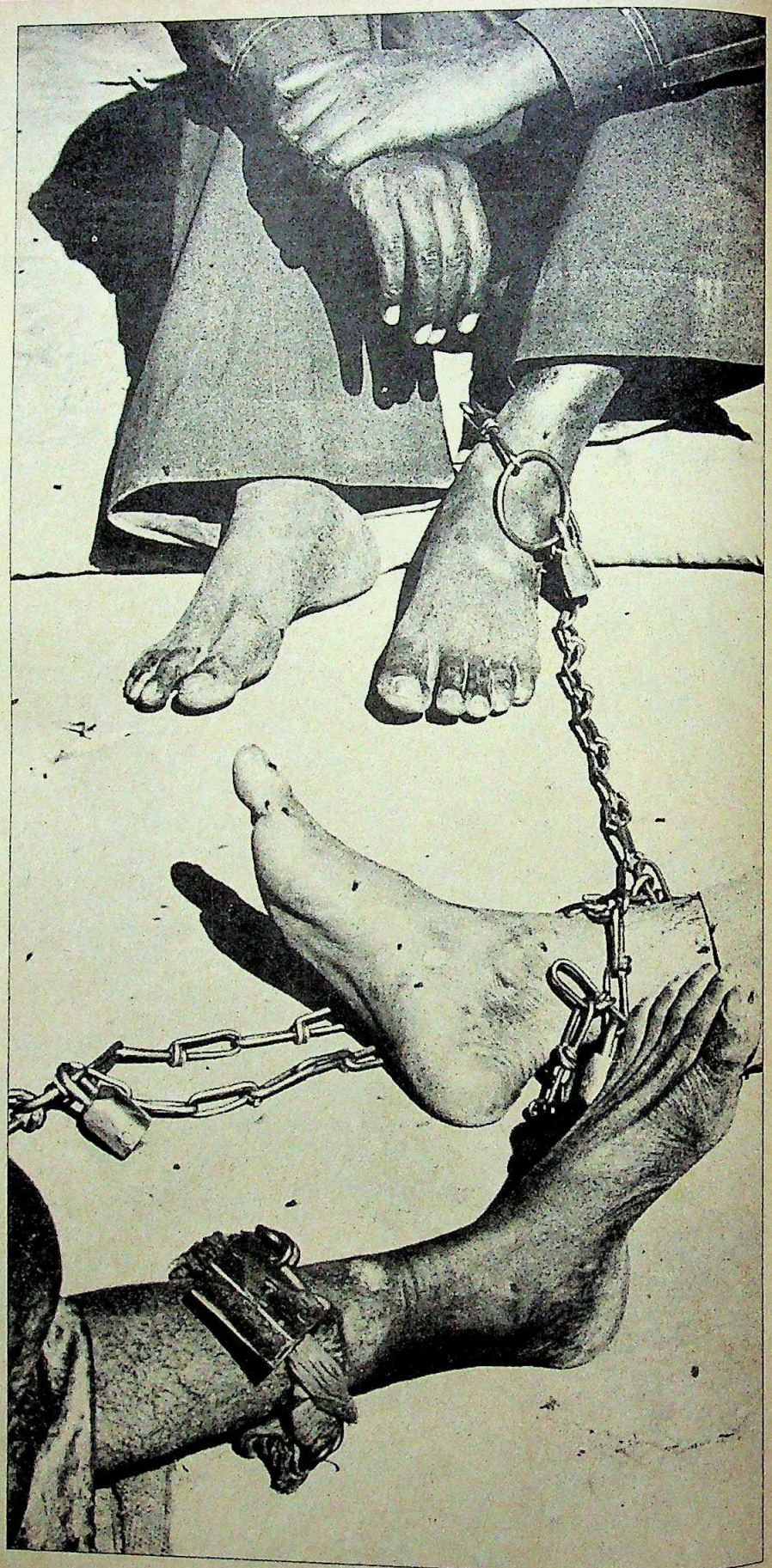
special prayers for Muslims. Oxcarts, donkeys, rickshaws, limousine taxis, pedestrians on foot and on crutches, plough their way along a narrow, dusty trail that winds its way through ramshackle food-stalls into a grove on the banks of the Sotnadi, where Bare Sarkar is enshrined. A cold, watery sunshine bathes the open tomb. Lazy birdsong gives way, suddenly, to a frenzied, frenetic cacophony of growls, gurgles, wails, pleadings, and incantations. Throngs of pilgrims circumambulate the grave. Some sit in silent meditation. Others thrash about in convulsive contortions, their eyes glazed, their shrieks piercing the still afternoon air. They are under the influence of a self-imposed hypnosis brought about within minutes of some inexplicable mental contact with what they call the spirit of the *ziyarats*.

Women of all ages develop states of cathartic frenzy in which they throw open their hair, shake, shudder and jerk in paroxysms of delirious, non-stop, violent motion, crying, pleading, beseeching, begging, cursing, fighting, cajoling. They continue tirelessly for hours, their eyes open but seeing nothing except the light that illuminates some impenetrable inner world of pain, suffering, or ecstasy. In this state—*assar*, as it is called—they troop from grave to grave, from Chote to Bare Sarkar to Banno Bi, and to the graves of the saints' contemporaries whom they call Compounder Sahib and Doctor Sahib and Banke Miyan. Some give thanks. Others beg for miracles. A few simply spit out venomous abuse.

For six hours, in a state of trance, a young woman walks about blindly, begging Chhote Sarkar: *"Mujhe maaf kar de. Ab main nahin karoonga, Chhote!* (Forgive me. I won't do it again.)" She talks in the male gender. A middle-aged woman shakes her fists at Banno Bi's grave: *"Haramzadi Banno toone mujhey maar diya. Ajaa mere saath punga le!* (You bitch Banno, you have done me to death. I dare you to come and fight with me.)" Another man screams at Bare Sarkar: *"Kutte ki aulad, main tujhe dekh loonga!* (Son of a dog, I'll show you.)" Here there are no gods of vengeance. The saints are all-forgiving, ever merciful to their enemies. They answer abuse with compassionate benediction. The pilgrims— Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and Muslims from all over India— continue to circumambulate. They ask for settlement of land disputes, forgiveness for robberies committed, punishment for



The mentally sick brought in chains to the shrines

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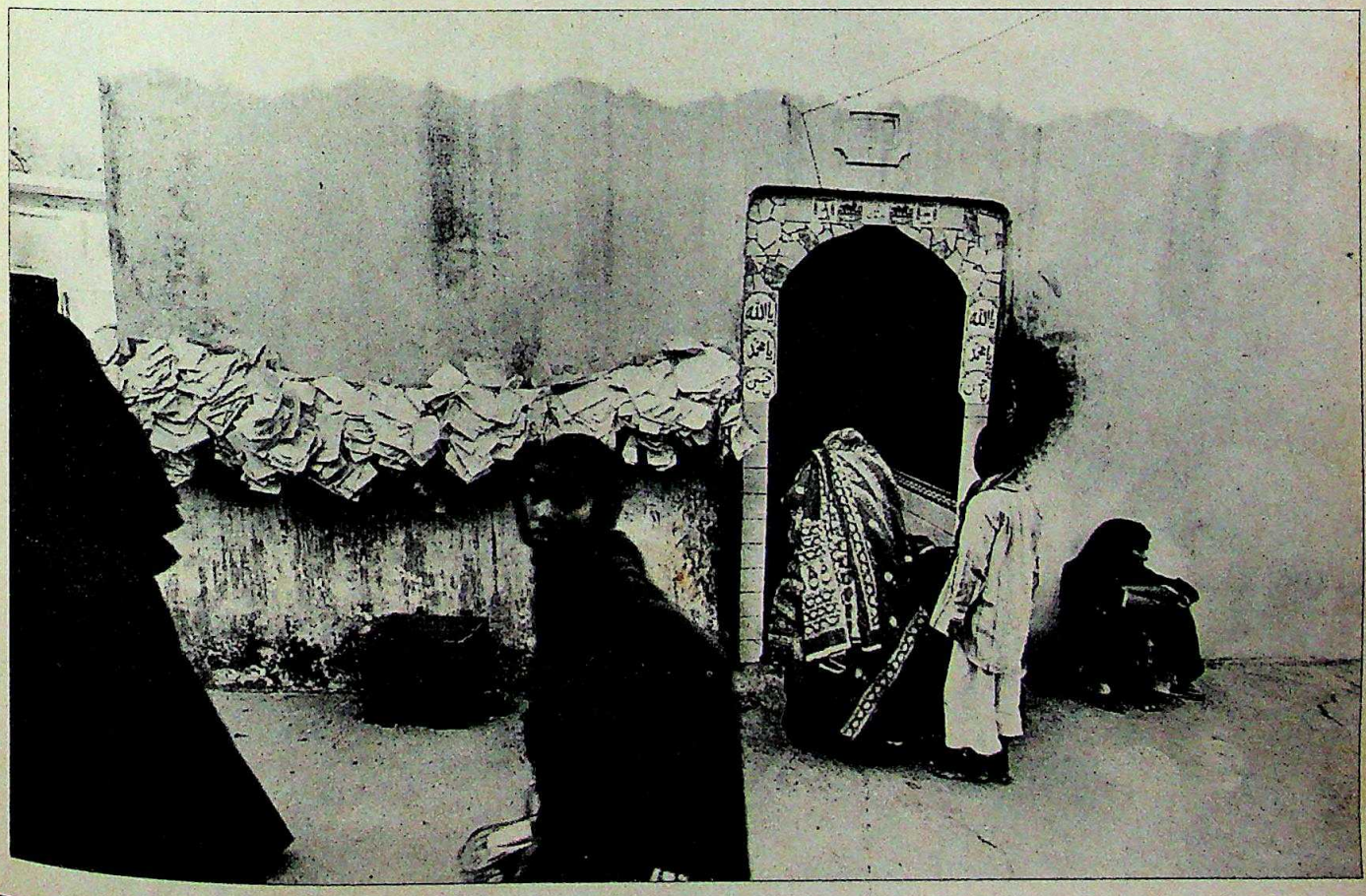
errant lovers, sanity for the insane, health for the sick, vindication for crimes.

They shower the graves with roses and marigolds and garlands and colourful lace-cloth in which they offer *prasad*. The grave sites are thick with the sickly sweet smell of burning incense. Along the pathways are trees and wooden posts with knotted string to which the believers tie letters addressed to the spirits in which they ask for miracles and dispensations. There is no violence. There are no vicarious thrill-seekers. No one stares at or even mocks the most bizarre demonstration of penitence or pleading. Late in the afternoon, a tall gypsy woman from Bilari growls, spits and hisses at Bare Sarkar. She is left in peace to her own devices.

A middle-aged Hindu woman smiles and chats normally with her little daughter as she walks to Banno Bi's shrine. She kneels outside and stares at the grave for a minute. She begins shivering. Her daughter pulls off her mother's *ghoonghat* and quickly opens a ribbon and two clips that hold her hair together in a braid. The woman looks heavenward, her eyes glazed, and opens her mouth wide as if to devour everything she sees. Her body becomes rigid. She begins convulsing and growling, and then shaking in fitful jerks from side to side. She keeps this up for two hours, screaming about injustice done to her husband in a land dispute. In the evening she walks home to her village, chatting and smiling again.

Across a small field in a guava orchard sit the insane who have been rejected by their families and government asylums and put in charge of a contractor. They are chained to one another or to trees. Every evening they are made to do the rounds of the *ziyarats* for their well-being. Shravan Kumar from Aligarh—a member of the home guard—was totally incontinent when he was brought to the *ziyarat* four months ago. His contractor says he is now almost normal. Sayyed Nazir Ali from Modinagar used to have

Pilgrims hang written messages to the spirits of the Sayyeds



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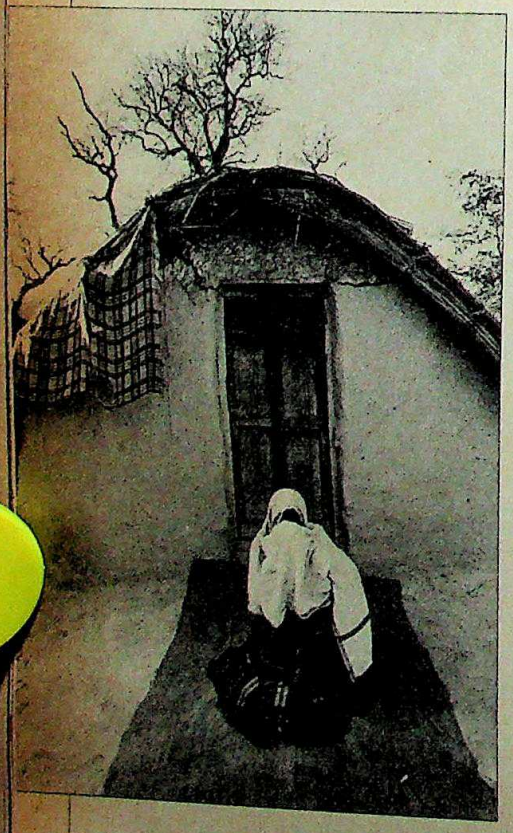
uncontrollable temper tantrums and beat his wife. Today, six months later, after being rejected by medical institutions, he is better, says his wife, who sees him everyday and feeds him while he is chained to a wooden post.

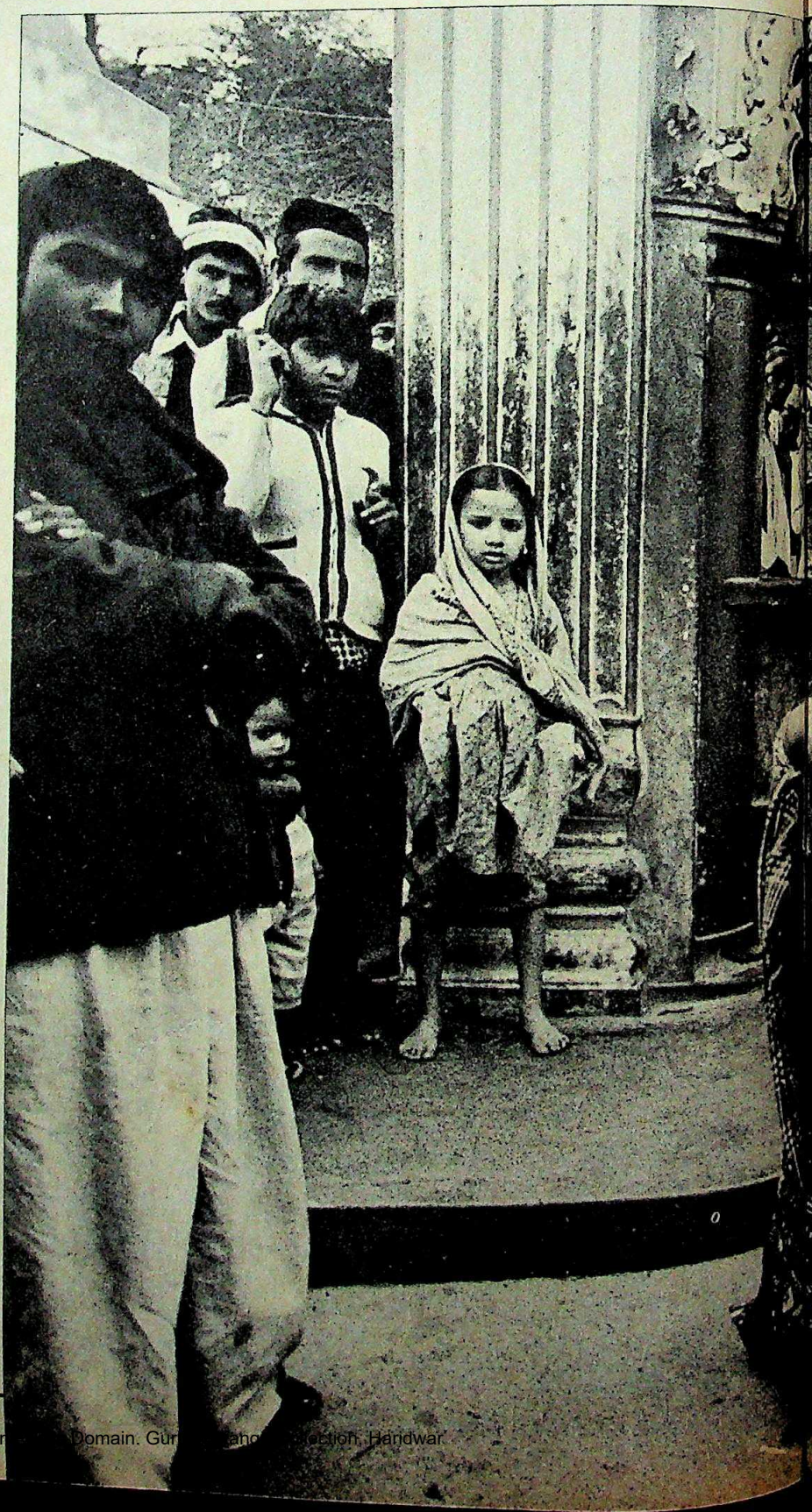
"Miracles?" repeats Jabbar Hussein, whose family has taken care of the *ziyarats* for nearly 700 years. "They happen every day. The blind see. The lame walk. We hardly even talk about these things." Hussein, for two years, had throat cancer. He was treated at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences and Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi. There was no improvement. "I was in the hospital," he says, bursting into tears, "when I had a dream. Bare Sarkar told me I was cured. I left the hospital. I have been back for check-ups. There is no cancer any more." The pilgrims who beseech the saints claim that they usually get a signal in their dreams—within 40 days—that their wishes have been granted.

Gokaran Singh Thakur, pradhan of Sukora village in Dataganj, is on bail, along with his son, for attempted murder. Every Thursday, he treks to the *ziyarat* asking for relief. He says he is confident because of certain developments and that he will soon be a free man. Champa is from Faridabad. She brought her 11-year-old daughter to Bare Sarkar after all efforts to revive her with glucose drips, following severe vomiting and diarrhoea, had failed. Within a day, the child opened her eyes and recovered.

Seth Devendra P. Garg, a pottery industrialist of Khurja, travels to the *ziyarats* every month because, he says, Bare Sarkar miraculously saved his business from what had seemed inevitable ruin. Ziauddin from Aurangabad was childless after being married 15 years. Medical measures failed. He came to the *ziyarat*, he says, and within a year, he became a father. He celebrates his good fortune by giving free food to the pilgrims.

Suplicants wait and pray daily for several months at a stretch awaiting a miracle





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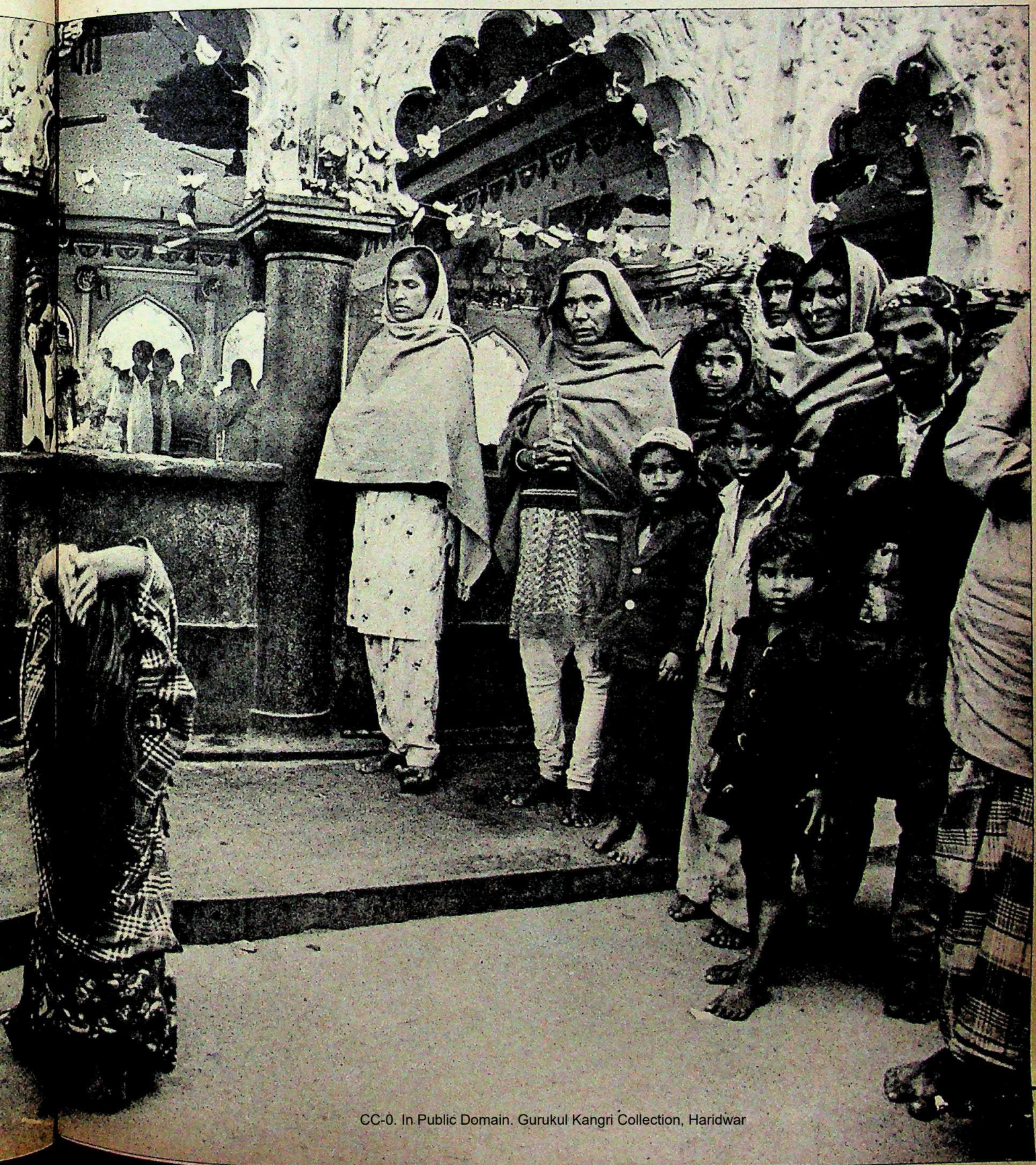
At any given time some 2,000 pilgrims camp, or live in rented huts in colonies near Bare Sarkar. There are no Hindu or Muslim or Sikh or low-caste or high-caste areas. Here they all live together, eat together, pray and curse together. Luvjeet Singh, a cloth trader from Bijnor, lives with his family in a tiny hut opposite a Harijan family. He has been there three months praying for the deteriorating mental health of his father who, he says, is improving.

As night falls, hurricane lanterns light up the shrines. *Qawwals* gather and belt out song and rhythm that drown the wailing and chanting of the pilgrims. On *Jumeraat*, the qawwals are singing: *"Sada mere dushman ko rakhna salaamat; nahin to mere marne ki dua kaun karega....*(Keep my enemy in good stead forever, or who will do the good deed of wishing me dead?)"

The miracle, ultimately, is that there are no distinctions here.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR



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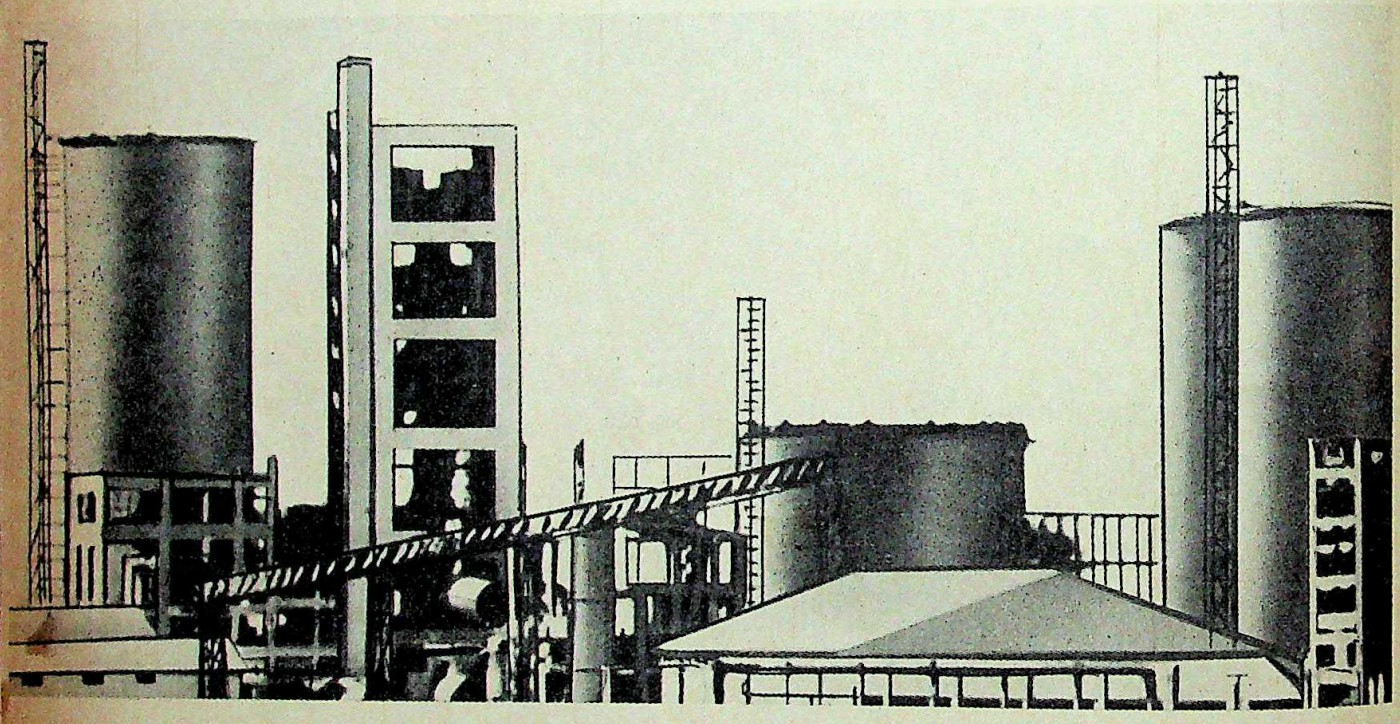

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A BLUE CHIP in the making

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The Bhandari delegation in Islamabad: putting on the pressure

INDO-PAK RELATIONS

The New Offensive

RELATIONS between India and Pakistan have always resembled a slow fox-trot performed by a drunken couple—one lurch forward followed by a sideways stagger and a stumble backwards. But the recent flurry of diplomatic activity on the Indo-Pakistan front finally promises to enable the duo to steer a straighter course. Three high-level Indian delegations have crossed the border—both literally and figuratively—in quick succession over the past fortnight, loaded down with various agreement drafts and proposals to which their Pakistan counterparts have responded to with unusual alacrity.

The motivating factor for the current resurgence of mutual efforts to try and vault over long-standing hurdles is, predictably enough, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the series of meetings he has had with Pakistan President Zia-ul-Haq, particularly the latest one in mid-December. Just prior to that meeting—the sixth between the two—Rajiv had summoned a meeting of key officials of the Pakistan desk in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and told them that he had decided to give Zia the benefit of the doubt. "Let's take him at his word and put the ball in their court," he said.

Officials handling Pakistan affairs consider the strategy significant. "There has always been a chasm between promise and performance as far as Zia has been concerned," says one, "and the strategy enabled us to seize the diplomatic initiative." Zia was pressured into agreeing to speed up the process of "normalisation" which, in the last fortnight, has moved at a much faster pace. In a tightly-scheduled action programme, Finance Minister V.P.Singh's delegation spearheaded the invasion, followed by the one led by Defence Secretary S.K. Bhatnagar with peripatetic Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari and his team bringing up the rear. And next month, Foreign Minister B.R.Bhagat will keep the pressure on with an official visit to Islamabad. All three delegations returned with what the MEA phrasebook terms "cautious optimism" but that is more a reflection of the current political flux in Pakistan rather than any lack of effort.

What is more significant is the fact that the new atmosphere has surfaced during the build-up to the historically vital visit to Pakistan by Rajiv himself, probably in March. The two issues which have so far clouded the air—Pakistan's alleged support to Sikh extremism in Punjab and the country's nuclear ambitions—were consigned to the back burner in an effort to get moving on various other fronts. Thus, V.P.Singh and his aides were able to extract a pledge by the Pakistan side to expand the list of 42 items permitted for private trade to between 200 and 250 items within the next month. Though convinced that the list of items will favour Pakistan business interests, the Indian delegation, in the words of one member, "let them set the pace".

What encouraged that attitude is the appointment of Mahbub-ul-Haq as Pakistan's finance minister. Haq is a forward-looking personality with a genuine desire to forge an improvement in Indo-Pak relations, including trade relations. He has so far been shackled by a group of his cabinet colleagues which is set against any improvement in relations with India. In fact, during the talks, it was Zia himself who intervened on the side of the pro-liberalisation group in the cabinet, giving Haq the leverage he required.

The issue that the second delegation led by the defence secretary went to discuss was infinitely more sensitive and complex—the recent armed clashes between the two sides in the frozen wastes of the Siachen glacier area bordering Kashmir. Siachen is a prickly issue in Pakistan, mainly because army has lost considerable face because of the heavy losses it has sustained in its periodic assaults on Indian army positions. Bhatnagar and his aides, however, stuck to their guns, namely, that the Indian army is in control of the area and has no intention of budging. Even so, the fact that an issue of this nature is being discussed by the two is additional evidence that a genuine effort to improve relations is well underway.

That was again underscored by Bhandari's talks with his counterpart and old college mate, Niaz Naik, which embraced the entire gamut of Indo-Pakistan relations. The immediate areas of agreement was the acceptance of India's long-standing demand over the large number of Indian defence personnel who have been reported missing in action. Pakistan has now agreed to an extended visit by relatives of the missing personnel and promised them all help. The other agreement concerned the civilian detainees from both sides. There are about 800 Indian civilians in Pakistani prisons. Under the agreement, both sides will free the prisoners on or before March 31 this year.

The crucial question, of course, was Pakistan's non-aggression pact proposal and India's more comprehensive counter proposal for a treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation. Though a draft agree-

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ment was finalised on the separate issue of a mutual pledge not to attack each other's nuclear installations, the more vital no war pact still remained elusive. The two major hurdles in the way are the concept of bilateralism as a means of solving disputes between the two countries and the question of allowing foreign bases on each other's territory. Both are issues that Pakistan has stubbornly opposed. "The argument they give is that they don't want to do anything that would bind future governments in Pakistan or compromise their option to ask for military assistance from a foreign power," says an official involved in the talks, "instead, they gave us the old line about Afghanistan and a rather vague formulation designed to prevent both countries from allowing a third power to engage in a hostile act from its territory."

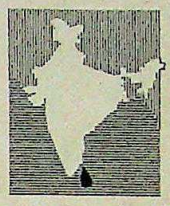
But behind that deliberately vague formulation lies Pakistan's growing paranoia about the threat of India using Israel's help to bomb Pakistan's key nuclear facilities. And, the reluctance to accept the bilateralism formula is because of their other paranoia—Kashmir, an issue that they have been overly keen to internationalise. Under the bilateral formula, it would have to be restricted between the two countries. In fact, what cast an initial shadow over the talks was the statement issued by the newly-formed Muslim League, the projected ruling party in Pakistan, that the Kashmir issue could only be resolved on the basis of the United Nation resolution and not the Simla Agreement, a statement that is contrary to what Zia has been saying to Rajiv. However, senior Pakistani leaders made some amends by assuring Bhandari that the Pakistan Government was not in agreement with the League's statement.

But that also underscored the reasons why India has taken a wait-and-watch policy on the no war pact issue. Pakistan's internal politics is currently in a state of flux and its future form and content is difficult to predict. "In that situation, you can't really be identified with one group or another," says a senior MEA official. But over all, the good news overwhelmed the bad and the most welcome news of all as far as India is immediately concerned was the death sentence handed down to the leaders of the hijackers of the two Indian Airlines aircraft while Bhandari was in Karachi. Though the timing was purely coincidental, it did succeed in adding to the general impression that India and Pakistan finally seem to be coming to terms with each other.

—DILIP BOBB

SRI LANKA

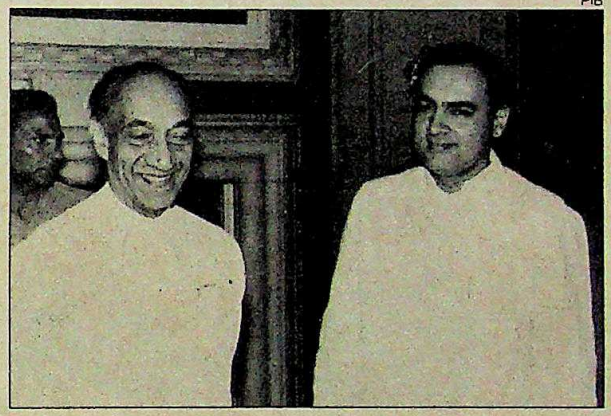
Silver Lining



CELEBRATED lyricist Algernon Charles Swinburne's contention that "even the longest river winds somewhere safe to sea" seems to be applicable to the Sri Lankan situation. Last fortnight it looked as if the chronic Tamil ethnic problem had edged nearer some kind of a settlement, and that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, as the mediator, was close to pulling off a hat-trick after the Punjab and Assam accords.

There were many pointers to a round-

PIB



Jayewardene and Rajiv: new hopes

the-corner settlement. Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene, who had recently been speaking in very aggressive terms about the need to militarily crush the Tamil militant movement, suddenly began to coo and woo. Last fortnight he told *The Hindu* newspaper of Madras: "Let the militants say we are giving up violence. Let them surrender their arms, close their camps, and begin a democratic life. I promise them a pardon, an unconditional pardon."

A subtle indication of the way things were being worked out was provided by the Sri Lankan National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali who observed in an interview: "The Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF) believes in a military solution and to my mind it is the biggest stumbling block. The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) is more accommodating and the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) is prepared to talk."

The minister also said: "In 1986 I see the military position for the (Sri Lanka) Government improving, unless the terrorists get military help from outside. As this process goes on we must somehow activate a process of dialogue. The signs are not entirely unhappy. I think some process of discussion will re-emerge."

That was perhaps an understatement. Some kind of an indirect negotiation is already going on between the Sri Lanka Government and the TULF with the Government of India acting as the mediator and messenger. The Sri Lanka Government had proposed autonomous district and provincial councils for the Tamils. All the Tamil groups had rejected them as not even remotely satisfying the aspirations of the Tamil people. The Government of India in turn asked the Tamil groups to state what they wanted.

Then the TULF submitted a detailed set of counter-proposals to the Government of India, which passed it on to Sri Lanka. These TULF counter-proposals sought state autonomy for all the Tamils of the island based on the federal principle. The first part of the counter-proposals clearly laid down that "Sri Lanka, that is *Ilankai*, shall be a union of states, and the northern and eastern provinces—which are predominantly Tamil speaking—shall constitute one Tamil linguistic state." Added was a rider: "The territory of a state, once established, shall not be altered without its consent." The TULF also wanted the Tamil state to have full control over law and order and land settlement in its area.

According to reliable sources, the Sri Lanka Government circulated copies of the TULF counter-proposals to its ministers, experts, consultants, and advisers for comments so it is only a question of time before the Government officially reacts to the counter-proposals. The informal but categorical assertions of Jayewardene and Athulathmudali that the Government cannot grant linkage between the northern and eastern provinces under any circumstances (in other words ruling out one united Tamil linguistic state), and the TULF's repeated declarations that the merger of the north and the east as one united region is its minimum demand which it cannot compromise on should not make one lose hope. Said a Sri Lanka Government source: "There are intermediate positions between the TULF demand and the Government's stand, and Jayewardene is prepared to concede some

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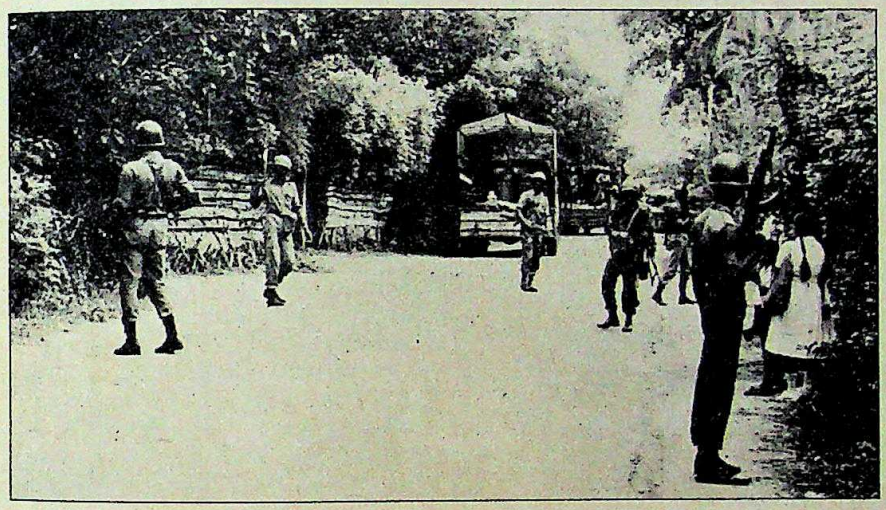
ground if the Indian Government can persuade the TULF to do the same."

That kind of an in-between meeting point did sound possible. Reports from Colombo indicated that Jayewardene was ultimately veering round to substantially conceding what was in the earlier annexure-C— which had in effect, granted the concept of a Tamil regional council, certainly an improvement over the district and provincial councils that the President has been playing around with from the Thimpu talks. There were also whispers in Colombo that the Sri Lanka Government was thinking of revoking the controversial sixth amendment to the constitution which required all MP's to solemnly declare their opposition to the idea of a separate state to retain their parliamentary membership.

These signs of hope bode well for the new active mediatory strategy that India has adopted on the Lanka problem. The Thimpu talks were a serious attempt by the Rajiv Gandhi Government to bring the Tamil militants for the first time face to face with the Sri Lankan side and get them to have fruitful discussions. The two rounds of discussions failed, because, as the convener of the Organisation for the Protection of the Tamils of Eelam from Genocide, S.C. Chandrahasan, observes: "The militant groups are not like political parties to sit across a table and come to a mutually acceptable solution with the Sri Lanka Government. They are guerrilla groups who have vowed to fight for Eelam and who have trained and committed cadres all the way down. So the leaders will run the risk of being done away with by their own cadres if they, on record, express themselves as being amenable to something short of Eelam."

The Government of India seemed to have realised this and the militants also explained to the Government of India their difficulties as guerrilla groups in negotiating directly with the Lanka Government and signing for something short of a separate state. Said an activist of Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front, (EPRLF), a constituent of the ENLF): "But we need India's help. After all we have sought refuge here. And the Indian Government is keen that a negotiated settlement should be found for the ethnic problem. So we assured India that we would have no objection if the TULF negotiated with the Sri Lanka Government."



Sri Lankan troops combing Jaffna

It was a new language of peace and conciliation, therefore, that both the sides were speaking last fortnight. On the debit side, violence again erupted in the northern provinces of Sri Lanka. In and around Jaffna, there were street battles between the militants and the army.

Said Appapillai Amrithalingam, the secretary-general of the TULF: "We have told the Government of India that till the Sri Lankan Army stops its killings and the Sri Lanka Government positively responds to our counter-proposals we cannot negotiate any further."

The TULF obviously would like to do some hard bargaining. But the Government of India has now subtly reversed its priorities. Last year Rajiv Gandhi operated on the assumption that the killings will have to first stop for a negotiated settlement to be worked out. But now the Government of India, insiders say, feels that the killings will taper off once some kind of a speedy settlement can be worked out. The Government reasons that any kind of accord is bound to be opposed by hardline elements on both sides, as it happened in Punjab. A pragmatic settlement between the moderate TULF and the Sri Lanka Government would, therefore, be the best bet under the circumstances. India can then see what to do with the recalcitrant militants, while hoping that many of them will gradually opt to go back and resume normal life. The Sinhalese hardliners and the Buddhist clergy, not to speak of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, would be Jayewardene's headache.

The Government of India is also confident now that it can successfully apply pressure on both the Sri Lanka Government and the Tamil militants to ensure some kind of a settlement and gradually get it implemented. India has been able to make Colombo see reason and undertake to grant Sri Lankan citizenship within one-and-a-half years to 94,000 people—mainly plantation workers of Indian origin who are now stateless in the island. These people hadn't opted for repatriation to India under the Srimavo-Shastri pact of 1964, and had been denied Sri Lankan citizenship. India was also able to convince Colombo that it would not be in a position to take back repatriates who qualify for Indian citizenship but who have not yet been ferried across till the Lanka refugees in Tamil Nadu return.

India is also in a position to force the hands of the militants when it comes to it. More than ever, the militants are now divided amongst themselves and demoralised. Confided an EPRLF leader: "Till now violent incidents, whether in Tamil Nadu or in Sri Lanka, used to take place only between a particular militant group and its dissidents. But now there are incidents between different major groups themselves."

Tamil militants are also accused in a number of criminal cases in Tamil Nadu, and assaults on local people are making them slowly lose sympathy. The Meenambakkam airport bomb blast of 1984 is an important case in point. One of the main accused in the case, Thambapillai Maheswaran—who is the leader of the Tamil Eelam Army—jumped bail and is still at large.

The Indian Government is thus in a position to twist the arms of the militants, specially with the large number of criminal cases pending against many of them hanging like the proverbial Damocles' sword over their heads. In that situation, the chances of a settlement are at its brightest in a long time.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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UNITED KINGDOM

Moderate Targets

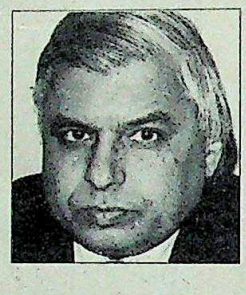
IN London's "little Punjab"—Southall—Tarsen Singh Toor's off-licence liquor shop and cash and carry were popular spots with local Indians. In this west London suburb where bucolic Punjabi and florid *salwar-kameez* outfits take precedence over cockney and leather skirts, Englishmen who venture this far are usually from neighbouring suburban sprawls or the inveterate "hot curry" aficionados. Toor, working late last fortnight with his assistant Ranjit Singh, had little reason to doubt the swarthy white man who entered his shop asking for a bottle of whisky. As Singh went to get the whisky, the man, with a "gypsy appearance" and light-brown hair produced a single-barrelled shotgun and blasted Toor with a shot in the head. As he slumped forward in a pool of blood, the assassin fled. For the stunned Sikh community in Southall and Indians in the United Kingdom in general, Toor's death was a wrenching body blow.

Widely respected, Toor was a nerveless spokesman for the entire community. Although a marked man, local Indians here seem appalled that his opponents—whom they describe as extremists and pro-Khalistan elements—had struck yet again with such ludicrous ease this time through a hired assassin. For them the latest killing served as a grim reminder that the grisly cycle of killing in the Punjab had now become a fearful and incessant pattern in the UK.

At 54, Tarsen Singh Toor was a spunky activist for a myriad causes. A resident of UK for close to two decades, he was a former secretary of the influential Indian Workers Association and a general secretary of the 10,000-strong Indian Overseas Congress for almost 18 years. A resolute supporter of Indira Gandhi, Toor was a visible presence during Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to London last October.

His close friends say that Toor often mentioned the existence of a hit list in which he figured prominently. With his growing reputation as an unbending and unbowed moderate, Toor was sought after by the local media for his views as Punjab's political fortunes ebbed and flowed. Six days before his killing, Toor had appeared on a Thames television news bulletin to condemn an assassination attempt on a colleague and fellow moderate, Sangtar Singh Sandhu. Appealing for peace he accused the extremists of wanting to "create chaos" in India. Toor was offered police protection but had declined it.

What has specifically distressed large sections of the Indian community in the UK is the startling inability of the police, Scotland Yard's crime branch and anti-terrorists squads to either apprehend the terrorists operating in the UK or protect the community's moderate leaders.



Toor's assassination served as a grim reminder that the grisly cycle of killing in the Punjab had now become a fearful and incessant pattern in the UK.

Questioned about the latest shooting, detective superintendent Guy Mills in charge of the investigation told reporters, "it might have been drugs, smuggling or robbery which went wrong. We are keeping an open mind." As the police have maintained this remarkably "open" attitude, other killings and assassination attempts have spiralled.

In November last year, Sohan Singh Lidder, head of the Luton branch of the Overseas Congress was shot dead in Luton. Sandhu, a 49-year-old moderate leader survived an ambush last fortnight in front of his home in Cranford, Middlesex. His assailant fired a shotgun from the bushes and escaped. Singh lost an eye and is now convalescing in hospital where he has been given round-the-clock protection.

The unremitting violence against moderate Sikh leaders has deeply worried Indian officials here. The High Commissioner P.C.Alexander, after calling on Toor's family in Southall, also met Home Secretary Douglas Hurd to express the Indian Government's grave concern. The continuing mayhem would hardly have done brittle Indo-British relations any good either. During Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Britain last year, the activities of Sikh extremists topped the agenda. Thatcher, then anxious to bring the lurching friendship to a more even keel, even virtuously offered to extend to India the Suppression of Terrorism Act of 1978. Since then legal experts of both countries have met for discussions but little has emerged so far.

Instead there were further setbacks. One was when British citizenship was granted to Gurmej Singh Gill, the self-styled prime minister of Khalistan. Since then, he and fellow separatists, have freely publicised their dangerous doctrine. Militants—under the garb of the International Sikh Youth Federation(ISYF)—like their counterparts in Canada and the United States have gradually taken control of gurudwaras. At last count 24 out of the UK's 130 gurudwaras are now controlled by the ISYF. Moderate Sikhs,often hectored and menaced, have accused the militants of collecting temple funds—sometimes as much as Rs 200,000 a week to arm and finance extremists in the Punjab.

Sukhdev Singh, a lawyer of another west London suburb, equally blames the Indian Government for the current ominous state of affairs by not applying enough pressure on British officials.

Some British officials have blandly offered assurances that it would be easier to extradite known extremists from this country once the upcoming white paper on terrorism is approved by the Government. It appears that radical changes in this country's extradition laws which go to the heart of the British system of justice are being envisaged in the white paper. Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, has apparently concluded that a major relaxation is needed in the legal requirements foreign countries have to fulfil to secure the return of the offenders. This does sound propitious. But the one catch in this buoyant, inspiring scenario is that the "offenders" have to be caught first. Until then—moderate Sikhs in the UK seem doomed to continue living in dread.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in London

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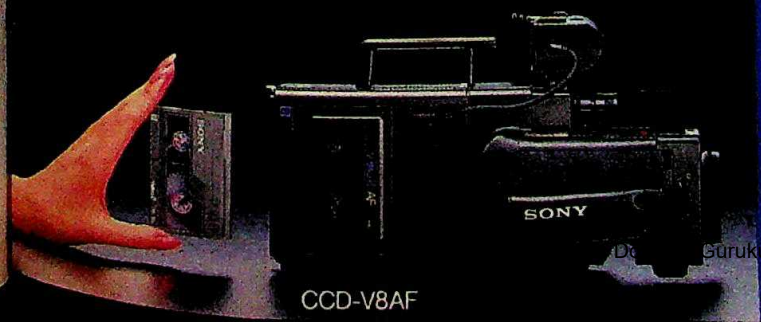

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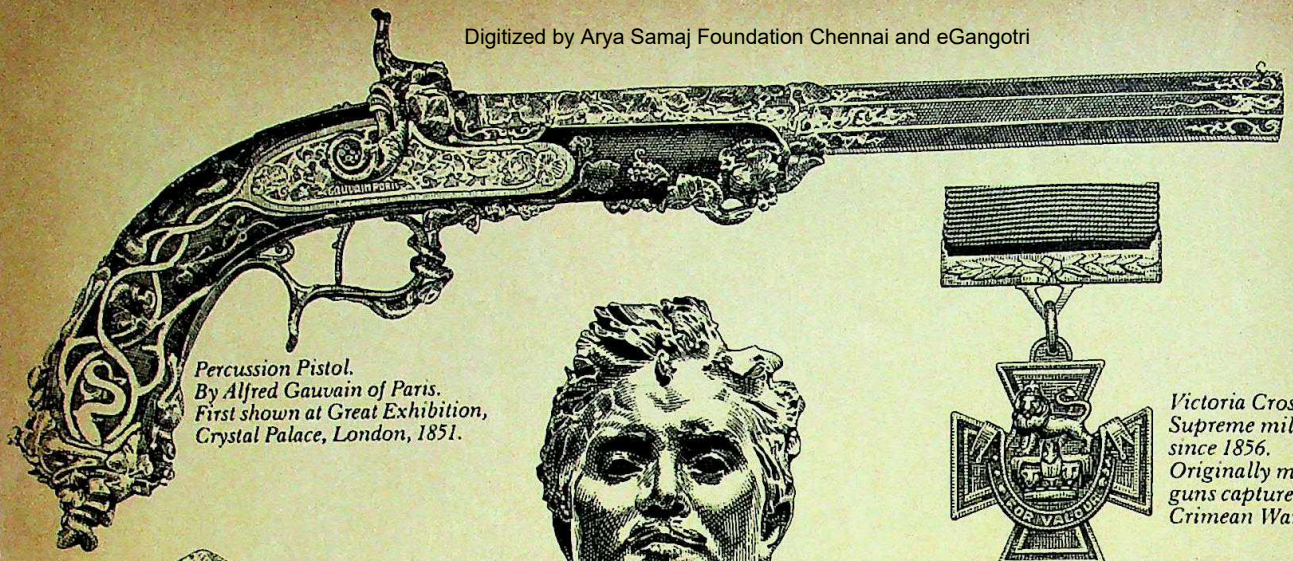

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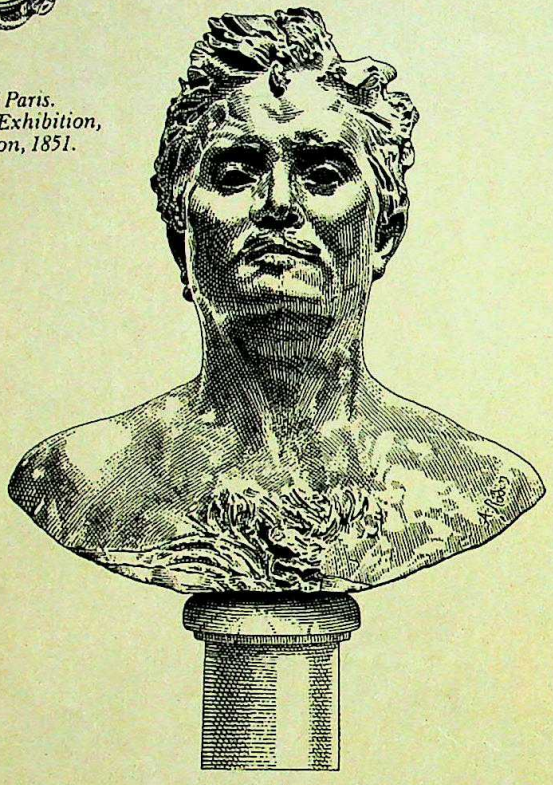

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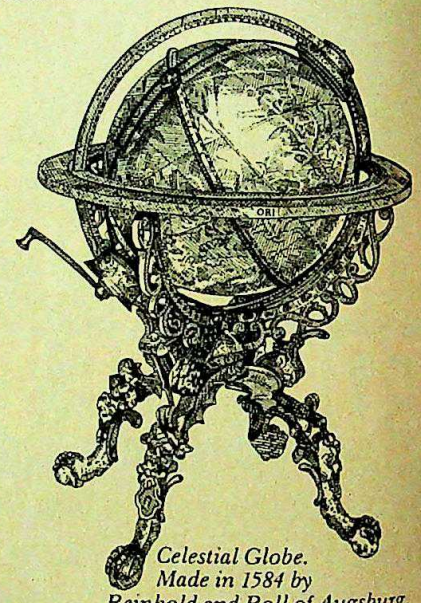

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RAMKRISHNA MISSION

Odd Claims

I AM proud to be a Hindu", Swami Vivekananda had declared at the historic Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893. But officials of the Ramkrishna Mission—an institution set up by him to spread the teachings of his spiritual guru Sri Ramkrishna Parahamansa—obviously feel differently. In a controversial legal petition, they now claim that they are not Hindus but followers of a minority religion called Ramkrishnaism. The petition contends that they should be granted minority religion status and attendant constitutional benefits. The Calcutta High Court has already upheld the mission's claims but whether the Ramkrishnaites will ultimately get favoured status depends on the Supreme Court where the issue will come up for hearing this fortnight.

Swami Vivekananda (left) and college: turning point

KALYAN CHAKARAVORTY

Not surprisingly, the mission's astonishing claim has caused considerable dismay among many of its followers since they have no desire to be deprived of their Hindu faith. The situation would have, perhaps, never arisen were it not for a clash between the mission authorities and the teachers of a college under its control— the Vivekananda Centenary College (VCC). The teachers have been embroiled in a dispute with the mission authorities over the latter's refusal to recognise their claim to come under the purview of the recently enacted West Bengal College Teachers (security of service) Act. The mission has instead accorded them the same status as that of any other whole-time worker of the Ramkrishna Mission Boys Home—which in effect means they can be sacked or transferred at will. The teachers took the issue to court in 1980 backed by the state Government, Calcutta University and the West Bengal College and University Teachers Association—an organisation with pronounced pro-CPI(M) leanings. The petition contended that the college could not be administered by the mission since it was a government-sponsored one.

In fact, the college—when it was set up in 1963 to accommodate refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan—was entirely funded by the state Government, the Union Rehabilitation Ministry and the University Grants Commission. But in 1969, a state government notification gave the college a "special constitution" under which the nine-member governing body would comprise three mission nominees, the college principal, three government nominees and two from the college teachers. This gave the mission complete control over the college, more so since the state Government never interfered in its working. The mission's control has continued undisturbed all these years even though the government nominees have long since retired from service.

> **The mission's astonishing claim that they are not Hindus has caused considerable dismay among many of its followers.**

This the teachers claim is contrary to the 1969 notification which specified: "The term of the governing body will be normally for a period of three years and the committee may be reconstituted or extended with the approval of the Education Department." But an Education Department official admitted that the mission could not be faulted since the Left Front Government had not taken any steps to reconstitute the body even three years after coming to power.

There is thus substance to the mission's charge that the teachers have been acting against the interests of the college. Moreover, instances of inordinate delays in sanctioning funds to some of its institutions coupled with the communist support to the agitation, has made the mission suspicious of the intentions of the Left Front Government.

Faced with what it viewed as a combined onslaught, the mission countered by declaring that "the college is a specially sponsored college and not an ordinary sponsored one and enjoys a special constitution under a special agreement between the Government and the mission." It argued that it did not have to adhere to normal rules since it was a minority religious organisation and hence enjoys the "special rights and privileges guaranteed under Articles 26 and 30 of the Constitution." Dismissing the idea that Ramkrishnaism is at best a sect of Hinduism, the mission claimed it was a distinct religion practised by only about 1.06 lakh people in the country and therefore, a religion of a minority group.

Predictably, the teachers hotly contested the claim charging that the religious issue has been dragged in simply in order to suppress their agitation. But the mission was serious enough. Its affidavit to the high court submitted: "the religion of Sri Ramkrishna is the religion separate and different from that of the Hindus...Ramkrishnaism has its separate god, separate name, separate church, separate worship, separate community, separate organisation and above all, a separate philosophy."

There is little doubt that these arguments work against Swami Vivekananda's aim in founding the Ramkrishna Mission to create "an organisation that will teach the Hindus mutual help and appreciation." But as the Calcutta High Court judgement points out: "Neither Buddha, nor Mahavira nor Christ ever thought of founding a new religion, yet three great religions bear their name." And even if the circumstances contributing to what has been claimed to be the birth of the new religion were hardly propitious, the fact that it took place 100 years after the death of Parahamansa amply compensated.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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CHILD WORKERS

The Wages of Innocence

UNCOUNTED millions of children across the country are missing out on the carefree joys of childhood as hunger, deprivation or the indebtedness of their parents force them into adult occupations. In Varanasi and Mirzapur districts in Uttar Pradesh, hundreds and thousands of eight and nine-year olds provide hard labour for the Banarasi sari and carpet weaving industries. The children, recruited from far-away villages , usually work at dead-end jobs paying them between Rs 60 and 90 a month. Many of them can never go to school, others are drop-outs. Official reports reveal that these child apprentices are abused and physically maltreated. Government efforts to provide proper training centres, better wages and to raise the age of young trainees have so far shown poor results. Manufacturers claim that if regulations against child labour are strictly enforced the cost of carpets will rise by 60 per cent and India will lose out to stiff international competition in the export market. Correspondent RAMESH MENON *reports.*

THE NARROW lanes and by-lanes in the Gauriganj area of Varanasi usually hum with the noise of busy looms. But the looms were silent for a day last month, when weavers (both young and old) struck work demanding a better wage. The next day, however, it was back to work for eight-year-old Gita, who says she desperately wants to go to school and stop working in a dark, dingy room, straightening balls of entangled wool.

Worksheds like the one that confines Geeta are the rule in this town that does a booming business weaving saris and carpets. Most of the sheds have no windows, and the doors are so low that little light gets in. Inside, children sit on the floor with their legs in soggy pits. And in winter the children clad in tattered clothes have little warmth.

It is all very Dickensian, including the long hours and the absence of holidays. And it is not a fate that should have befallen 11-year-old Muhammed Ali. Born in a hamlet near Sewapuri in Varanasi district, he used to be the pride of the village with his ready wit, intelligence and gregarious nature. But two years ago, his father, a carpet weaver, pulled him out of the school to start working on the loom, making carpets. His dream of studying and going out to the big cities in search of a fortune crumbled. "I want to study, but it is not possible now," he says mournfully, realising that his monthly wage of Rs 60 is more important to his destitute family.

Saeeda Begum, 11, was married two years ago. She now works at a loom helping two younger boys weave saris and floral sari patterns. "When I start living with my husband four years later, I will stop doing this detestable job," she says hopefully. Says Ramu, 9, who singlehandedly operates the loom at Gorai village earning about Rs 6 a day: "We have to carry on working to keep our stomachs atleast half full".

These are only a few of the over one-and-a-half lakh children aged between six and 16 in the districts of Varanasi and Mirzapur who have missed out on childhood. They are part of an overworked, underfed child brigade which operates some 45,000 looms serving the handloom and carpet industries of Varanasi district.

The eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh have traditionally been a stronghold of weavers and artisans. In the last decade, handloom and carpet weaving have flourished in Varanasi, Bhadohi and Mirzapur. This year, exports are likely to touch over Rs 250 crore in carpets alone, thanks to the underpaid labour of these exploited children.

They do not usually come from the villages where they toil. Many of them are migrants from nearby villages and also from backward areas in Bihar. They are inducted into the industry by labour contractors and their scouts. After selling dreams to their parents about how their offspring would become skilled carpet weavers and amass wealth, they take them away to the village sweatshops. As Professor B. Juyal, a sociologist, says:

Child labourers at work in Varanasi: exploited workforce

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

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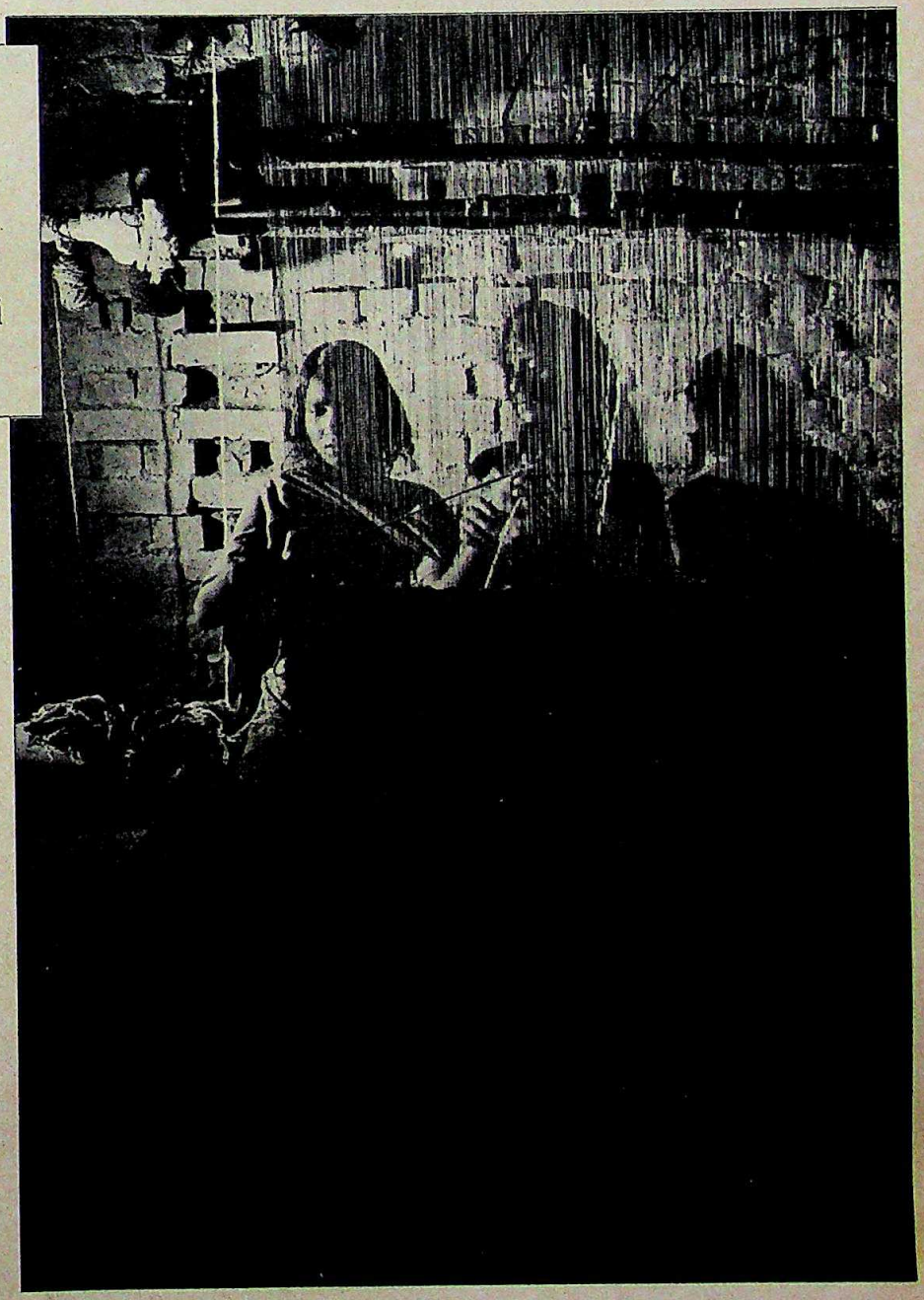
"Poor parents send away their children thinking that the carpet industry is manna from heaven. They think that their children will instantly grow very rich once they learn the skill."

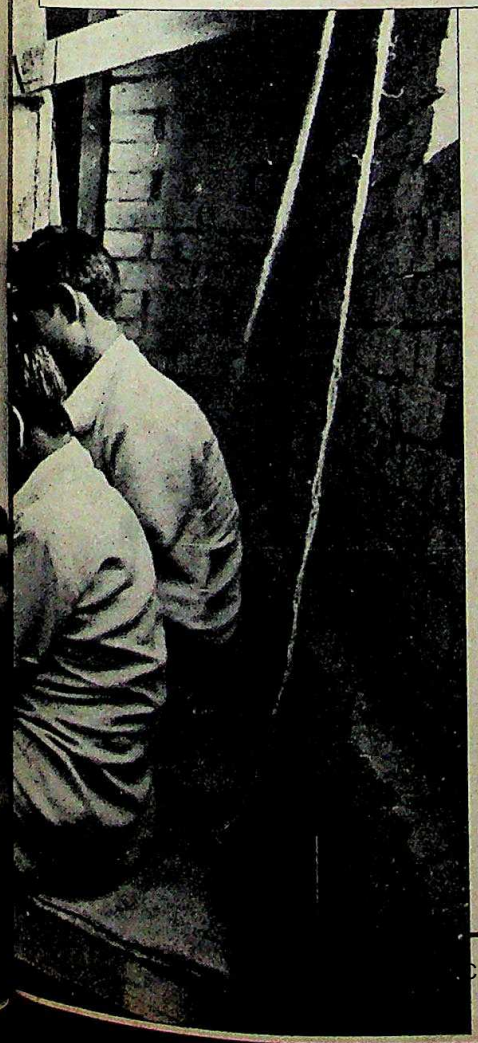
In many cases, parents send their children away as a means of paying off a debt to a contractor. For other parents, it is simply a matter of survival. As Taiyab Ali, who has been a carpet weaver for 35 years, put it: "I have taught the skill to 26 boys by now. I did not want my son to become a weaver. But I have now forced him to do it. We will otherwise starve."

Initially, the child aged around eight, is made to work as a trainee without wages. Depending on the whims of the employer, the child starts earning a wage of around Rs 40 a month. In the third year, his wage is increased to about Rs 60 a month and after around four years to Rs 90. Children who can weave Banarasi saris with zari borders can earn Rs 90-100 a month. Master weavers are usually hard taskmasters. Abusing, scolding and even physically beating the child apprentices is their style of instruction. A study done by the Banwasi Sewa Ashram in Uttar Pradesh on the condition of child labourers in Varanasi, Palamau and Mirzapur reveals that 91.5 per cent of them come from poor and backward communities and 76 per cent were illiterate. About 60 per cent of them put in 9-12 hours of work a day.

A child labourer earns half the wage of an adult doing similar work for the same length of time. Provision of food, lodging and clothing is considered a part of the wage and cuts into the paltry sum they earn. Around 45.5 per cent of them get only Rs 3-4 a day and if provided with food. Rs 30 are cut from their pay. In Palamau, 57.7 per cent reported that they did not get enough food. Parents are also forced to live with the uncertainity of their children. Last year, 30 parents from Palamau were so upset because they had not heard for long from their children who had gone to work in Varanasi that they approached human rights activists for help. As a result, the district administration in Varanasi was forced to search for the missing children. Only a few children were found. Others are still missing. It is feared they

Over 1.5 lakh children are part of an overworked, underfed child brigade which operates 45,000 looms in the handloom and carpet industries of Varanasi and Mirzapur districts.





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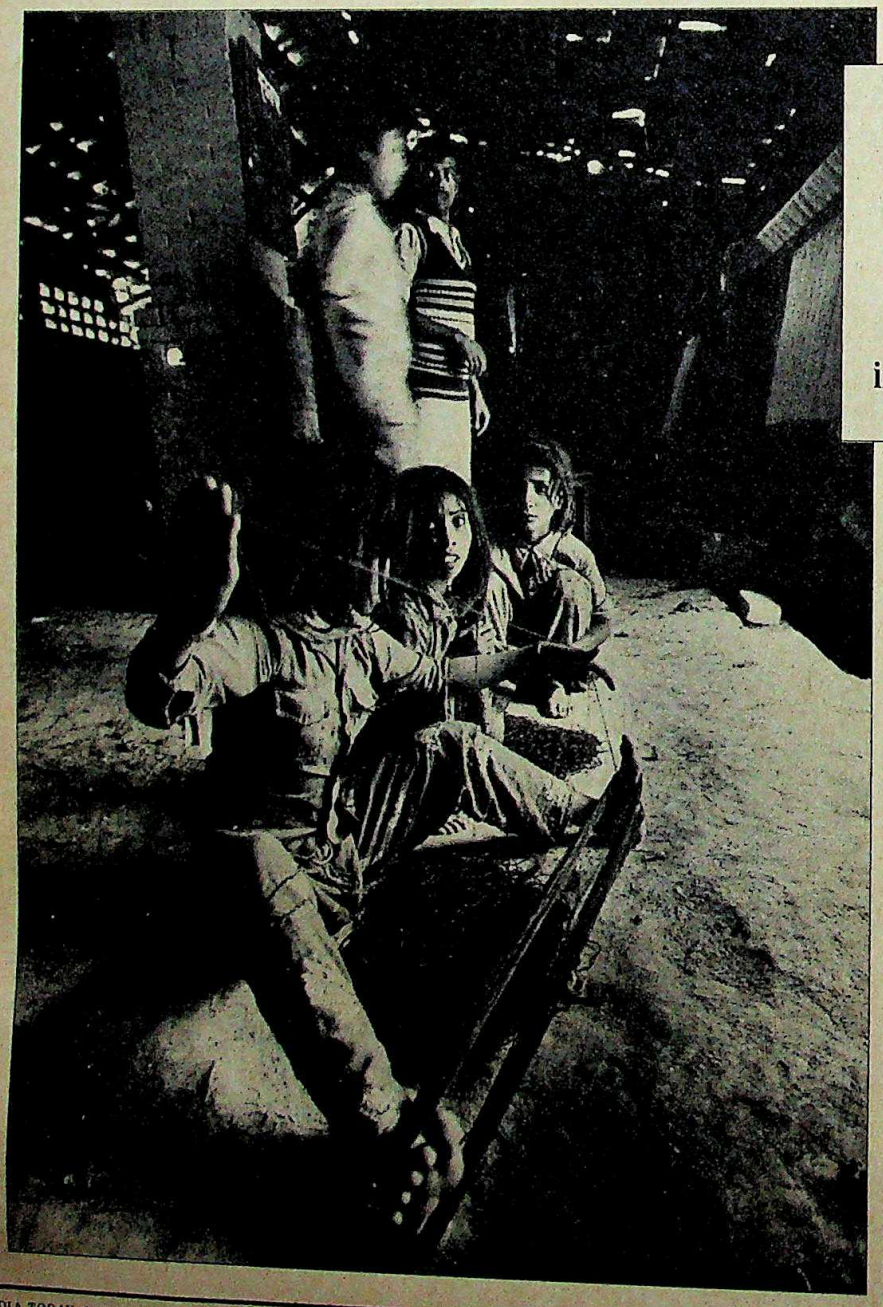
were sold by one employer to another—a common enough practice in the industry. Since no records are maintained, nobody is held accountable. The All India Carpet Manufacturers Association at Bhadohi, instead of using this opportunity to cleanse the system, alleged that vested interests in Bihar had launched this tirade as "they were jealous of the prosperity of carpet manufacturers in Uttar Pradesh".

Even though there is plenty of labour available in local villages, carpet and sari manufacturers prefer to get child workers from outside as it is easier to control them. Having no savings, the children also cannot go back home. There is also an element of bondage involved—it is common for the parent or the guardian of a child to take an advance from the employer. The advance is usually interest-free up to a limit, usually Rs 200. More borrowings are possible at interest-free rates. Since the facility is normally available, few are able to resist the temptation not to avail of it. The amount is then adjusted against the child labourer's earnings which means he or she cannot quit until the entire money is repaid.

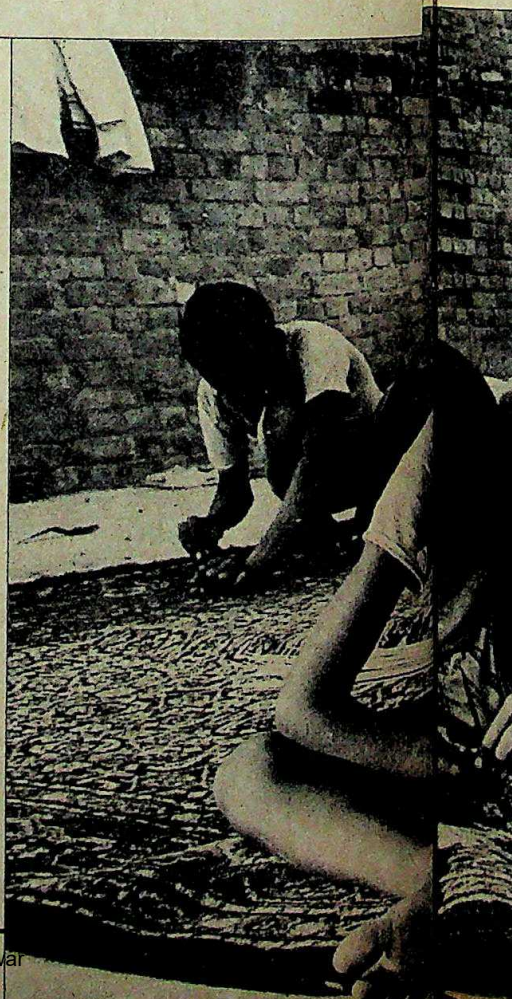
In addition, no parent is allowed to withdraw his child from one employer until he has cleared the entire debt so incurred. Alternatively, a new employer has to undertake to first pay off the old employer. No one wants to do that and the child has to remain with one employer. There is little or no mobility. They grow up doing the same job and very few end up as master craftsmen or are even able to buy a loom of their own.

A weaver in his 30's still earns just about Rs 300 and it is not possible to save enough to install a loom at a cost of Rs 2,500. And even those who are able to purchase a loom of their own, ultimately wind up running it solely on child labour. And so, the circle of exploitation endures.

Four years ago the Central Government started over 60 carpet-weaving training centres in the Varanasi-Mirzapur belt to be run by the All India Handicrafts Development Board. The idea was to encourage the cottage industry in Uttar Pradesh. The training centres were to give training to children above 14 years so they could get into the trade within a year. But in most of the training centres, children



A child labourer earns half the wage of an adult for the same amount of work. Provision of food, lodging and clothing is part of the wage and cuts into the paltry sum he earns.



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under 10 are employed on a monthly stipend of Rs 100.

A Central Government team which visited the training centres recently reported that most of the children were below the stipulated age. In Hathi village for example, 30 of the 33 trainees are girls, most of them under 10. But the centre insists that they are all above 14. None of them is interested in becoming a weaver. They were pulled out of school and forced to join the centre by their parents..

Ironically, even these government centres have served the interests of the private manufacturers—not only because they got readymade cheap trained labour but also because they could buy the carpets from these centres at rock-bottom rates, finish the carpets and then sell them at good profit.

As the awareness of child labour has grown, children have been taught to give false names and ages. In most villages, children just do not talk—elders answer questions of any visitor. In Sardarnagar near Bhadohi, an elerly man supervising the finishing of a carpet by six boys, all below 10, has instructed them not to give their real names whenever questioned. When asked, he reeled off their names—all names of places in Uttar Pradesh.

THE WORKING conditions of these children and they being employed on low wages is none of our concern, as we do not directly employ them," says K.C. Khanna, joint secretary of the All India Carpet Manufacturers Association. Khanna's annual turnover is nearly Rs 2 crore. He adds: "In fact, they should be grateful that they are being trained in such an intricate art." Carpet and Banarasi sari manufacturers profiting from the sweat of the children in Bhadohi and surrounding areas are oblivious to their needs. They hide behind the excuse that they choose to employ child labour not because of lower wages but because, as one of them said: "Their fingers are very nimble and can work with dexterity in carpet and zari making".

A report on the alarming conditions that children work in Varanasi and Mirzapur circulated by Sanat Mehta, chairman of the committee on child labour, in July 1984 recorded that "children work in conditions of semi-slavery". It also revealed that the working conditions posed serious health hazards as the children were exposed to breathing fluff and dust of cotton, silk and wool and in course of time would develop poor eyesight due to the nature of the work, as well as tuberculosis, filariasis and enlarged lymph glands.

But Khanna dismisses these hazards with a wave of his hand: "Those who work in the carpet indusry are healthier than others." According to Mehta: "With lower wages, children are not only replacing adult labour but also depressing the wages of adults doing similar work. The myth that children are better suited for the job as their nimble fingers can work with greater speed and accuracy has been in vogue too long to disprove."

The industry sucks in a large number of schoolchildren each year. Says Rama Wahal, a teacher in Sewapuri: "There is a high rate of drop-outs. With such a system of child labour prevailing, this sad situation is inevitable." The Chagankshetra Vikas Samiti, a social service agency in Sewapuri, had volunteered to run non-formal classes for children working in government training centres. All they asked for was an hour a day. But the All India Handicrafts Board did not respond.

District Collector of Varanasi Raghunandan Tolia does not dispute the wide prevalence of child labour in the area. "What is important now is not finding out ways to ban child labour but to ensure that these poverty-struck children work in better conditions and earn dignified wages," he says. During informal sessions with carpet manufacturers last fortnight, Tolia suggested that their working places should be made cleaner and better ventilated. He has asked them to open savings accounts in post offices in the names of the children where all transactions would have to be shown.

The manufacturers have not yet reacted to these suggestions. Representatives of the All India Carpet Manufacturers Association have cautioned the Labour Ministry that if it bans child labour, the cost of carpets would rise by 60 per cent and India would lose out on the export market which is at present facing stiff competition from China and Pakistan. But the basic fact remains that if children are to employed at all, then they deserve better wages and above all, the right to be treated with dignity.

Signs of awareness among the workers are becoming evident. But employers do not appear to recognise the fact that these children deserve to see a better day. As social worker Ramakant Rai sums it up in his impassioned question: "Children work so hard because they are driven by poverty. But does this give a licence to thousands of prospering businessmen to continue exploiting them?"

Young apprentices toil under master craftsmen: maltreated lot

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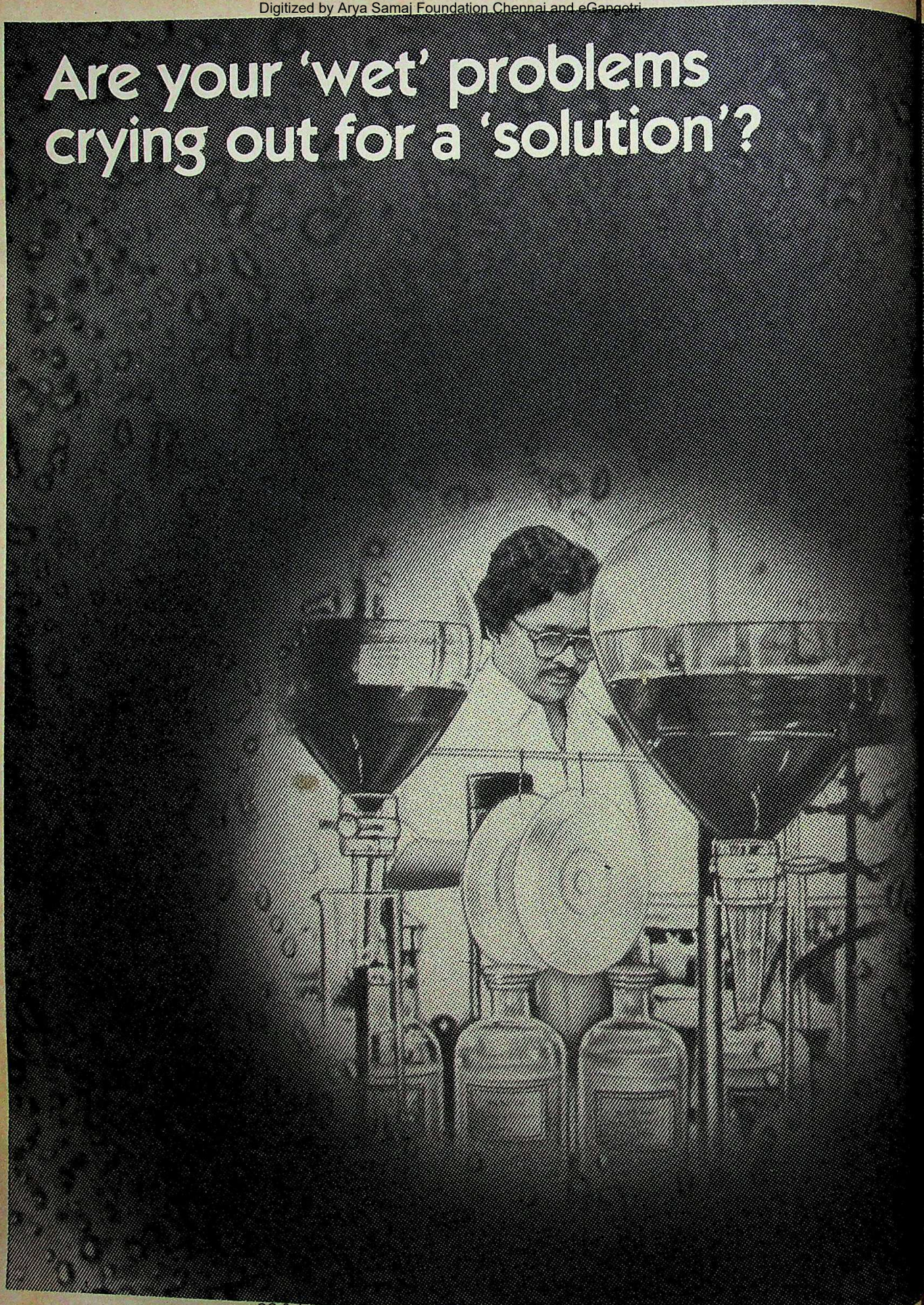
Are your 'wet' problems crying out for a 'solution'?



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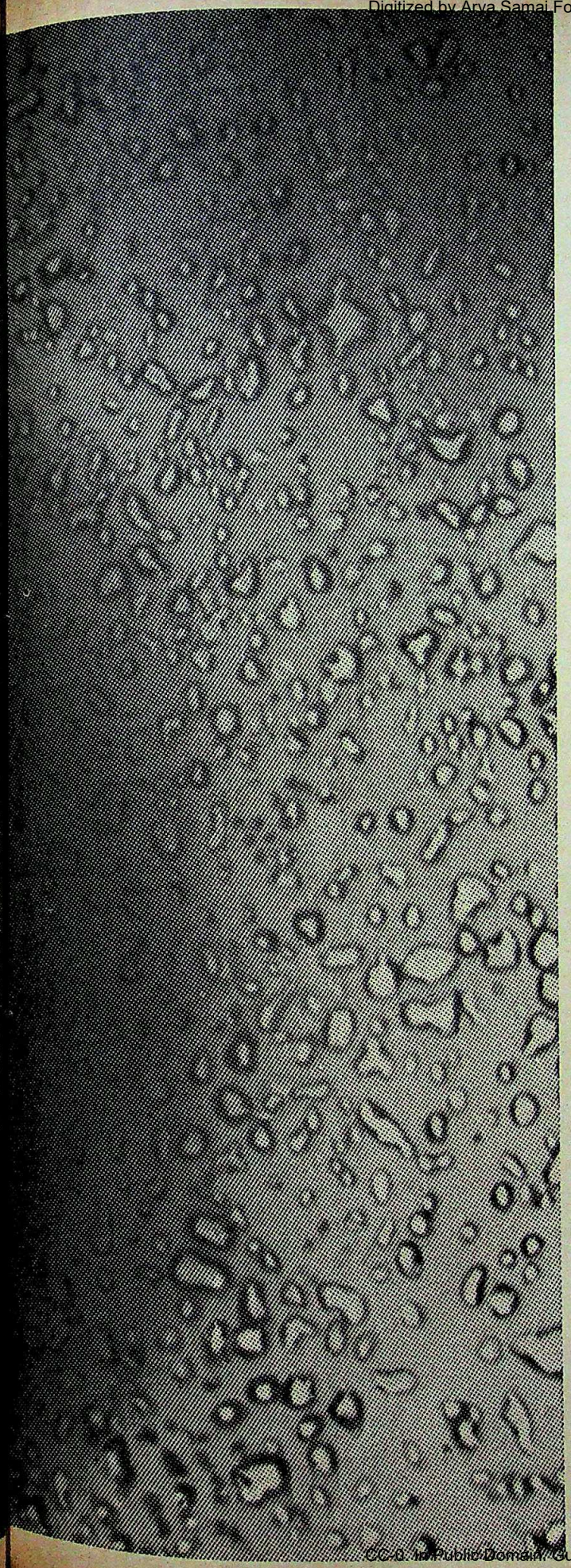

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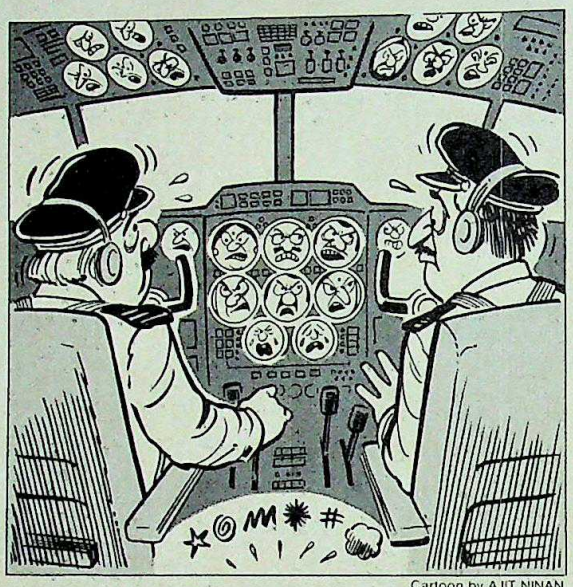
INDIAN AIRLINES

Travellers' Checks

THE AMBITIOUS seminar jointly hosted last fortnight by Air-India and Indian Airlines on the theme "Civil Aviation at the turn of the Century", witnessed a galaxy of aviation experts airing their views on the industry. Very few of the speakers, however, talked about the actual bread and butter of the airlines—the passengers.

But there could also be another reason for the glaring gap in the seminar proceedings: the fact that passengers have now decided to speak for themselves, and quite forcefully too. The first stirrings of revolt surfaced on Indian Airlines flight 406, a daily, direct Bombay-Delhi service popular with day tripping businessmen and executives.



Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

On the January 15 flight, the passengers were asked to emplane at the scheduled time, 9.30 a.m. For the next 45 minutes, the passengers sweltered on board as the auxiliary power unit which feeds the air-conditioning plant on the aircraft was out of commission. Finally, Captain Bhatnagar, the flight commander, informed the irate passengers that "because of non-coordination between the engineering and traffic wings, you have been put to this inconvenience".

The announcement was greeted with the usual mixture of jeers and groans but up in the executive class cabin, one long-suffering passenger decided that enough was enough. R. Mohanty is a frequent traveller on Indian Airlines, in fact so frequent that most cabin crews know him by name. Summoning the purser, Mohanty demanded a sheaf of suggestion cards the airline has recently started carrying on board its flights and dashed off a lengthy letter of complaint to the captain. According to airline sources, the letter essentially blamed the captain for not getting the ground staff to move faster and threatened to report Bhatnagar to the aviation minister on arrival in Delhi.

Whether Bhatnagar could have avoided the delay is debatable. Airline sources say that the reverser on one of the engines was malfunctioning and the engineering department had been working on it for some hours before the scheduled take-off time. When the traffic personnel asked the engineering staff how long it would take, the reply was "10 minutes". The traffic personnel then allowed the passengers to board but the fault actually took a further 45 minutes to rectify.

Mohanty, refusing to be fobbed off by excuses of "non-coordination", was invited to the flight deck a few minutes after take-off by the captain. From then on, the versions of what took place naturally vary. The captain's version is that Mohanty was abusive and threatening and claims that Mohanty hit him. Mohanty's version is that it was Captain Bhatnagar who was abusive and rude and claims that it was Bhatnagar who used physical force to push him out of the flight deck.

Ultimately, it was the unfortunate passengers who paid the price. Bhatnagar immediately called up Bombay control tower and informed them that he had a violent passenger on board and was turning back and asked them to have security personnel standing by to arrest Mohanty on arrival. He then went further and informed his passengers over the public address system why he was turning back and then added: "If any passenger misbehaves, he will be handed over to the police."

This was a bit too much for the rest of the passengers to take, not knowing what exactly had happened on the flight deck and already irritated at the delay. Before the aircraft could land at Bombay, they had organised themselves and blocked all the exits. When it landed they refused to let the security personnel on board and also flatly refused to fly with Bhatnagar in charge of the aircraft.

This unprecedented sequence, signalling a new mood among airline passengers in the country, had the inevitable downstream dislocations: a bridegroom on board the plane missed his connecting flight from Delhi; and managed to make it to his wedding only by switching to surface transport.

Airline officials tried pacifying the crowd, but realising that they had a revolt on their hands, finally requisitioned the services of another pilot who flew the aircraft to Delhi four hours behind schedule but with both Mohanty and Bhatnagar aboard, the latter as a passenger.

According to senior airline sources, it is difficult to establish the true facts of the altercation. Bhatnagar is known as a level-headed pilot and a colleague says that it would take excessive provocation to make him behave the way he did. The other crew members on the flight deck naturally back Bhatnagar's version. But the incident was embarrassing enough for the airline to officially admonish Bhatnagar and temporarily suspend him from flying. "Mohanty is a regular and well known to the airline. The captain had no business aborting the flight for the reasons he did," admitted a senior airline executive.

That minor victory for the passengers seems to have inspired similar displays of resistance. A week later, the departure of an airbus flight from Calcutta to Delhi was again delayed for 15 minutes. Angry passengers were told by the pilot that the reason was because the lt-governor of Arunachal Pradesh had still not checked in. When the lt-governor arrived, passengers refused to let him board and demanded a personal apology. He refused and the flight left without him. He, it later transpired, was hardly at fault since his connecting flight from Silchar had been delayed by two hours. But the incident offered further proof that a growing number of Indian Airlines' passengers are no longer willing to be taken for a ride.

—DILIP BOBB with JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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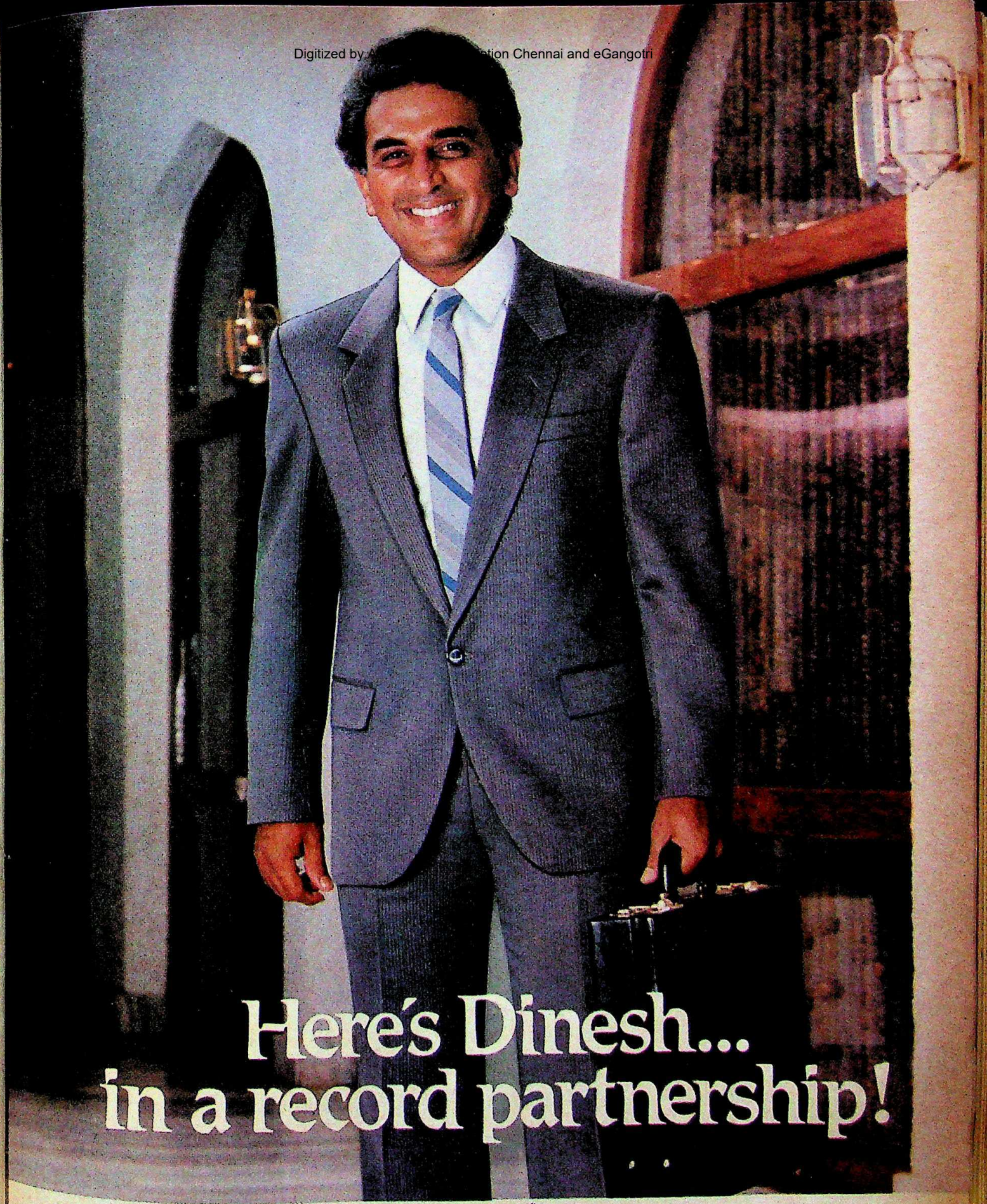

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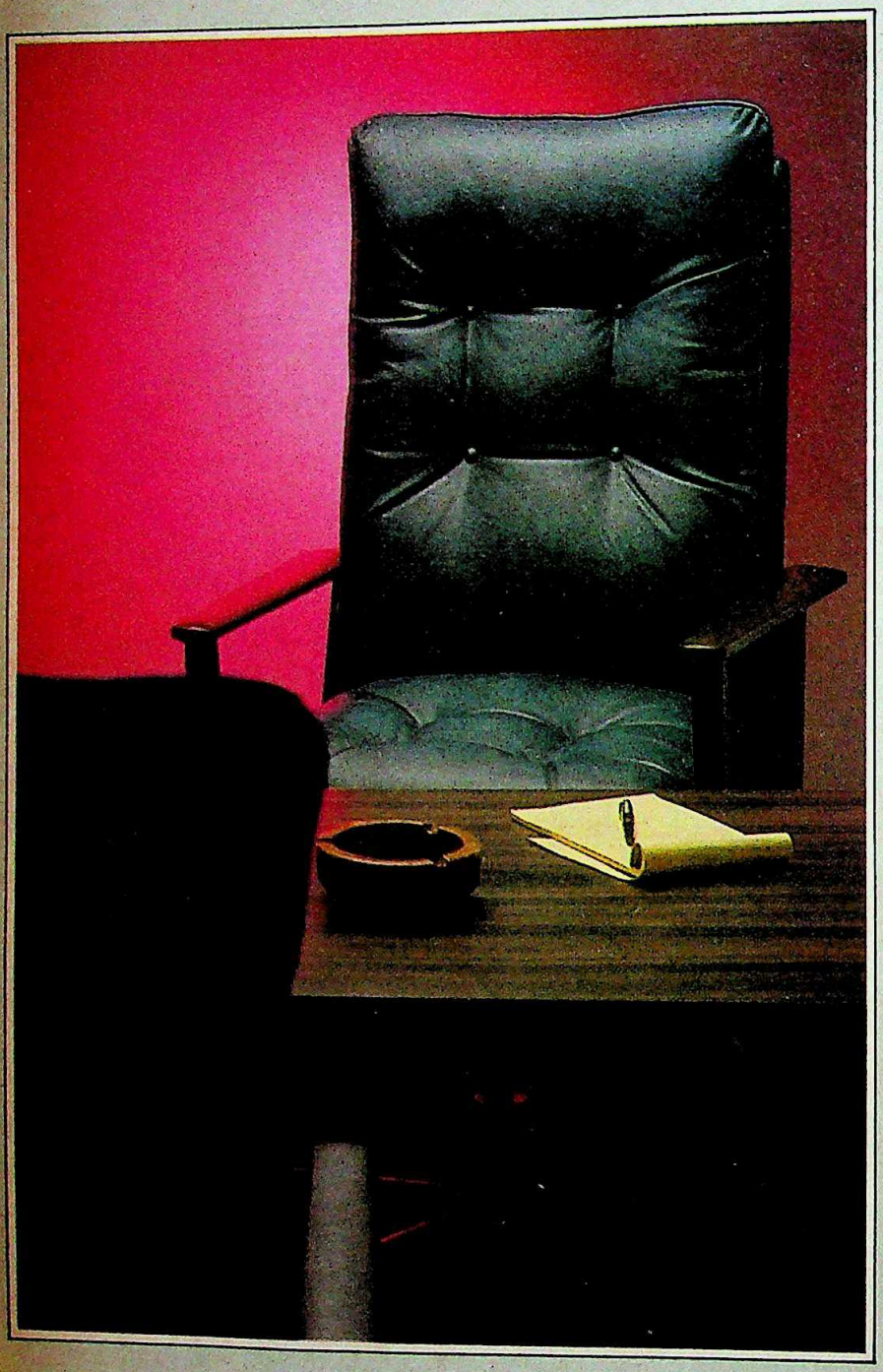

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STATEMENT OF INTENT

THE GOVERNMENT is getting ready with a sequel to its statement on long-term fiscal policy: a long-term industrial policy. Expected in the next three months, this document will be a statement of intent. It will look forward to the country's industrial position in the next five years. It will also formally place between two covers all the recent changes in the Government's policy on industrial licensing and growth, and enshrine steps to be taken in the medium-term future. But this policy document is not expected to place the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956 on its head.

TROUBLED PICTURE

THE PROPOSED million colour television picture tube venture between Philips of Holland and the Andhra Pradesh State Electronics Development Corporation seems to have run into a hitch over the location of the plant. The electronics multinational and the state government agency have been holding talks on the project since last June, but the Dutch firm wants the factory to be set up near Hyderabad, while the state agency has suggested two sites near Vijayawada (these are close to supplies of natural gas, which is a raw material). The two sides signed a memorandum of understanding under which Philips would invest 60 per cent of the equity and the state government organisation, 15 per cent. But the differences over the location of the plant now cast a shadow over the whole project. Meanwhile, Philips' Indian subsidiary has got past one hurdle in its effort to start manufacturing colour TV sets in India, with the Union Cabinet deciding recently that firms with less than 40 per cent foreign shareholding are not barred from this field of enterprise.

MODELS OF SERVICE

AFTER triggering off a technological revolution in the car industry, Maruti Udyog seems intent on extending the revolution down the line. The public sector vehicle manufacturer has on its drawing boards a model vehicle service station. By the end of the year, the station may provide drivers with computerised print-outs on the state of their vehicle's health. Better still, after their vehicles are repaired, drivers will be handed another print-out showing whether the faults have been actually rectified. The project, expected to cost a few lakhs, is still at a preliminary stage, but action is expected soon on acquiring land in the capital.

FAVOURITE SOAP

TOILET soaps suddenly seem the industry favourite. After Shaw Wallace's unexpected diversification into this field a few months ago, the next large unit to be straying into toiletries is Shriram Foods and Fertiliser Industries, the money-spinning DCM unit which has so far concentrated on chemicals and vanaspati. The unit plans to set up a factory in a backward district in Haryana with a licensed capacity of 16,500 tonnes a year. Shriram already makes some laundry soap, but with vanaspati output having gone up substantially over the years, more fatty acid (a vanaspati by-product) is available to make soaps. The Rs 30-crore venture will add some Rs 33 crore to Shriram's annual turnover of Rs 180 crore. The only hitch, however, is that its vanaspati unit in Delhi is lying closed at the moment because of safety hazards.

POWER PLAY

A NUMBER of international power giants are knocking at the doors of the Government and the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) with offers of power projects tied to financing arrangements. The French company Stein (managed by the Alsthom group) has offered a project using a new type of boiler technology suited for the high-ash coal found in Talcher, Orissa. The British have made an offer too, but the NTPC is in no mood to consider this until Britain's NEI improves its record on the Rihand super thermal power project that has fallen behind schedule because of NEI's project management limitations. Finally, the Russians are keen to extend the scope of their Vindhyachal super thermal project by adding two 500-megawatt units. NTPC is keen on accepting at least some of these offers because that seems to be the only way in which new projects for completion in the Eighth Plan can be taken up during the current planning quinquennium. The Government has given the company a Seventh Plan investment allocation of only Rs 5,600 crore, compared to the original demand for Rs 13,000 crore, and NTPC is anxious to make up for this shortfall.

UNWELCOME TREND

DESPITE the boom in the capital market and rising levels of bank deposits, the country seems to be saving and investing progressively smaller proportions of the net national product (NNP). Reserve Bank of India figures released last month show that domestic savings as a percentage of NNP dropped from 17.6 per cent in 1980-81 to 16.4 per cent last year, while aggregate investment (which includes foreign resources) fell from 19.5 per cent to 17.7 per cent. Both savings and investment fell in three of the last four years, marking a sharp change from the earlier trend of steady improvement on both fronts. If this new and largely negative trend continues, the planned growth of the economy could be in more trouble than it actually is.

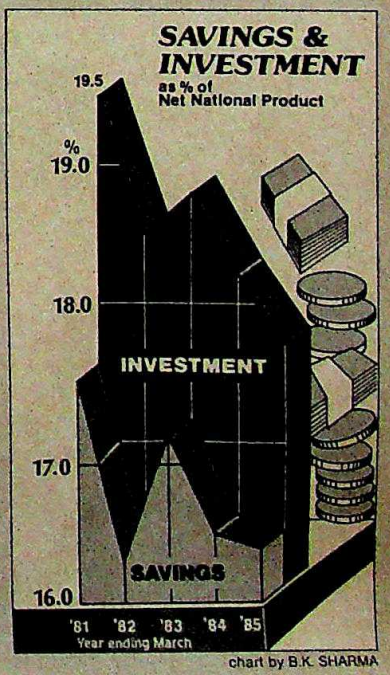

chart by B.K. SHARMA

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Gearing up for Inc

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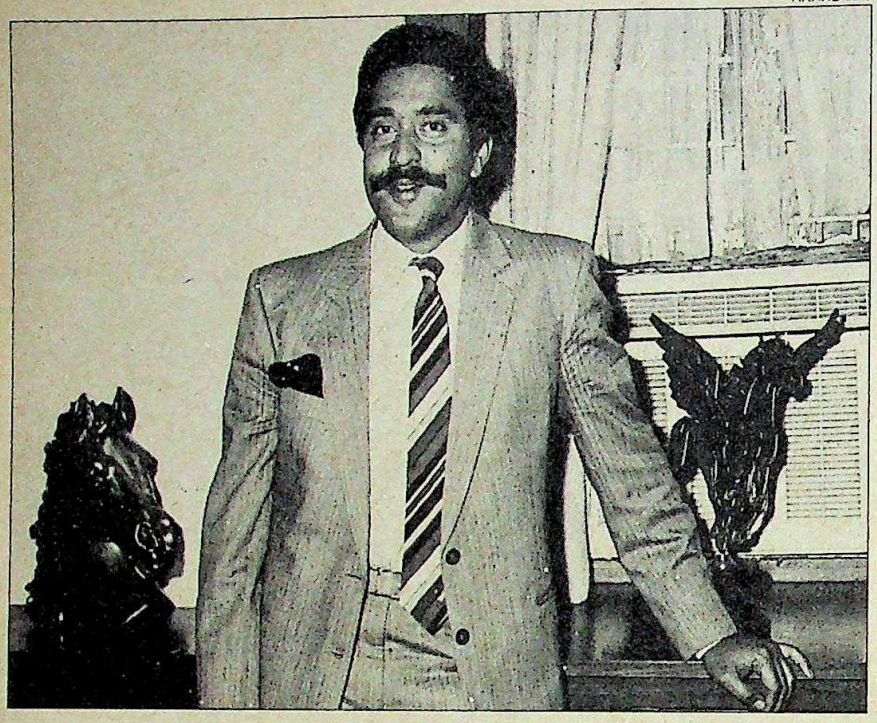

Vijay Mallya flanked by his company symbols: troubled times

VIJAY MALLYA

Fighting Spirit

HE DRIVES a red BMW, and also uses three Mercedes and an old Fiat. He owns a stable of eight thoroughbreds, and has won three Grand Prix races, driving a Formula 1 car. In addition, he has a pilot's licence to fly. And, at 30, he is perhaps the youngest man in the country to head a group the size of United Breweries, which with some 30 subsidiary companies and other companies like Hoechst and Berger Paints (all of which Mallya heads) have a combined turnover of around Rs 800 crore.

But life is not a bed of roses for Vijay Mallya. He is neck deep in trouble with the Government for his alleged role in the takeover of Shaw Wallace's overseas shareholdings and for the conduct of business operations abroad, allegedly without the Reserve Bank's permission. His homes and offices have been raided, one of his companies' bank accounts have been virtually frozen as the Government has launched tax recovery proceedings, his passport has been taken away pending investigations, he himself was arrested in January, and he has been subjected to endless hours of questioning by officials of the enforcement directorate.

All this at a time when he is trying to launch an ambitious diversification programme that will take his empire into a host of new high-technology and core sector areas. Indeed, Mallya was busy last month stomping across the country, addressing share brokers in connection with a public issue of debentures meant to raise working capital for his expanding operations. And while some of his new projects have been cleared by the Government, others haven't as yet got the green signal.

In more senses than one, Vijay Mallya's future hangs in the balance: he has to get all the Government approvals, get the projects off the ground, keep his existing businesses on even keel, and clear himself of the serious charges laid at his door.

Sitting in the drawing-room of Brewery House, the sprawling Bangalore home that his late father Vittal built, Mallya is deeply conscious of his image problem and his predicament, but declares: "In 20 years I will be known not as a spoilt kid who inherited a business, but as a king in my own right. Also, I'm a born fighter, with nerves of steel. I have withstood this tension for six months, and I will fight my case in court."

One thing is immediately clear: Mallya may be in a tight spot at the moment, and he is probably worried about the final outcome of the Government's cases against him. But he is not short of confidence in himself, and even his critics (of whom there is no shortage) admit that he is both intelligent and hard-working.

Far from being awed by the prospect of stepping into the shoes of his father, who founded the empire and built for himself an unmatched reputation as a takeover wizard and financial genius, Mallya has confidently assumed the controls and set about initiating a series of far-reaching changes in his companies.

Indeed, Mallya is openly critical of the way his father ran the business. Sitting in what was Vittal's office chair, across from a safe that dates back a few decades to when the daily sales of United Breweries used to be stashed away in it, he acknowledges his father's vision and foresight, but talks of poor management information systems, a lack of delegated authority down the line, the failure to see a market opportunity when Coke left the country in 1977, the failure to plan investments in a manner that would save on taxes, and a great deal more.

So the son has created a new corporate management group that is now in overall charge of the operations of all the companies, organised the various businesses into coherent groups such as liquor, brewery, foods and beverages, industrial products and international operations, and put each of them under a president.

He took the decision early on to move into non-liquor businesses and decided that a group his size should be in high technology and core sector areas. Since this meant tying up with companies that had the technology to go into these new areas, Mallya over the last two years has shopped around the world for suitable business partners, with creditable success: GTE-ATEA of Belgium and Ericsson of Sweden in telecommunications, Picker (a subsidiary of General Electric) in medical electronics, JFP Well Service and Eaton Industries for oil drilling, Heli-Union of France for aviation services and Pharmacia of Sweden, which Mallya says is the Rolls Royce of bio-technology.

His first project is now about to go into production: a joint venture with the Orissa Government for manufacturing electronic PABX and telephone instruments. He has already bid for an onshore rigs tender floated by the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC), and Heli-Union's contracts with the ONGC will be transferred to Mallya's joint venture with them. The tie-up with Picker initially

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involves marketing the company's products in India, and should lead later to a manufacturing arrangement. Last fortnight, he talked of bringing into India laser technology in medical electronics.

That is not all. He intends broadening the product range of Hyderabad Electronic Instruments, a small company taken over fairly recently, while his entry into Tamil Nadu, Alkaline Batteries will help him get into nickel cadmium technology for batteries. He says he is also looking at solar energy, and he has received a letter of intent from the Government for manufacturing acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS). Another application for manufacturing linear alkyl benzene (LAB), a raw material for synthetic detergents, is pending with the Government.

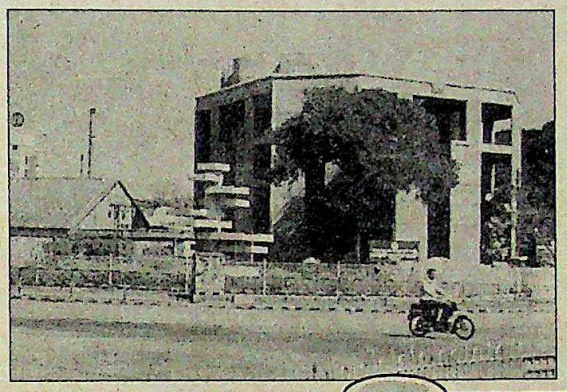
That is an impressive array of projects, judged by any yardstick, and Mallya talks of investing Rs 200 crore in them over the next few years, plus another Rs 100 crore if the LAB licence comes through. Finally, he has sought to be a co-promoter in a Rs 900 crore oil refinery project in Mangalore.

While Mallya's ability to get the required government clearances, as well as to set up large projects and find niches for himself in competitive markets remains to be proved, he is among the first to be close to launching a PABX and electronic telephone instruments.

HE HAS also to prove that he can keep his various existing businesses running smoothly. While many of the companies (like McDowell) are doing well, there are problems too. In a recent communication to his managers and staff, Mallya talks repeatedly of the need for cost control, threatening underlings with "inquiries" and "disciplinary action" if they fail. Group information systems "leave much to be desired", the breweries have had to curtail production for the first time because of sluggish off-season sales, United Breweries had to undergo a three-month lockout, the ketchup business faced new competition in the market from Voltas and Food Specialities (no mean rivals, both), and UB-MEC Batteries is going through a rough period, as is Phipsons, the liquor marketing company.

The figures show that the United Breweries group's turnover has been growing quite rapidly, but that profit margins have been under pressure. While total sales climbed from Rs 316 crore in 1981-82 to Rs 522 crore last year (66 per cent growth in three years), profits dropped from Rs 38.7 crore to Rs 33 crore before recovering last year to Rs 37.8 crore. So the stress on cost-cutting is understandable. But Mallya says that profits in the first half of 1985-86 have grown faster than sales, which have been growing at over 20 per cent.

The new corporate office in the United Breweries complex: ambitious plans



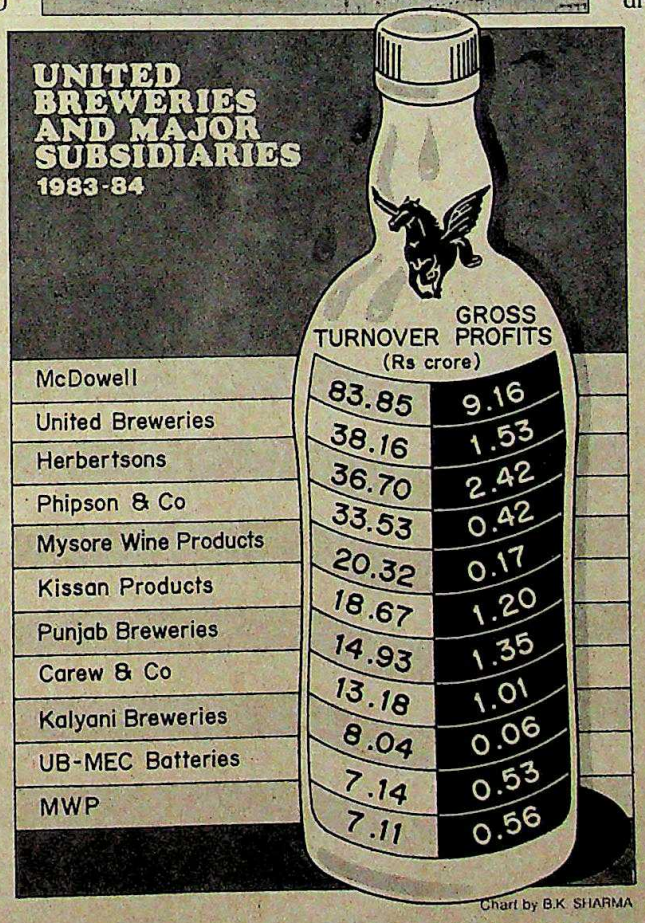


Chart by B.K. SHARMA

COMPANIES IN WHICH MALLYA HAS CONTROLLING INTEREST

	Year	Turnover	Profit (Rs in Crore)
Hoechst	1984	109.28	13.00
Berger Paints	1984–85	73.76	4.73
Roussel	1984	19.13	2.93

Nevertheless, there is no shortage of critics who dismiss the young tycoon's ambitions and business acumen. One well-informed observer pointed to the creation of a host of new (and allegedly superfluous) positions in the corporate headquarters and his hiring people at "wastefully high" salaries, and charged that the current issue of debentures was forced by the fact that many of United Breweries' subsidiaries were desperately short of funds and that they were window-dressing accounts, a charge that Mallya denies. Another critic argued that Mallya was brash rather than confident, and that the young tycoon in fact suffered from a host of internal uncertainties which he sought to cover up with an external aggressiveness. Yet others pointed out that his father would never have got into the kind of scrape that the son has over Shaw Wallace. Accounts vary on whether the old man thought well or badly of his only child.

Mallya seems more than aware of these criticisms, and dismisses them as being born out of jealousy or the inability to accept that a 30-year-old can run a large business. He repeatedly says that "I would have had no problems if I had been 20 years older," and goes as far as to claim that his being dragged into the Shaw Wallace affair was also a product of jealousy and "vested interests".

His business acumen will be proved beyond debate (one way or another) in the next couple of years, when the results of his corporate reorganisation and expansion projects will be there for all to see, but the Shaw Wallace affair is a more immediate nutcracker. In an interview with INDIA TODAY, the since he was linked to the controversial acquisition abroad of Shaw Wallace's 38 per cent overseas

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shareholding, he explained last fortnight that he had never considered buying the shares himself because he did not have the money abroad, and that his sole objective had been to prevent a rival liquor chain from getting control of the company. This he tried through a friend in Britain, Anthony Chatwell, and other business groups, but to no avail.

Nevertheless, a long chain of circumstantial evidence has linked Mallya to the ultimate purchase of the shares by the Dubai-based M.R.Chhabria. These include the involvement in a variety of ways of his employees or business associates in Singapore and London, and also the involvement of the Hong Kong-based employee of an associate company. There have also been newspaper disclosures of a letter that he wrote to a business associate in Calcutta, claiming that he was buying

INTERVIEW

"I am no takeover king"

FOR SIX months since his offices and homes were raided by the Government, Vijay Mallya has avoided the press. But Mallya, who at 30 is the youngest head of any Rs 800 crore business in the country, is anxious to prove that he is not a spoilt kid but a serious businessman in his own right.

Breaking his long silence for the first time, Mallya spoke to Senior Editor T.N. NINAN *for three-and-a-half hours last fortnight at his Bangalore home, on his father's business record, on his corporate plans, and on his involvement in the controversial Shaw Wallace deal. Excerpts:*

Q. *What was it like to be trained under your father?*

A. My father said I would have to either work like any other employee, or not work at all. My first salary of Rs 400 remained unchanged till I took over as chairman. I was not given an office for two years, and then I got a poky corner of an office. After two years I asked for a car, and got a Herald with difficulty.

As for my father, God, he was terribly strict. Initially, he would examine every letter that I wrote. It was only after he got confidence in me that he began to leave things in my hands.

Q. *You have this image of a high-flier, with expensive cars and your record in Grand Prix racing.*

A. I do have some expensive cars, but I object to this image of a high-flier. I am a serious businessman. The problem is my age. If I was 20 years older, no one would say anything.

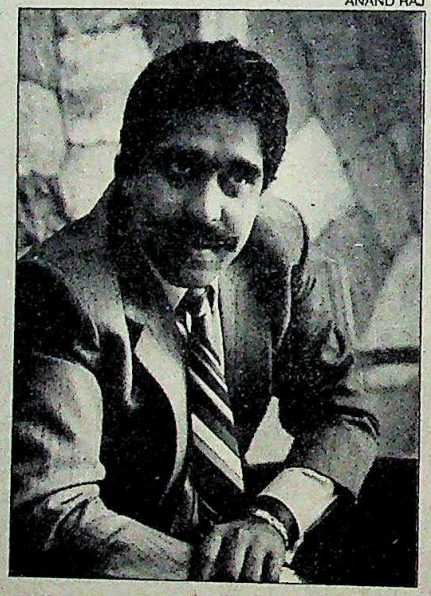
Q. *You seem to like horses: you have busts of horses in your office, and you own racing horses.*

A. Yes, I like horses. The horse is the company symbol. And I own eight horses. But I do not bet on mine or other people's horses. In fact I do not bet at all.

Q. *You also have this image of being a spoilt son of a rich father. People talk of your expensive watches, your estate in Hertfordshire outside London, and a house in Singapore with expensive gadgetry.*

A. All this is rubbish. This watch is Swiss, it isn't very expensive, and you can see the strap is steel. I know I have the image of being a spoilt kid, but in 20 years I will be known as a king in my own right.

ANAND RAJ



Mallya: "I have nerves of steel"

I do not own any estate in Hertfordshire. If I am in England over a week-end, I stay with a friend, Anthony Chatwell, who has an estate. And in Singapore, I stay with friends or in a hotel.

Q. *You have changed a lot of things after you took charge. Why?*

A. My father's vision and foresight were brilliant. But I found several managerial inadequacies, including a lack of accountability and cost consciousness. My father's style was too personal and forgiving. And he didn't believe in delegation. Every invoice had to go to him.

Q. *So what changes have you made?*

A. I had to decentralise. I introduced a new personnel policy in terms of grades, proper job definitions and accountability. I upped pay scales after I found what other companies were paying. I created the corporate management group. I set new standards of performance.

Q. *How has restructuring helped?*

A. I grouped the business under different heads, with a president in charge of each group. Earlier, Kissan and Dipy's were separate brands and companies, and each was spending money to promote himself and kill the other brand. But both are my companies and my brands. So I have stopped this.

Q. *Did you run into problems in stepping into your father's shoes?*

A. Some people couldn't accept a man half their age as boss. But I proved that I am more competent than them.

Q. *Do you believe in takeovers, like your father?*

A. I do not believe in unfriendly takeovers, and my father didn't either. I have two or three takeover prospects, but I don't want to be a takeover king.

Q. *Why are you entering unfamiliar areas of business through your diversification programme?*

A. Hindustan Polymers and UB-MEC Batteries were unfamiliar business too, when my father took them over. Both are now doing well. The point is that liquor does not find favour with the Government. So I am using the profits for going into core sector and high technology areas. But liquor will of course remain the mainstay of our business.

Q. *What is the problem that you now have with your bank accounts?*

A. The Government says that we should not have claimed a tax benefit on a company merger in 1982-83. But if not in that year, then the benefit would be available in the next year, when the merger was formally okayed. But they have frozen all McDowell bank accounts and asked our debtors to pay money directly to them.

Q. *What exactly was your role in Shaw Wallace?*

A. In May 1984, I heard that a rival liquor group was planning to take over Shaw Wallace. This was confirmed to

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Shaw Wallace offshore, and of a document from Standard Chartered Bank which mentions him as half-owner of the company that eventually bought the shares.

Mallya, however, has his explanations for each of these points (*see interview*), and insists that he has not invested in Shaw Wallace, a point on which the evidence that has surfaced so far does not provide a clincher. And as Mallya rightly points out, this is a criminal case and the onus of proof is on the Government.

If the country's liquor prince is finally able to put Shaw Wallace behind him, he will get the chance that he desperately seeks to prove to the world that he knows more about life than driving fast cars round tricky corners, and that he is just as adept at being a businessman in the fast lane.

—T.N.NINAN

me by my Singapore-based president, Morris Mathias, who had also been approached by a middleman, Horace Langois, who is a friend of mine as well as Mathias. I told Morris we couldn't afford the takeover and to prevent this rival group from getting the company.

Morris then called and asked me if it was all right if he asked other overseas groups to come in, and among several others he approached Anthony Chatwell, the friend I stay with in England. Chatwell runs the largest foods business in the UK, and his business interests tied in with Shaw Wallace's operations. He was also interested in getting Thames Rice Milling, one of the companies that held the Shaw Wallace shares, because he had dealt with this company earlier and wanted the name and goodwill.

But in October 1984 Mrs Gandhi was assassinated, there was unrest in India, and the pound also lost heavily in value. So Chatwell said he was no longer interested. Apparently, Langois had by then already been in touch with M.R.Chhabria, who eventually bought the Shaw Wallace shares.

Q. *But you wrote to one Mr Bhagat, a business colleague of yours in Calcutta, telling him that you were getting control of Shaw Wallace.*

A. That's when Chatwell was involved.

Q. *Why did you ask Bhagat to destroy your letter?*

A. He also asked me why he should destroy it. I told him that every employee of United Breweries would invest in Shaw Wallace.

Q. *Morris Mathias seems to have been involved right through.*

A. He only allowed the use of his office and telex by Langois. Let anyone prove that I invested in Shaw Wallace.

Q. *The enforcement directorate says you have a stake in Carrasco and Amarante, the two Hong Kong companies involved in the takeover.*

A. I have no investment in either.

Q. *But Bhattacharya, who is your employee in a restaurant company, was a director of Amarante.*

A. Bhattacharya was a director of Amarante for only two months. And he is not my employee. He is an employee of a company which is managed by another company with which my people have a management contract. The owner of Bhattacharya's company in fact has 30 restaurants in the Far East.

Q. *Your London employee, Walavalkar, was involved too.*

A. Walavalkar is not my employee. And he merely signed on behalf of Langois because Langois could not be there on the spot. He did this after Langois gave him full personal indemnity. Suppose I am in Bangalore and you as a friend are in Delhi and I ask you to sign for me with full personal indemnity, won't you sign?

> **"I object to this image of a high-flier. I am a serious businessman. The problem is my age. If I was 20 years older, no one would say anything."**

Q. *There is the document from Standard Chartered Bank which says you owned half of Carrasco.*

A. For all I know such a document never existed. In any case, I have never talked to Standard Chartered, and am not aware of any proposal made by the bank.

Q. *Did you talk to an officer of Grindlays in London, who then talked to Standard Chartered?*

A. Brijesh Mathur at Grindlays is a friend, but I do not discuss business with him. In any case, if Grindlays spoke to Standard Chartered who in turn floated a document, this was without my knowledge or permission. So there can be no criminal liability on me. The onus of proving this is on the people who make the allegations.

Q. *A newspaper has suggested that you financed the Shaw Wallace purchase by using a $ 10 million loan from the State Bank in Singapore.*

A. Ninety per cent of that is in the form of advances against letters of credit. So there is no cash credit involved.

Q. *Do you regret your involvement in the Shaw Wallace affair?*

A. Not at all. It was never my intention to participate in Shaw Wallace. I achieved my objective of preventing a rival group from getting control of the company.

Q. *What of all these companies in Singapore that the Government says you own, and which you say you have a management contract with.*

A. We had written to the Reserve Bank about this, we had remitted home the money earned through the management contract. The Reserve Bank never objected. So what is the point in now charging us with crime?

Q. *I understand the enforcement officials were very rough with you and your people, and that you broke down before Swaminathan, the additional director of enforcement.*

A. No I did not break down. I have nerves of steel, and I have withstood this for six months. I have great respect for Swaminathan. He is a very intelligent interrogator. Nobody brutalised me or anyone else in my group. Swaminathan did lose his temper and shout a few times, but you see my submission and decide who broke down.

But my general manager in Singapore, V.S.Kumar, objected to the manner in which he was questioned by Swaminathan and resigned.

Q. *Even after your home and offices were raided last July, you did not return to India for over a month.*

A. Because I had nothing to hide, nothing to rush back to hush up.

Q. *Do you believe that V.P.Singh is after you for any reason?*

A. V.P.Singh is not after me, he is after all people he believes have broken the law, and he is backing his officers in the same fashion that I would back my executives.

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SWADESHI POLYTEX

A Battle Royal

"CHOOSE the right management," the front page advertisement in the *Indian Express* exhorted. And with that, Mahendra Swarup, vice-chairman of Swadeshi Polytex, formally plunged the troubled company into a fresh controversy and a renewed fight for managerial control.

The attention-grabbing notice followed close on the heels of a letter which Swadeshi Polytex Chairman Rajaram Jaipuria sent last fortnight to the staple fibre firm's 12,000 shareholders soliciting their votes at the company's next shareholders' meeting in March. Some days later, a lawyer in the capital served notice on the company's directors that an unnamed client wanted to remove Swarup, his son Gaurav and two of their nominees from the 12-member board.

The two events may have been unrelated, but they seemed to have severed the uneasy marriage between the Swarups and Rajaram, a marriage that had helped them take control of the Rs 68-crore company last August after ousting Rajaram's nephew, Ashok. In any event, the Swarups swiftly went on the offensive. Mahendra Swarup shot off a letter to shareholders soliciting their proxies, charging "directors of the other group" with "dilatory tactics" with regard to the company's expansion plans.

A battle royal is clearly on, though an unruffled Rajaram insists that there is nothing unusual in his seeking proxies: "This is a common practice every year, and there is no question of a proxy war." This would make little sense given the company's shareholding pattern (around 24 per cent of the stock is held by the public; the balance is held by four major shareholders). He also dismisses the lawyer's notice as of little consequence, saying that it cannot stand legal scrutiny because the client has to be named in such notices. And he claims the company is not plagued by any tensions or problems: "Things are going well, much beyond my expectations when I took over."

Swarup, who is also chairman of Paharpur Cooling Towers, thinks otherwise, for he said: "It cannot be said that all is well. There are differences in management style and philosophy."

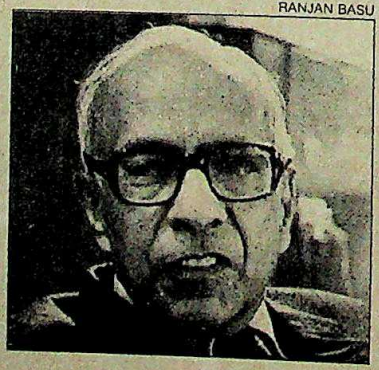
The differences surfaced shortly after the new management assumed office six months ago. Reflecting precisely this, the Swarups had gone shopping for Swadeshi Polytex shares on the market on a modest scale. Then, the Swarups say they sounded Ashok Jaipuria on a re-alignment of partners, so that both could get together against Rajaram. Meanwhile, Rajaram himself went to Ashok for support, turning his back on a decade-long tussle between Ashok's late father Sitaram and Rajaram (the two are foster-brothers). These rapid and unexpected developments have made Ashok the key figure in the latest round of tussling, so that just six months after making an exit from the money-spinning company he is once again poised to become its chief arbiter.

RANJAN BASU

"There is no question of a proxy war. Things are going well, much beyond my expectations when I took over."

RAJARAM JAIPURIA
Chairman, Swadeshi Polytex

RANJAN BASU



"It cannot be said that all is well. There are differences in management style and philosophy."

MAHENDRA SWARUP
vice-chairman, Swadeshi Polytex, and chairman, Paharpur cooling Towers

The company's shareholding pattern makes the outcome of the face-off unpredictable. Ashok says he controls "over 14 per cent" of Swadeshi Polytex stock (others put the figure at 9.7 per cent), while the Swarups have 17 per cent. Rajaram in turn controls 34 per cent, most of them through his company Swadeshi Cotton Mills. Finally, the financial institutions hold around 16 per cent of the shares. Thus, Ashok could swing the balance if he decides to team up with Rajaram, but will probably need the financial institutions' support if he backs the Swarups. The institutions, therefore, are the joker in the pack.

Ashok confirms that he has been meeting both uncle Rajaram and the Swarups, but says "I have not yet made up my mind on what to do." Rajaram insists that his meetings with Ashok have no special significance: "After all, we are one family and we meet on social occasions. This does not have much relevance."

But Rajaram's disclaimers are less than convincing. Notes an independent member of the company's board: "The whole history of conflict in Swadeshi Polytex is now being repeated, and this is very unfortunate." Certainly, few could have expected that the marriage of convenience between Rajaram and the Swarups would prove so short-lived. Earlier, they had been backing Ashok's father Sitaram (who died shortly before the results of the crucial vote last year were known). But the Swarups switched sides after striking a management-sharing deal with Rajaram. Under the agreement, Rajaram and Swarup would be non-executive chairman and vice-chairman, respectively. The board-managed company would have a three-member committee monitoring the firm's functioning, with senior managers reporting to the committee. Other stipulations included leaving the day-to-day affairs of the company in the hands of the professional managers, non-interference by the committee, and imple-

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A great way to fly
SINGAPORE AIRLINES

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To discover India, you must travel and see her as she lives day to day in all her diversity. A fear many of us have about travelling to unknown places is that we cannot speak any language other than our own. In fact, for an Indian this is hardly a handicap. Almost all Indian languages have common roots. In no time, you'll find yourself picking up a few choice phrases of the language of the state you happen to be visiting. In addition to being of invaluable assistance during your holiday, these phrases will become a souvenir to bring home from the trip.

Besides the facility with which your ears become attuned to the languages of India, you also have the never-failing advantage of body language. A form of communication that is older and sometimes more

How to speak just one a country that sp

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loquent than words. Over the years, ome classical Indian gestures have ome into being.

The 'namaste' gesture, like the alaam' means a greeting in any nguage. In fact, thinking up gestures communicate your need can be ery good fun and you can be sure the ther person will join in the spirit of hings and help as much as he is able.

Travel is an adventure that aturally includes strange lands, strange people, strange customs, strange food, strange everything. What you get out of the experience depends on how you approach it. A healthy curiosity and a readiness to enjoy every novelty will do what travel is meant to... i.e. enrich the mind.

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mentation of the company's expansion and diversification programme.

But soon enough the fur began to fly. The two factions crossed swords on numerous issues—from the choice of foreign technology for plant capacity expansion to Rajaram's alleged improprieties in using company perquisites as non-executive chairman.

The Sitaram-run management had signed up with Britain's ICI for know-how to step up plant capacity. Rajaram, however, regarded their technology as obsolete, favouring instead a tie-up with Zimmer, the German firm that had originally supplied know-how to Swadeshi Polytex. Rajaram said that their technology was even then superior, and that competitors who are now expanding their production capacities have stuck to similar know-how. On the other hand, the Swarups have argued that work on jacking up capacities could have begun much earlier had Rajaram agreed to the ICI collaboration, and that speed is of the essence when facing competition.

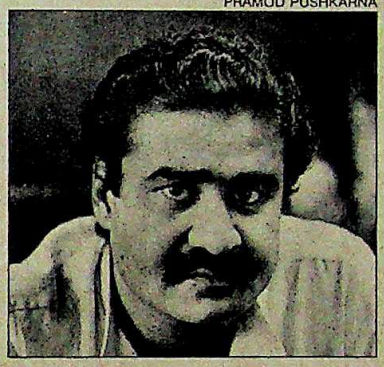
More serious are the charges levelled at Rajaram himself: interfering with the company's day-to-day running, thereby violating the terms of the understanding with the Swarups, and seeking the exit of a vice-president. Tagged on to this are such minor accusations as using company cars and distributing boxes of pistas worth over Rs 39,000 as Diwali gifts. Indeed, Swarup seems to have raised these matters in letters to Rajaram. However, the Swadeshi Polytex chairman argues that "anyone who is a large shareholder has to protect his interests. And even assuming that the company's executives spent some Rs 30,000, will it make any difference to the company's fortunes? The previous management gave Diwali gifts. This is customary with every company."

BUT A businessman close to the Swarups insists that the expenditures should have been clearly listed or explained, and that broader issues of clean management and of observing the proprieties in corporations are at stake. Going further, he says that the Swarups talked to Ashok Jaipuria on the understanding that he would stick to such principles. Finally, he claims that the staff is demoralised, and that many senior employees have left Swadeshi Polytex.

Not all those who have been closely following events in the company buy this. Says an interested observer: "Much of the opposition to Rajaram is opposition for the sake of opposition. The Swarups may have come on the board of the company to protect their share investments, but their aspirations changed." This may not be true. The Swarups say they would be willing to let the institutions run the firm. In any case, at a board meeting last fortnight, the Swarups and their nominees seem to have suggested the appointment of a whole-time managing director for the company, but the matter was deferred till February 22, when the board meets next.

If these developments have the ingredients of a corporate thriller, high drama had unfolded itself on other fronts. Nearly two months ago, the Uttar Pradesh Government moved to dispose of 10 lakh Swadeshi Polytex shares owned by Swadeshi Cotton Mills. The shares themselves were attached some eight years ago against dues that Swadeshi Cotton owed the Uttar Pradesh Government. Since much of Rajaram's stake in Swadeshi Polytex is through these shares, selling them would jeopardise his position in the company. But G.K. Daruka, a Swadeshi Cotton shareholder, got an interim court order staying the sale of the shares. (Interestingly, the Rajaram-owned daily newspaper, *Pioneer*, carries Daruka's name on the print line, but Rajaram contends that Daruka has a separate entity as a shareholder.)

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"I have not yet made up my mind on what to do."

ASHOK JAIPURIA
Chairman, Cosmo Films

Shortly after the Uttar Pradesh Government's initiative became public knowledge, a number of companies wrote to state government officials in Kanpur expressing their interest in buying the shares. This included Swarup's Paharpur Cooling Towers, which enclosed a photo-copy of a draft for Rs 50 lakh to show that the firm meant business. Ashok Jaipuria is also believed to have written to the state Government in this connection, but declines comment.

Apart from the action in Uttar Pradesh, the key to controlling Swadeshi Polytex lies with the Government. Almost eight years ago, the Centre took over six Swadeshi Cotton textile units, but not the company itself, and slapped a moratorium on their liabilities. The Government has repeatedly extended the take-over and the moratorium every year. Now it is likely to nationalise the units in April, and Rajaram may in fact be able to use the compensation he gets at that stage to clear his dues to the Uttar Pradesh Government. But the state Government, after waiting for so long to get its money, decided to act and sell the Swadeshi Polytex shares so that it gets its money immediately. The court stay order has, however, put a stop to this.

In another sense also, the Government will be a key player between now and March, because the financial institutions will have to decide how they use their 16 per cent shareholding strength in the coming proxy battle. So one thing is certain: both the institutions as well as the ordinary shareholders of the company will be hotly wooed in the coming weeks, as indeed will Ashok Jaipuria.

While the ultimate outcome of this latest round in a long-running saga remains unpredictable, the diminutive chairman of Swadeshi Polytex thinks that he will have an edge in any fight. Company profits are up from Rs 3.55 crore the year before to Rs 5.80 crore last year, and dividends have been raised from 20 per cent to 25 per cent. The snag in this is that the Swarups too claim credit for the better performance ("realisations are up"), while Ashok Jaipuria points out that the new management took over in August and could not have done much by October, when the company's financial year ended. Rajaram has a ready answer to this too: he was in the company along with Ashok by last February, under a compromise out by the Supreme Court.

The truth in all this is difficult to determine. What is clear is that Rajaram is a dogged fighter, the Swarups are bracing for battle and the shareholders' meeting in March is unlikely to mark the end of the story.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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CIGARETTES

The Tobacco Tussle

SUDDENLY the stalls are full of them. Nestling cheek by jowl with well-known cigarette brands are a host of new names: Lords, Now, Stride, Golden G1 and many more. Manufacturers are launching mint-new brands in rapid fire succession, with the promise of many more to follow. And the market-place is full of the smoke and fire associated with a major battle for the smoker's attention.

As the sales graphs of some of the new brands have climbed swiftly, established brands have taken a beating and industry sales as a whole have tumbled by 10 to 15 per cent. Undaunted, the tobacco companies are even now scrambling to fill what they see as vacant market slots. "Everything has turned topsy-turvy," says Dipak Basu, chief of marketing and sales at Godfrey Phillips India, the Modi-owned cigarette company that ranks third.

What has turned the cigarette industry on its head is the official notification last September which did away with an earlier multi-layered excise structure. Instead, the Government clubbed cigarette prices into five slabs for excise purposes, the duty changing at the 60 paise, Rs 1.70, Rs 3, and Rs 5.50 points. Apart from simplifying the tax structure, the move was meant to prevent firms from floating deceptively similar brands priced differently, a practice that tax men believed led to excise fiddles (INDIA TODAY, October 31, 1985). The new tax rates forced tobacco companies to jack up prices by 30 per cent or more. And the battle was on.

Cigarettes are price sensitive, and the first result was that the overall market shrank. Smokers today are puffing away at about a billion fewer cigarettes a month (almost 13 per cent) and many have moved downmarket to cheaper brands (*see chart*). A quick analysis by one cigarette company executive suggests that smokers are also switching to filter-tipped cigarettes from non-filtered ones, partly because of the new excise structure.

Inevitably, all this is mirrored in the sales of the leading brands. ITC raised the price of Wills Filter (once the country's largest selling filter cigarette), from Rs 3.60 to Rs 5.15, and the company's flagship product dropped an estimated 130 million (almost 32.5 per cent) in monthly sales. Sanjay Dalmia, president of GTC Industries (formerly Golden Tobacco Company), acknowledges that the sales graphs of Panama Filter Kings and non-filtered Panama cigarettes have dipped.

But in the case of both the firms, this has been partly offset by other brands taking up some of the slack. ITC's non-filter Scissors, whose price was marked up from Rs 1.30 to Rs 1.70, has been going great guns, and some other ITC brands have been faring well too. Also, GTC's regular Panama filter cigarettes and the company's Style have surged ahead in the market-place. Indeed Style is now the envy of the company's rivals.

Clearly, new slots have been created almost overnight, and the companies have been quick to recognise this. ITC launched Now (Rs 1.70 for 10) in three metropolitan cities recently, and is poised to extend the brand to Calcutta this month. Says a company official: "Style was sweeping the market and we needed a low-priced filter cigarette to match it." A company spokesman claims that 45 million Now cigarettes are sold every month, and that ITC has set itself an ambitious monthly sales target of around 250 million. The tobacco giant followed this up last fortnight by hawking a brand called Stride (Rs 5.60 for 20) in Madras. That may take on GTC's Lords which at Rs 6 for 20 is only marginally more expensive. Amidst this flurry of activity, firms such as Godfrey Phillips are unlikely to remain on the sidelines for long. The Modi company could be eyeing the Rs 1.70 slot as well as more expensive segments of the market, though company officials decline to comment on this.

The skirmishing is not limited to the middle of the market. GTC and others are now focusing their attention on the bottom-range 60 paise (for 10 cigarettes) price slot. GTC has launched or will introduce half a dozen brands in this price range, with such unlikely names as Golden A1, P1, and G1, and the Calcutta-based New Tobacco Company is expected to follow suit with similar cigarettes. Even ITC is planning "to expand the market" by launching cheaper brands, though the tobacco giant does not have a 60 paise brand on its drawing-boards at the moment.

If that promises a further hotting up of the action, Dalmia believes that the market turbulence is temporary. But others

Some of the new brands in the market: switch in strategy

	*Monthly Sales million cigarettes		% Change
	Before Sep '85	NOW	
KING SIZED PREMIUM FILTER PRICE BEFORE SEP '85: 40-50 PAISE PRICE NOW: 60 PAISE	543	450	-17
KING SIZED POPULAR FILTER PRICE BEFORE SEP '85: 25-30 PAISE PRICE NOW: 25-35 PAISE	975	1170	+20
REGULAR PREMIUM FILTER PRICE BEFORE SEP '85: 25-30 PAISE PRICE NOW: 35 PAISE	970	715	-26
POPULAR REGULAR FILTER PRICE BEFORE SEP '85: 15-20 PAISE PRICE NOW: 20 PAISE	1109	1265	+14
ALL NON-FILTER	4555	3500	-23

* Quick estimates

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

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argue that things will get worse before they get better. For one, further excise changes could be in the offing in the coming budget, and the cigarette majors will clearly show their full hand only after March. Industry men claim that the latest duty rates have made pricing a difficult business: all cigarettes priced at between 61 paise and Rs 1.70 have the same excise burden, so that there are at the moment no cigarettes priced between 60 paise and Rs 1.70. But this could change soon.

More important, the new excise structure does not seem to have reduced excise evasion in the industry, which was one of the Government's stated goals last September. Some industry executives darkly hint at fiddles continuing in the 60 paise range of cigarettes. They contend that cigarette packets priced at 60 paise are not really viable because the excise burden is as high as 42 paise. So most cigarettes continue to be sold in the market at higher than the printed price, and it is entirely possible that a part of this extra take finds its way back to the companies or those who run the companies. Argues an executive of a major firm: "At 60 paise, the duty is 42 paise. That leaves the manufacturer with just 18 paise to meet profits and expenditure on everything from raw tobacco to processing costs, packaging and advertising. How can he do so unless he resorts to a fiddle?" But Sanjay Dalmia, whose GTC is heavily into 60 paise cigarettes, dismisses the charge. Nevertheless, the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) may decide to make another move on the cigarette excise front.

With most cigarettes sold at far above the price marked on the packets, huge amounts are clearly escaping the excise net. The Government has imposed excise on the printed price for the last two years in a bid to reduce tax disputes, but firms cut the trade margins which were included in the price and traders tagged on their own extra margins. Tobacco companies, however, shrug and point an accusing finger at the trader. Says an ITC spokesman: "As far as we are concerned, the mark-up is done by the traders and it is up to the weights and measures directorate to check this."

Here too, the Government could take action soon. Says a senior CBEC official: "The basic malady has not been taken care of. Cigarettes are sold at more than the maximum price and something will have to be done about this." No one can argue with that statement, but if it is translated into action more upheavals in the cigarette market are certain

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

BUSINESSPEAK

MOHAN SINGH OBEROI

Gracious Host

MOHAN Singh Oberoi has a problem. Two months ago, the 85-year-old founder and chairman of the Oberoi chain of 26 hotels received from the Egyptian Government the "Order of the Republic-First Class". The award comes in the form of two multi-pointed stars that are worth their weight in gold, because they are mostly made of solid gold. A mildly worried Oberoi says he has written to the Reserve Bank to make sure that it is in order to keep so much gold.

There are numerous other awards in the show-case cabinet in Oberoi's compact farmhouse, set in a 100-acre farm where he tends his 50,000 chickens, grows wheat whose quality he is inordinately proud of, and crosses cauliflowers with flowers to get a hybrid strain that he happily displays in his drawing-room. But the gentleman farmer remains an active hotelier, cheered by the Government's recent decision to exempt hotels from the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, and by the decisions of various state governments to grant hoteliering the status of (and therefore the inducements due to) an industry. "The Government is on the right track," he says.

He is less enthused by the official talk of giving a new thrust to tourism. "The Government talks big, let us see how far the plans are implemented. Each new minister makes long speeches, but so far our experience has not been good."

Nevertheless, the stocky hotelier is busy planning the future: a new chain of three-star hotels as well as five-star projects in Agra, Jaipur and Varanasi. And he will be off soon on an inspection tour of hotels in the United States, Australia and Indonesia. "All my visits abroad have been business holidays," he says. On his first visit abroad 40 years ago, he drove his family to distraction because he would do nothing other than look at hotels. Every day he dictated his observations to his daughters, who came back with 11 notebooks full of comments.

Even today, the sprightly chairman goes through every one of the suggestions made by his hotels' customers. And he clearly has an eye for detail: "Take toilet rolls. If you put two of them side by side in a bathroom, the guests will use both of them. You must put them one on top of the other, so that only the top one is used and the bottom one remains as reserve." He says he learnt most of his hoteliering himself: "No hotelier abroad has done better than we have. I have seen almost all the hotels in the world, and we're competing with them."

He is critical of most rival hotel chains in the country: "Take the Siddharth Continental fire last week. The whole thing was badly handled. They should have warned the guests. Instead, they switched off the lights. There were gas masks downstairs, but no one used them. And most of the deaths were because of suffocation. It could easily have been avoided. The people were not trained properly. How can you function without trained staff?"

The day after the fire, Oberoi went to his flagship hotel in New Delhi, inspected the fire-fighting arrangements, and ordered that fire drills be conducted every fortnight. "The guests might complain about the frequent fire drills, but it is better to get complaints than to lose your life."

Looking back on an eventful life, Oberoi is amiably candid about his brief political career: "I didn't want to be in politics, I just wanted to be a member of Parliament. It is nice to be an MP, and to sit in the House." So he sat in the Lok Sabha as a member of the tribal Jharkhand party, and then in the Rajya Sabha as a member of the Bharatiya Kranti Dal. Explaining this odd choice of political colour, he says simply: "I couldn't have got in as an independent."

Asked if he isn't bored after 52 years of reading complaints about toilet rolls, he shoots back: "I love hoteliering. How can you be bored with something you have created? Do you get bored?" So while pottering around his well-tended farm, he continues to look ahead, to the prospect of perhaps diversifying into air charters, and to India "becoming a big power one of these days".

—T.N.NINAN

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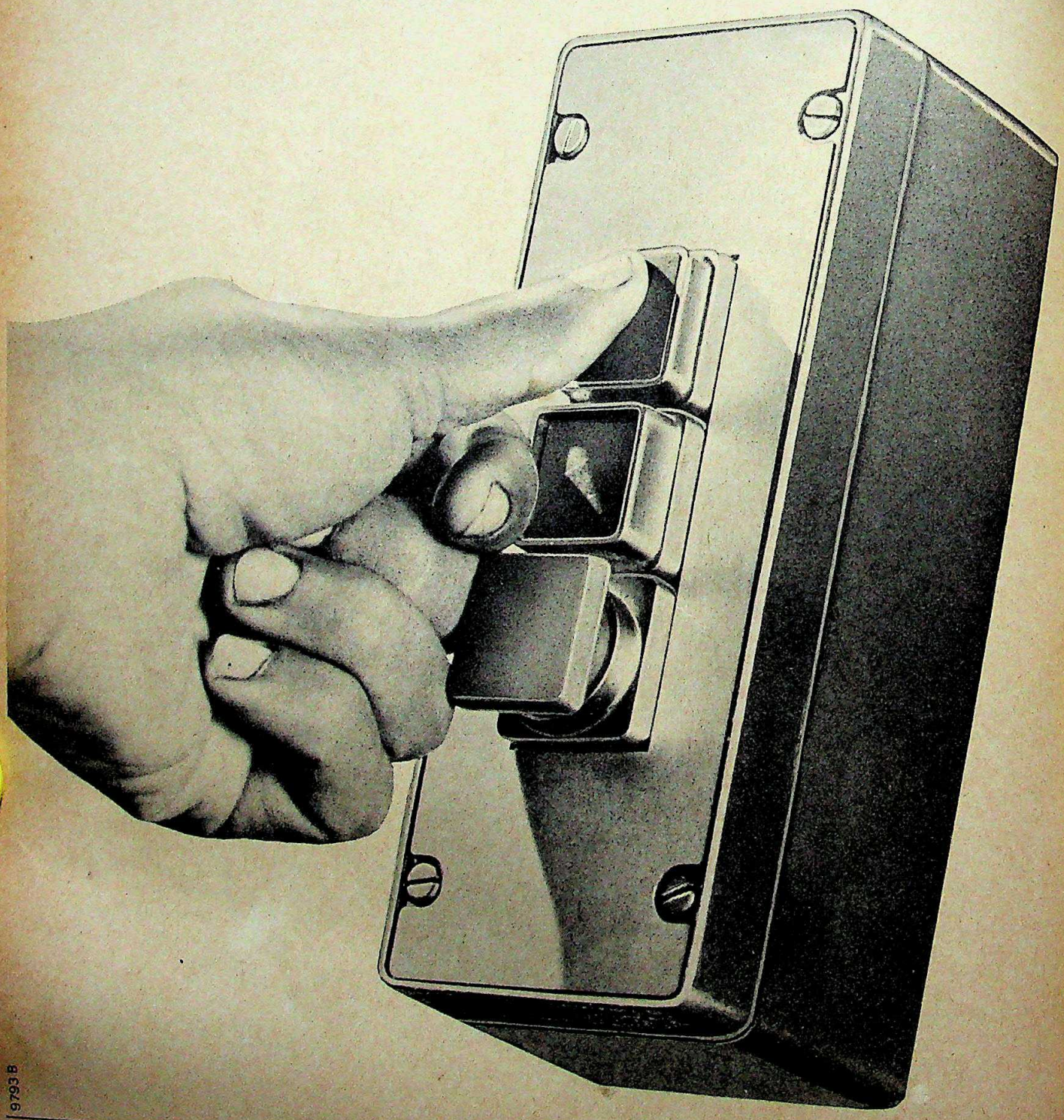

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What's up at Dunlop: 2

India's industrial movement...

Dunlop introduces world-leading BTR conveyor belt technology

Now Dunlop India sets up a Rs. 20 crore project to manufacture steel cord conveyor belting.

For the first time in India.

In collaboration once again with none but the best.

BTR Belting Limited. The British conglomerate acknowledged as the pioneer and world's leading manufacturer of steel cord conveyor belting including the internationally famous 'Silvercord'.

This new project will soon make Dunlop India's Conveyor Belting operation at Sahaganj, West Bengal, one of the most sophisticated of its kind in Asia.

What are the other far-reaching implications of the Dunlop-BTR technical tie-up?

In a word : quality.

Cross-section of a steel cord conveyor belt — designed for increased working strength, higher flexibility and greater safety.

Superior quality steel cord belting which allows for longer hauls, larger capacities and higher speeds.

And, for the first time in India, a belting that is specially designed for use in steel plants, port handling and coal, lignite and iron ore mines.

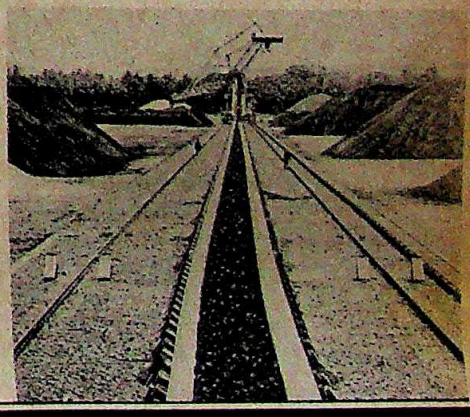
But that's not all.

The Dunlop-BTR tie-up will save the country a large amount of foreign exchange. By manufacturing indigenously a world-class advanced technology steel cord belt. And, most importantly, Dunlop's commitment to investment in R&D continues to bear fruit in terms of high technology products for the country.

All this is an indication of the revitalisation of Dunlop.

Yet another way in which Dunlop India contributes to Indian industry's march into the twenty-first century.

DUNLOP INDIA
The first name - the latest technology



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CALCUTTA

The Take-over Fever

INDIA'S stock-markets have now got accustomed to boom times and spiralling share price graphs. But jumpiness on the stock exchange is another thing altogether. And Calcutta's Lyons Range stock exchange has been unusually excitable in recent weeks, with even hard-nosed brokers and major players on the market getting bitten by the take-over bug. Reports have surfaced every few days about a fresh blue chip company being taken over by local businessmen, and the concerned companies' share prices have quickly gone through the roof.

Indian Explosives Ltd (IEL), the chemical giant with a turnover of Rs 520 crore, was reported to have been bagged by the redoubtable Aditya Birla. Cigarette monolith ITC's parent company in Britain was believed to be trying to disinvest; B.M. Khaitan of Macneill and Magor moved into Metal Box; battery manufacturer Chloride India (sales: Rs 75 crore) was said to be up for grabs; R.P. Goenka took control of the ailing Gramophone Company of India, and his younger brother G. P. Goenka was trying to get a firm grip on Kolay Biscuits while simultaneously negotiating a joint venture for the West Bengal Government-owned Webel Video Devices after taking charge of the company's management.

Some of the talk of take-overs, however, seemed at best premature and perhaps altogether baseless. G.P.Goenka, for instance, flatly denied newspaper reports that he had negotiated a deal for acquiring a controlling interest in Britannia Industries and told INDIA TODAY: "Britannia is a damn good company, but I don't have the money to buy the damn thing. And there is nothing to all these rumours that I am trying to acquire companies like Glaxo or even ITC." ITC spokesmen similarly dismissed all talk of a change of hands as unfounded rumour, and although Aditya Birla could not be reached, people close to him denied any link with IEL. It also seemed far from clear whether there was anything to the talk of Chloride India changing hands.

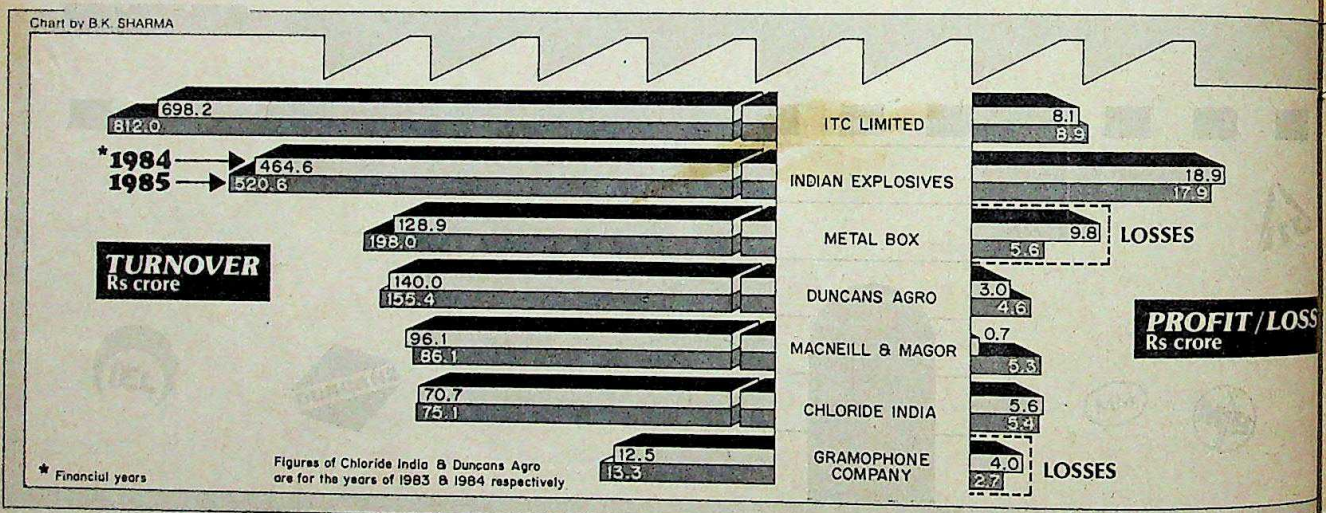
But the stock-market would not be quietened by the denials, recalling a similar phase in late 1984, when Shaw Wallace shares continued to register new price peaks despite repeated denials of any take-over bid. Finally, a take-over bid did materialise. The Gramophone Company of India too had in the past repeatedly denied any disinvestment by its British parent company, as indeed had Dunlop India before the Goenka take-over two years ago.

So IEL's share climbed from Rs 55 to Rs 82 in a matter of weeks. Other shares behaved in similar fashion: Chloride India's share jumped from Rs 70 to Rs 108, and ITC's from Rs 45 to Rs 55. More understandably (given the Khaitan entry), Metal Box's share climbed from Rs 16 to Rs 27.50. If there was indeed any evidence of corporate battles looming ahead, it was limited for the moment to these share price movements.

Nevertheless, the city's business circles were abuzz with speculation that M.R. Chhabria's brush with the Government in his bid to acquire the overseas shareholding in Shaw Wallace might have made the buyers in companies like IEL wary of announcing their acquisition just now, particularly when the Government was busy raiding business premises across the country. But at least in IEL's case there may be little substance to the reports of a take-over. Apparently the four ICI companies that came together under the IEL umbrella not long ago had given a specific commitment to the Government that if ICI in Britain decided to disinvest, the shares would be first offered to the Government.

For the moment, the biggest formal move had been made by Khaitan, who worked out a tie-up with the ailing packaging giant Metal Box (turnover in the last 18-month financial year: Rs 198 crore) and was waiting for the Government's green signal for picking up a 10 per cent stake in the company. Meanwhile, he himself, his son Deepak and a British nominee moved onto Metal Box's board.

The Goenka brothers were also making the headlines with their moves. R.P.Goenka was waiting for Thorn-EMI of London to agree to a rights issue that would give him a stake in the Gramophone Company of India (sales: Rs 13.33 crore, loss: Rs 3.97 crore), which he and a Bombay-based associate, Udayan Basu, have been managing for the last couple of months. G.P.Goenka, meanwhile, had already struck a deal with the owners of the virtually defunct Kolay Biscuits, which has been lying closed for the last five years, but he continued to face problems with the company's 2,500-strong labour force. "Biscuits are a line that can be developed into a reasonably profitable industry, but I am not going to take on a



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surplus work-force," Goenka said even as he continued to negotiate with the state government to find a way out of the impasse.

Meanwhile, the younger Goenka plans to use Webel Video Devices as a "spring-board for diversifying into a vast range of electronics items." The company currently manufactures only black and white TV tubes, but has put in applications for producing items like video cassette recorders and microwave receivers.

Much of the turbulence in Calcutta's corporate world seemed to originate from the activities of ambitious and expanding businessmen like Khaitan and the Goenka brothers, from the fact that the overseas principals of large Indian companies were finding the going difficult abroad, and that these principals might, therefore, be considering disinvesting in India in order to raise cash for staying afloat elsewhere. Dunlop of UK did precisely this in the case of Dunlop India two years ago, when R.P.Goenka moved in. Thus, Chloride India is doing well, but its parent company is not.

Every few days, reports of fresh blue-chip companies being taken over by local businessmen are sending their share prices shooting through the roof and stockbrokers are getting increasingly bitten by the take-over bug.

BUT IT is also true that many of the *pucca* boxwallah companies in Calcutta have not been prospering (Metal Box being a standing example with losses last year of Rs 5.63 crore), and the foreign principals might well have realised that these companies needed new managerial tie-ups with *desi* entrepreneurs. Said a senior company executive in the city: "Many foreign parent companies, particularly those based in the UK, have of late come to believe that the highly westernised managers in their Indian subsidiaries are not able to compete in the complex Indian business environment."

The normally reticent B.M.Khaitan, typical of the kind of local businessmen who are being favoured by the foreign principals as new business partners, concurred: "I think we have the right blend of professionalism and entrepreneurship required to make sick companies tick again. Professionals have to be given the freedom to operate, but at the same time the entrepreneur has to provide the push for a little bit of change." Khaitan in fact believes that a number of old British companies could have been saved had a partnership between professionalism and entrepreneurship been evolved earlier. His own record in Macneill and Magor bears this out: the company's net worth has shot up from just Rs 14 crore to Rs 40 crore in the last three years. And he has been able to take over the management of India Foils by reaching an agreement with its British parent company.

As a part of the same trend, the Birlas' Texmaco had in the past associated itself with the sick AVP dairy firm while the Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) had bought Metal Box's Kharagpur ball bearing unit and moved into the Calcutta-based Davy Ashmore. Meanwhile, other giants of the East continued to flounder. Guest Keen Williams, the Calcutta-based engineering giant, was considering offloading its manufacturing division at Andul Road in Howrah, after having earlier sold the Durgapur-based Sankey Wheels and the forging units in Howrah.

The ambitious plans of the new entrants into troubled companies stands in sharp contrast. Khaitan has promised to inject new working capital into Metal Box and to work out a new marketing strategy, while R.P.Goenka has been pulled into the Gramophone Company at a time when India's audio equipment market is looking up. The company's accumulated losses have already wiped out its capital and reserves and the dividend has been skipped for three years in a row. But audio cassette production has quadrupled recently to 8,000 a month and, according to a company insider, it will stop incurring cash losses from next month.

The Calcutta Stock Exchange: buzzing with activity

Goenka's main strategy for the company is to beat the cassette pirates at their game, with low-priced cassettes competing with the pirates and higher-priced ones offering quality and reaching for the upper segment of the market. In another move typical of the change that fresh blood infuses into a company, Goenka's son Sanjeev announced a Rs 50-crore investment package for modernising and diversifying Dunlop India's production facilities. "We are graduating to radial tyres with Sumitomo technology, and moving into V-belts and steel cord conveyor belting," Sanjeev Goenka said.

Such examples might in fact encourage disinvestment by other companies abroad, providing yet more opportunities for prowling local businessmen. And the next few weeks will show whether there is in fact anything more to the action than what is already known in companies like Metal Box and the Gramophone Company. Indeed, if share market specialists are as well informed as they were in the Shaw Wallace case a little more than a year ago, Calcutta's corporate grapevine could soon be buzzing even more than it already is.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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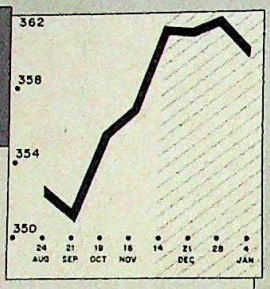
THOUGH inflation is still under control, both the wholesale and consumer price indices have started rising at higher rates than before. Money supply is steady at around 17 per cent per annum while bank credit has contracted marginally. The foreign trade front continues to be grim with exports falling and imports growing at 28 per cent per annum.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data to which regressions are fitted.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
4.3% p.a.

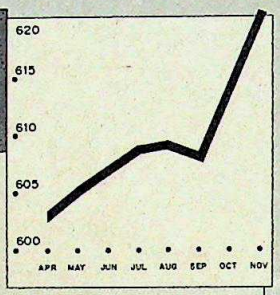


Though inflation is under control, the long-term trend in wholesale prices has been rising from 1.3 per cent to 2.9 per cent to 4.27 per cent.

Consumer Price Index

1960 = 100

Current Trend
4.7% p.a.

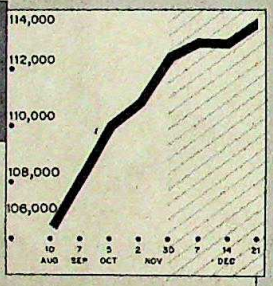


The Consumer price index rose by one per cent by November, well above the long-term trend which rose from 2.9 to 4.7 per cent per annum.

Money Supply (M3)

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.1% p.a.



Money supply jumped by 5.9 per cent in the third week of December, above trend. The long-term trend has, however, stabilised at 17 per cent.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

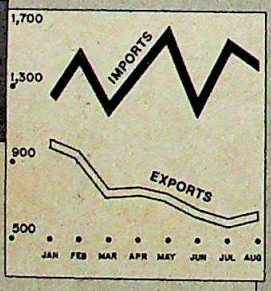
Current Trend
12.0% p.a.

Commercial bank credit has tightened marginally, with the long-term trend dropping by 0.44 per cent to 11.96 per cent.

Foreign Trade

Rs Crore

Current Trend
–4.4% p.m.
EXPORTS
28.3% p.a.
IMPORTS

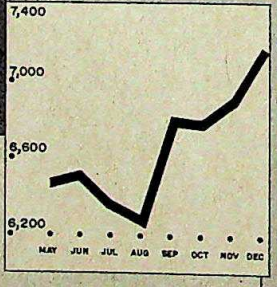


Exports have continued to fall despite a hiccup in August. Imports have risen at over 28 per cent a year. August 1985 Trade gap was Rs 740 crore.

Foreign Exchange Reserves

Rs Crore

Current Trend
29.8% p.a.

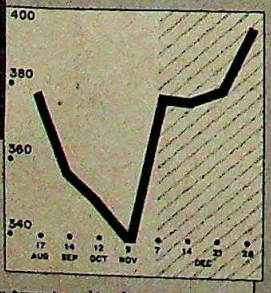


Foreign exchange reserves continued to grow at a handsome rate, despite the yawning trade gap, because of remittances and capital flows.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
6.4% p.a.

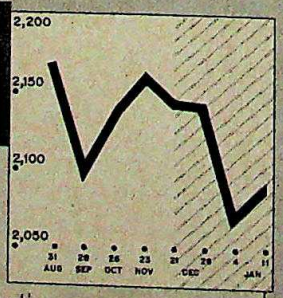


Though the long-term trend in share prices is no longer hyper-inflationary, share prices rose 4.9 per cent between December 7 and 28.

Closing Gold Price

Rs per 10 gms

Current Trend
–4.7% p.a.



Despite a mild 0.95 per cent upturn in the first week of January, gold prices have continued their downward trend.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Items with maximum growth in December, 1985

	%Growth
Tea	7.54
Vanaspati	6.26
Tobacco	6.12
Groundnut Seeds	6.11
Electrical Motors	5.74
Sugar	5.66
Oranges	5.26
Groundnut Oil	5.13
Gingelly Oil	4.66
Solvent Extracted Oil	4.12
Raw Hides	4.00
Maida	3.84
Ragi	3.69
Urad	3.64
Boilers	3.62
Copra	3.12
Coffee	3.12
Maize	2.95
Rape & Mustard Seed	2.93
Jowar	2.85
Bananas	2.83
Raw Silk	2.81
Tapioca	2.76
Mustard Oil	2.73
Linseed Oil	2.72
Linseed	2.62
Cashew-Nuts	2.22
Tanned Hides & Leather Belting	1.93
Ghee	1.89
Cables & Wires	1.88
Atta	1.80
Eggs	1.65
Aviation Spirit	1.39
Jute Textile Machinery	1.30
Polythene Moulding Powder	1.12
Transformers	1.12
Coal	1.09
Petrol	1.06
Soda Ash	1.04
Coir Yarn	1.04
Milk	1.01
Bolts & Nuts	0.98
Diesel Oil	0.97
Pig Iron	0.92
Rails	0.90
Aluminium	0.85
Coir Fibre	0.85

Of the 139 series considered, 88 of them with a total weight of 52.221 had a positive growth and 51 of them with a total weight of 34.405 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1985	1984
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, December	14496	14179
Saleable Steel		
Thousand tonnes, December	718.2	649.0
Cement		
Thousand tonnes, December	2678	2526
Fertiliser		
Thousand Tonnes, December	529.0	490.0
Thermal Plant Load Factor		
Per cent, December	54.4	54.0

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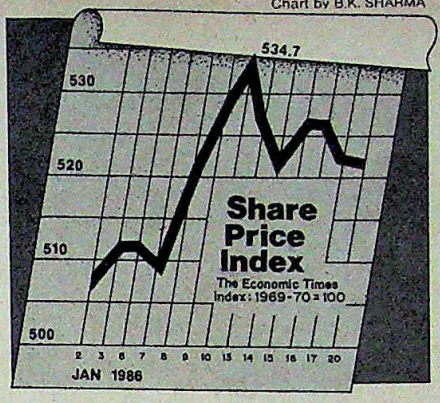
THE MARKETS

Sunny Days

THE STOCK market continued its climb to new levels of optimism last fortnight, despite the market authorities imposing trading margins on 60 per cent of the forward traded scrips and on some cash shares as well. Initially, this resulted in buyers beating a hasty retreat, but they were soon back in strength—encouraged almost certainly by the flow of good news from New Delhi.

The Government came out with one policy liberalisation after the other for the industrial sector. It announced a fresh scheme for the sanctioning of excess capacity in selected industries, removed some of the roadblocks that had come in the way of earlier liberalisations being effective, de-listed 250 items that had been exclusively reserved for the small-scale sector, and on the export front extended the cash compensatory scheme to several non-traditional items of export. Various reports also suggested that the cement industry might get some fiscal incentives, while a virtually open door policy on pharmaceuticals is being finalised.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Investors who had been worried by the raids on leading business houses and individual industrialists got a shot in the arm when the Government said it was willing to go easy on tax evaders who decided to come clean. Although tax officials denied that there would be any let-up in the raids, the signal was unmistakable that a new scheme to encourage tax honesty was under preparation.

Finally, the industrial production index for October, released last fortnight, signalled an upswing after the earlier slack, while prices were under control.

These factors were more than enough to offset the effect of the imposition of trading margins as high as 20 per cent. As a result, even high-priced shares (as in the case of some fertiliser and pharmaceutical companies) found fresh buying support. The margins themselves had come in the wake of a Bombay broker defaulting on his commitments after defying orders prohibiting him from doing fresh business. Consequently, they were seen as an administrative measure, and not as a 'cool down' signal. So the boom continued.

Nevertheless, everything is far from rosy. The textile industry continues to be in the doldrums despite the new textile policy having gone into effect, and the investment rush into areas like cement, polyester, commercial vehicles and cars will almost certainly result in overcapacity being created. Some of the new commercial vehicle companies have already seen their share prices drop from previously astronomical levels, and the same fate could befall companies rushing into fields like polyester yarn and fibre. But these clouds remain far away, and last fortnight the sun continued to shine on an optimistic stock market.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1986 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 20.1.86	Change on Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	44.00	45.00	1.00 +
Associated Bearings	860.00	775.00	835.00	50.00 +
Associated Cement	386.00	349.50	362.00	14.00 –
Atlas Copco	86.00	77.00	78.00	2.00 –
Bajaj Auto	2030.00	1950.00	2010.00	25.00 +
Ballarpur	62.00	55.00	59.00	4.00 +
Baroda Rayon	445.00	410.00	410.00	30.00 –
Bata India	82.50	75.00	77.50	1.50 +
Bayer	470.00	445.00	460.00	5.00 –
Bharat Forge	86.00	73.00	81.00	4.00 +
Birla Jute	97.00	92.50	93.25	0.75 –
Blow Plast	160.00	122.00	150.00	25.00 +
Blue Star	110.00	92.50	105.00	nil
Bombay Dyeing	120.00	86.00	101.00	8.50 +
Brooke Bond	83.75	74.00	82.00	8.00 +
Ceat Tyres	310.00	240.00	305.00	55.00 +
Century Spinning	1560.00	1460.00	1490.00	35.00 –
Chloride India	122.00	99.00	107.00	3.00 +
Citurgia	63.00	53.00	63.00	8.00 +
Colgate	262.50	220.00	230.00	17.50 –
Cyanamid	100.00	70.00	100.00	20.00 +
DCM	58.50	50.00	50.00	5.50 –
Dunlop	52.75	49.75	52.00	1.25 +
Elecon Engg.	90.00	82.50	82.50	2.50 –
Escorts	94.00	81.50	81.50	9.00 –
Food Specialities	255.00	235.00	240.00	15.00 –
Garware Nylon	61.50	52.00	55.00	3.00 –
Glaxo	87.00	66.00	80.00	7.00 +
G.E. Shipping	36.00	27.75	32.50	3.75 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	1195.00	925.00	1120.00	100.00 +
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	82.50	82.50	4.00 –
Hindustan Lever	138.00	127.50	134.00	2.00 –
Hindustan Motors	128.50	120.00	123.50	2.00 –
Indian Explosives	83.50	69.00	83.00	12.50 +
Indian Hotels	130.00	115.00	127.50	2.50 +
Indian Organic	90.00	82.00	84.50	2.50 –
Indian Rayon	137.00	127.00	130.00	6.00 –
Ind. Suzuki	81.00	58.00	75.00	13.00 +
Indrol	330.00	285.00	310.00	15.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	480.00	360.00	440.00	15.00 +
ITC	57.50	53.00	55.50	1.70 +
J K Synthetics	122.00	106.00	110.00	2.00 –
Kinetic Engineering	325.00	285.00	295.00	30.00 –
Kirloskar Cummins	700.00	675.00	692.50	7.50 –
Lakme	195.00	172.50	190.00	15.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	198.00	180.00	187.00	2.00 +
Lipton	57.25	46.50	56.75	4.88 +
Lohia Machines	70.00	65.00	68.00	2.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	72.00	77.00	2.00 +
Motor Industries	910.00	810.00	840.00	25.00 –
National Organic	660.00	585.00	652.50	42.50 +
Nirlon	77.00	61.00	73.00	6.00 +
Orkay Silk Mills	167.00	125.50	158.00	28.00 +
Peico Electronics	104.50	83.50	84.00	7.25 –
Premier Auto	745.00	632.50	692.50	37.50 –
Raymond	97.00	88.00	93.00	nil
Reliance Industries	281.00	226.00	278.00	42.00 +
Richardson Hind	215.00	182.50	212.50	7.50 +
Sandoz	86.00	62.00	86.00	11.00 +
Shriram Fibres	78.50	71.00	76.50	nil
SPIC	146.00	129.50	138.00	2.00 +
Tata Steel	1240.00	1150.00	1195.00	5.00 –
Telco	880.00	780.00	866.00	58.50 +
Vulcan Laval	135.00	85.00	135.00	35.00 +
Zenith Steel	97.00	73.00	89.00	11.50 +
20th Century Leasing	77.50	67.00	67.00	8.00 –

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.6842	8.6011
Austria	Schilling	100	72.3212	71.5582
Bahrain	Dinar	1	32.3320	32.2717
Bangladesh	Taka	100	41.0437	40.9920
Canada	Dollar	1	8.8689	8.7835
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.3808	1.3678
Egypt	Pound	1	14.8332	14.7913
France	Franc	1	1.6542	1.6515
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5849	1.5720
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.0833	1.0717
Iran	Rial	100	14.4332	14.3732
Italy	Lira	100	0.7137	0.7127
Japan	Yen	100	6.1503	6.0973
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7463	0.7401
Kuwait	Dinar	1	42.0920	41.8730
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0290	4.9809
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8332	0.8101
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5832	0.5703
Netherlands	Guilder	1	4.5028	4.4633
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7553	0.7437
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.8087	5.4024
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0780	0.0717
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4490	0.4480
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.6322	1.6128
Switzerland	Franc	1	5.9721	5.9209
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7430	0.7331
Thailand	Baht	100	45.9320	45.0133
UK	Pound	1	17.5162	17.3958
USA	Dollar	1	12.4625	12.4375
UAE	Dirham	1	3.3032	3.2917
USSR	Rouble	1	14.9732	14.8017
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	5.1308	5.0050

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 21.1.86

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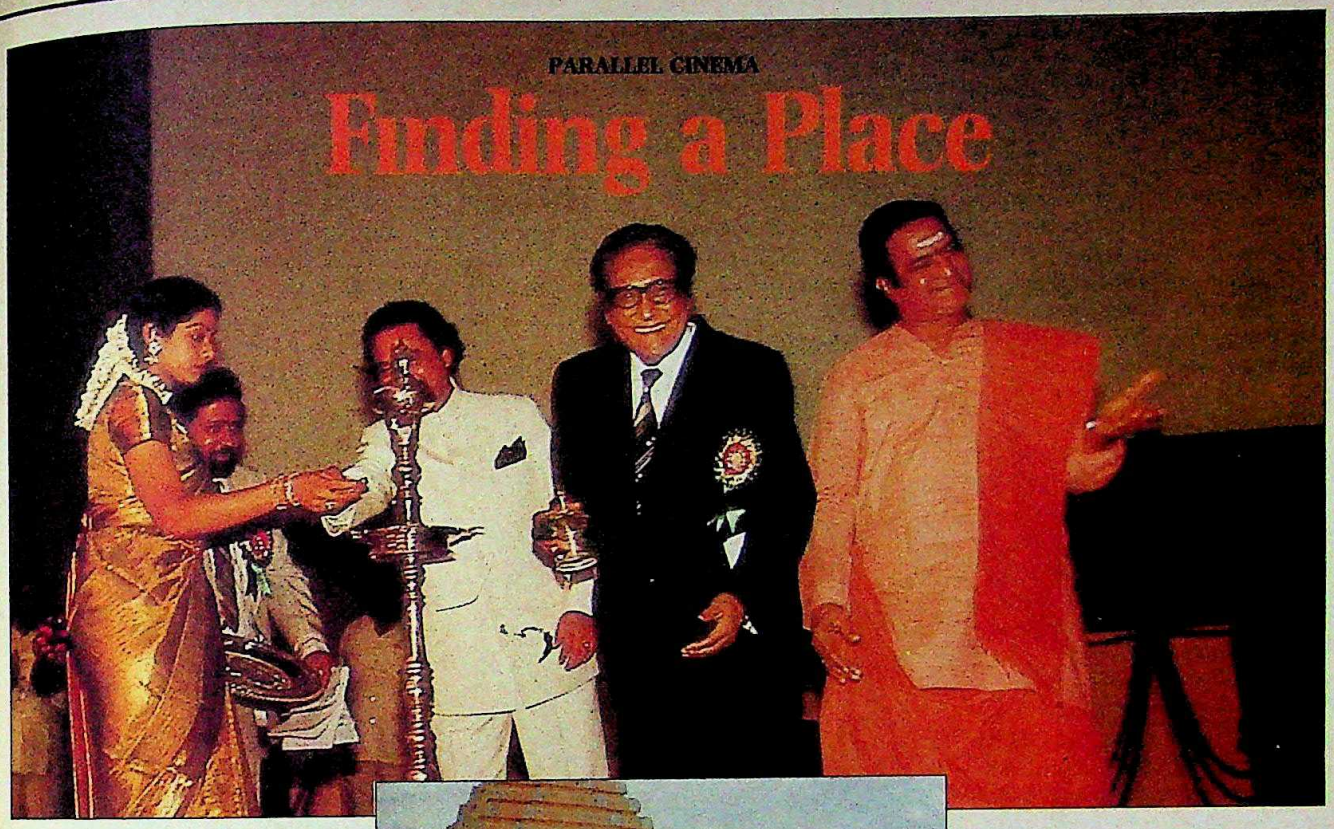
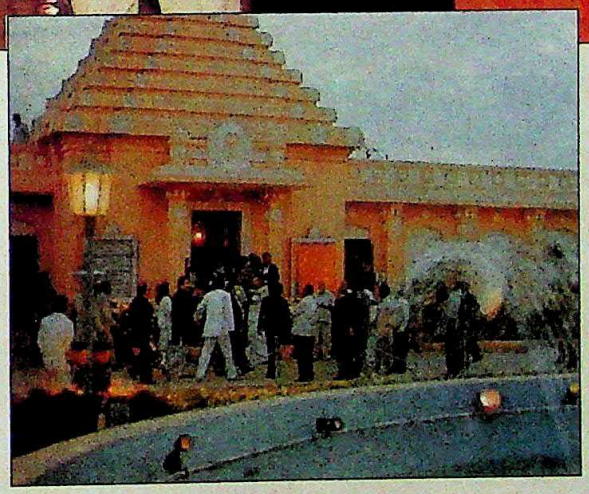
PARALLEL CINEMA

Finding a Place





N.T. Rama Rao with Ashok Kumar and Sridevi at the Filmotsav opening (top); and outside the venue

CRITICS and audience alike have loosely labelled it "intellectual cinema". Though a type that is hardly likely to blitz the box-office, a glimpse of India's minority cinema, provided last fortnight by the 21 films screened at the Indian Panorama section of the Filmotsav 1986 held at Hyderabad, testified at once to the vigour and durability of the genre. The makers of the Panorama films included the aging doyens, like Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani and G. Aravindan, as well as the fledgeling film makers like Aparna Sen and Prakash Jha, restless to reach the top after having won their spurs in their early films. But the common thread that ran through their work could best be described in terms of a new audience-awareness.

Gone are the shoe-string budgets, the ulcers caused by each roll of raw film used up in shooting, the willingness to make do with inadequate lights, poor sets, untrained actors and sequences that do not call for expensive crowd scenes. Gone too is the snooty lack of concern about selling a film. On the contrary, the parallel cinema today is vibrant with the expectation of a market and is driven by the gutsy hope to experiment with new forms, and explore new areas of existence.

In 1981, G. Aravindan, the acknowledged celluloid "poet" of Kerala, made his *Pokku Veyil* for only Rs 4 lakh and yet its producer could not recover its cost. But *Chidambaram*, Aravindan's 1985 film, made for Rs 7 lakh, is pre-sold and is expected to gross Rs 17 lakh this year from television and theatre rights. Nihalani's 1983 opus, *Ardh Satya*, was made at Rs 16.5 lakh—a fact that earned him the opprobrium of being dubbed the "prodigal son" of the industry. But his recent film, *Aghaat*, made at Rs 30 lakh, is patiently awaiting release and Nihalani seems to be suffering no jitters on that score.

These, together with Benegal's exquisite *Trikal* (Rs 24 lakh), Aparna Sen's *Paroma* (Rs 20 lakh) and Ramesh Sharma's debut film, *New Delhi Times* (Rs 30 lakh), testify to the new courage to experiment with both style and theme—and money. Unlike in the mainline cinema industry of Bombay, Madras and Hyderabad, where star payments and production values account for most of the spending, the serious cinema has to use (or is expected to use) budget to explore new areas, to create new idioms, and to perfect techniques.

There is no dearth of such adventurism in today's new cinema. In *Damul*, Jha leads his camera unit into the labyrinth of the caste politics in Bihar: he even shows on screen the mechanics of the state's unique contribution to parliamentary democracy—booth-capturing. In *Paroma*, Aparna Sen pulls out all the stops to put together a feast of "props", which again makes the interiors of the bourgeois home credible on screen. And Sharma's *New Delhi Times*, though torn between the conflicting desires to communicate and to be admired for its fancy photography, is still a dream based on great expectations of the market. But it stepped with great eclat into what was hitherto forbidden terri-

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tory for films: the soft underbelly of the Fourth Estate which showed a crusading journalist being unknowingly manipulated by forces on which the media has little control.

Special Correspondent SUMIT MITRA has chosen to review three films out of the 21 screened at the Panorama: *Trikal*, *Aghaat* and *Chidambaram*—which present a unique dissimilarity and show the range and amplitude of the new cinema whose makers are hoping to finally discover their audience this time round.

TRIKAL

TWELVE years ago, when Shyam Benegal graduated from advertisement films to his first feature, *Ankur*, Satyajit Ray, in an article on what was regarded as the "new wave" at that time, sounded a note of warning. He wrote on the plot of *Ankur* which had four protagonists instead of the traditional trigonometry of drama: "As a firm believer in geometry as a guiding principle in art, I should strongly advise Benegal to keep away from quadrangles in the future."

Benegal, who is a Ray-buff himself and is credited with a documentary on the master, apparently heeded the advice but reacted to it in his own way—drifting away from the taut narrow-canvas dramas of his earlier career and opting instead for the "circular" stories. Like *Junoon* (1978), the spectacular extravaganza; *Kalyug* (1981), the modern parable of the clash of corporate titans; and *Mandi* (1983), a funny comedy about the best little whorehouse in a nowhere town in India.

But *Trikal* is even more circular. With a cast the size of which was last seen in Coppola's *The Godfather*, Benegal confidently announces in *Trikal* his ultimate mastery in directing a large number of people without raising doubts regarding who is doing what to whom and when. And he does it without losing out on the very Latin character of his locale, Goa at the time of its merger to the Indian Union, or the political complexities that enwrapped the stamping out of the last ember of colonialism.

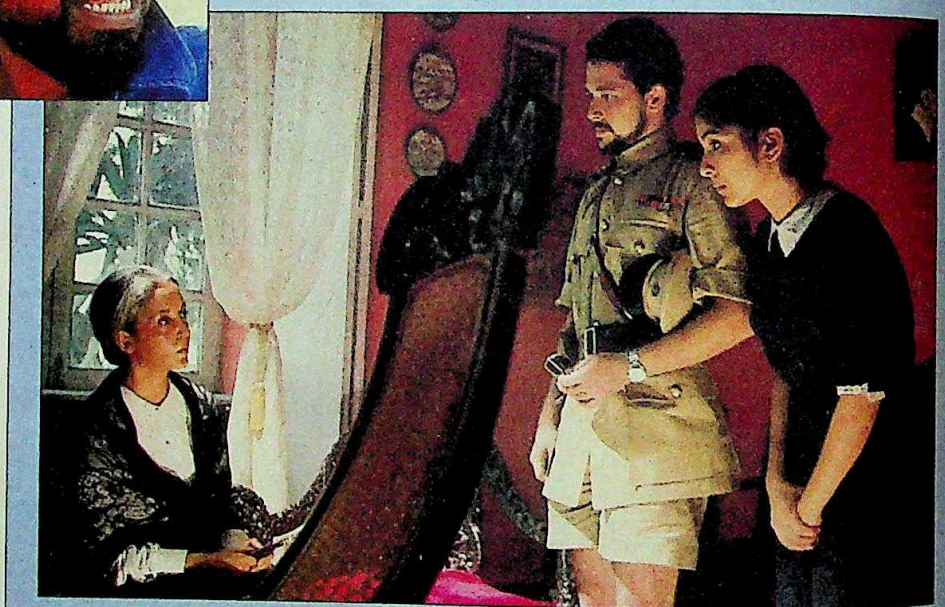
The film opens with the voice-over narration of Naseeruddin Shah, returning to Goa in the wake of the visit by the CHOGM delegates. It ends with the man driving back down the roads, with the haunting question: "Why did I return to Goa?" The interim is crowded with sepia-tinted memories of the Souza-Soares mansion, standing in the middle of the paddies and calling up images from the past that simply refuse to be buried.

But it is not so much in the story than in the brilliant filigree of his characters and situations that Benegal scores in *Trikal* over his earlier broad-brushstroke films. At the centre of the filigree lies Dona Maria, the widow of recently-deceased Ernesto Soares, who would not believe that her husband could die, would insist on an old *fado* being played on the hand-wound gramophone while her husband's body lies in state, and would vainly summon his spirit through a medium, Ernesto's illegitimate daughter Milagrenia. Leela Naidu, the screen siren of the '50s, lends to the role of Maria both the eccentricity and the extraordinariness of a dowager queen, while Neena Gupta, playing Milagrenia, lifts her unique role far above the clinical and the predictable, to turn it into a celebration of the absurd and the unknown.

But Benegal has not spun his Latin yarn only around this twosome. What stands out in the film is the brilliant draughtsmanship of the building, its corridors, its bedrooms lit through skylights, its snaky corridors, distinctive kitchen, sun-washed courtyard and the baroqueness of its architecture. It is against this interesting backdrop, and seen through a kind of nostalgic autumn-haze created by the magic of cameraman Ashok Mehta's filters, that Benegal recreates the vision of an old colony. The huge family, with its members including those who are born within wedlock as well as the children of love, mingle in the vast dining-room and clink glasses with one another.

Yet *Trikal* is far from what might be described as a monochromatic film. Grimness and side-splitting laughter seem to alternate through the film in incredibly rapid succession, reminiscent of Chaplin as well as Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, based again on a Latin society written off by history. In Benegal's film, a dead march and a sombre funeral scene is followed by a sudden gust of dust-storm in which one of the pall-bearers loses his denture. A funeral speech suddenly veers off its ceremonial course when the family doctor begins to talk with apparently great relish on the dead man's amorous misadventures. A young lover, who comes to serenade his lady-love under her window in moonlight, suddenly finds himself in the embrace of another woman. An engagement party, with wild foot-tappings to a *mando* song, is broken off with the news that the bride is pregnant. Maria calls up her husband's spirit, but is visited instead by

It is in the brilliant filigree of his characters and situations that Benegal scores in *Trikal* over his earlier broad-brushstroke films.



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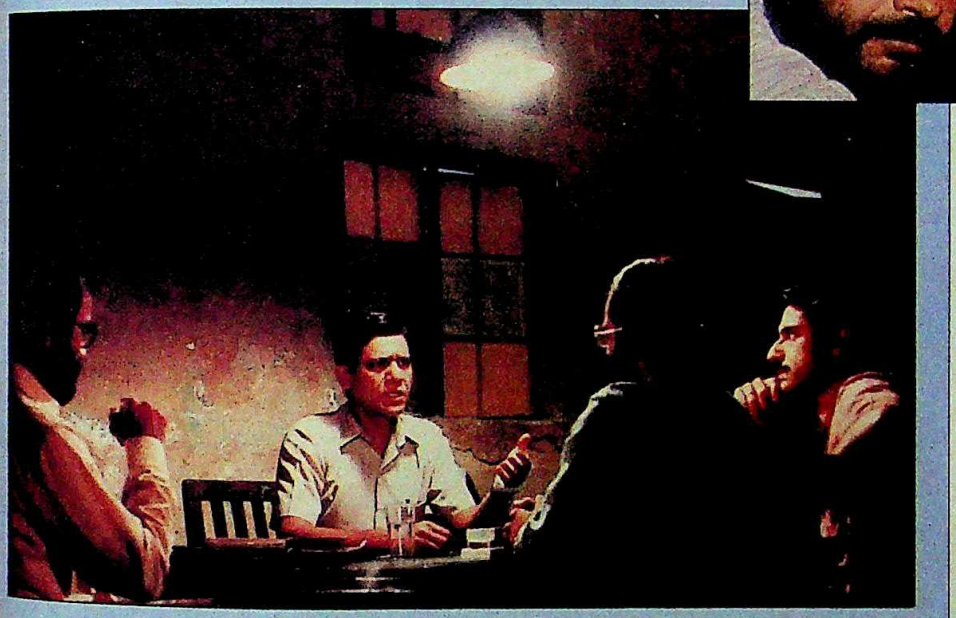
the spirit of a Hindu rebel who had been done to death decades ago.

However, Benegal's saga of four hundred years of solitude ends on a strong epic note when the spirits come back to Maria to tell her that Ernesto had found his ultimate peace and had become one with the four elements. The key colour at once changes from golden sepia to daylight tones. And, as the narrator asks, "Why did I come to Goa?", there is a feeling of a *rondeau* winding up, extending in the process a bitter-sweet dream which might have lasted only a fraction of a second.

Nihalani makes the structure stand on its head in *Aghaat* by smothering the hero's idealism under the dialectics of opportunism.



AGHAAT

GOVIND Nihalani's hard-hitting film on the self-delusion of a Marxist trade-unionist is the most clinical among his ongoing series, *Aakrosh* (1981), *Ardh Satya* (1983), and *Party* (1985), all aimed at depicting the vulnerabilities of the Indian middle class. No wonder that Nihalani exposed for *Aghaat* 128 rolls of raw film against a projected 72 rolls, often shot one scene after 20 retakes, and on occasions gathered hundreds of professional "extras" (or junior artistes) to shoot a single crowd scene. Because the budget of the film shows not in any extravagant wayward-ness but in the superbly etched authenticity of its locations and in the lived-in quality of its sets. For no recent film with a workshop background, including the jute-mill sequences in Goutam Ghose's award-winning *Paar*, captures the atmosphere in the unobserved interiors of a factory with more meticulous adherence to details.

In the near-documentary verve of its portrayal of the trade union set-up, *Aghaat* marks a quantum leap from a dozen or so of the overtly leftist films made recently through the munificence of the Marxist Government in West Bengal.

Though woven around Nihalani's trade mark hero, Om Puri, *Aghaat* is in a different league from his earlier commercial success, *Ardh Satya*, the tale of a young police officer torn between his idealism and his instinct for survival. In *Ardh Satya*, it is the idealist streak that at last scored over the materialism, and Om Puri wormed his way to the heart of average cine-goers by killing, almost in the manner of a Dostoyevsky hero, the ugly politician of the prevailing establishment.

But Nihalani makes the dramatic structure stand on its head in *Aghaat*, and deliberately invites commercial risk by making its hero's idealism get smothered under the dialectics of opportunism. It is this anti-heroic resolution that makes *Aghaat* a risky proposition at the box-office but a distinct progression in artistic terms.

The main protagonist in *Aghaat*, Madhav Verma, is a lecturer-turned-trade-unionist, a typical communist organisation-man who has his dreams set on a classless Utopia, and to whom "economism" (fighting purely for higher wages, and not for changing the society) is the ultimate in the degeneration of the working classes. But the veneer of placidity on the labour front is shattered when Rustom Patel, a clone of Datta Samant, surges ahead, capturing union after union around the industrial suburbs, pitching demands on a scale that no industry can support, and literally knifing his way to prominence on a simple slogan: "*We Want More.*"

As Patel, and his henchman, Krishnan, played with an almost sinister delight by Kerala actor Gopi, muscle into Verma's factory, his idealism comes into conflict with the party diktat: survive at any cost today, for if you don't survive today how are you going to bear the torch of the revolution tomorrow? His followers are assaulted or terrorised. And, more significantly, the workers are infected with the virus of the mad lust for more. The management is bullied to talk peace with Patel, and, before long, the traditional and known world of the genteel Marxist falls to pieces.

Nihalani works the story out to the climax, depicting the crisis of Verma's conscience, with the austerity of a film maker who is determined to produce a film of ideas. However, the "party" intervenes at one stage, and the comrade sent from the headquarters quotes Mao to yank Verma out of his idealist stupor. "Class struggle is not a tea-party", he says. Om Puri plays out the grim catharsis with a rare aplomb when he joins Rustom Patel in his game, resorts to violence, outsmarts him, and spouts a poem of defeat with his head hanging low in the final moment of Pyrrhic victory.

Aghaat's statement is perhaps a bit too mannered, and Nihalani is perhaps too eager to prove a point. But the film travels much beyond the statement to capture the human condition of industrial slums, and, on occasions, to break away from the format and portray ineffable moments. One such sequence is that between Pankaj Kapoor, a worker who has lost his body from waist downwards in a factory accident, and his sensuous wife, played by Deepa Sahi. It is in the midst of a passionate embrace that they realise the irony of

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an existence from waist downwards. The message of *Aghaat* may not shake the earth. But it is the film's superbly crafted inner weave that makes it worth a glowing mention, if not its budget.

CHIDAMBARAM

IMAGINE a film running through its length of 103 minutes with hardly any background score, except for a few brief vocal passages, a burst of *nadaswaram* and a roll of Carnatic drums. Imagine a face held in close-up for over a minute, the head fixed like a Rodin sculpture, cracking into a smile only when the wait seems intolerable, but dredging up in the process the seemingly inarticulate layers of emotion. Imagine the scenic splendour of the Kerala hillsides, and their forested slopes, drowned in sunburst colours, only to provide the dramatic counterpoint to a tortured man escaping from his memories. Imagine a body of a suicide hanging in a grimy cowshed, with birds twittering outside in the fields and spears of sunrays lunging into the darkness of the interior.

Chidambaram is the first worthwhile foray on the Indian screen into the surreal.

Cartoonist-artist and Carnatic musicologist G. Aravindan's *Chidambaram* is all that and a lot more. After Mani Kaul's disorganised non-narrative cinematic experiments carried out a decade ago, and Aravindan's own tentative *Pokku Veyil*, *Chidamabaram* is the first worthwhile foray on the Indian screen into the surreal. At another level, it is a major triumph of its lead players, Gopi as a forest official and Smita Patil as a forest guard's wife, in their ability to emote and to get their timings right in a film that turns grammar upside down. And Aravindan is like an ET in filmdom. "I have never learnt film grammar", he says, "for I have always followed my own judgement about where to cut a shot and when, and I feel I have almost instinctively been guided by the long time-circle of the Carnatic music."

Chidambaram is woven around Gopi, an actor with a capacity to convey emotions in understatements which can be expected only in the land of Kathakali. Aravindan builds up the first half of the film purely through subtle hints and spatial relations that become surcharged with dramatic possibilities. There are only four brief scenes between Gopi and Smita, yet they convey a tale of passion and betrayal—almost with Biblical purity—against the background of a pristine forest. Aravindan almost paints the day and night in the forest, the golden orb of the sun setting behind the slopes, and captures the right aural surprise of the intrusive motorbike noisily meshing its gears down the hillside. Smita is absorbed into the plot almost by the force of nature, though she is forbidden by her weakling husband—just as Adam had said—to travel to "that side" of the forest.

But she has already got a taste of Chidambaram. In a haunting scene, where she asks Gopi to write the address of her parents on a letter, she mentions her village, "via Chidambaram". Where on earth is Chidambaram? Is it where the temple of the mind (the word literally means the dress of the mind) is located? Is it the mystery destination of the soul? Is it the next town? Does it exist on the planet?

The second part of the film has the quality of a vibrant and moving dream. It begins with the dicovery of the woman's body, who had been hacked to death by her husband before he killed himself. In a *Rashomon*-like tracking shot through forest foliage that lasts nearly seven minutes, Gopi runs away from the past straight into a phantasmagoria. The situations from now onwards are all projections of his fear and guilt, stuff that dreams are made on.

A doctor and a couple of policemen weave in and out of the film. The somnambulance ends only with a surreal encounter with Sivakami(Smita), the woman dead long ago; in the courtyard of the ancient temple of Chidambaram. The flight from the past ends as the camera ascends rhythmically, to the beat of the mridangam, towards the spire of the temple.

Absolutely overpowering in its ingenious cutting rhythm, *Chidambaram* will go a long way in finding a distinctive style for Indian film makers. And Aravindan is not quite alone in Kerala. For a decade now, both he and his peer, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, the maker of *Mukhamukham* and *Elipathyam*, have been trying to develop a reflective cinema of the Indian kind that speaks a universal language and at the same time retains its distinctive flavour just as the Japanese cinema did since the advent of Kurosawa and Mizoguchi. *Chidambaram* may be too abstruse a film, too cloistered from its life and times to merit a rating as high as Ray's Apu films or Donskoi's trilogy on Gorky. But, more assuredly than India's 910-films a year movie industry, it is a small but firm milestone along the journey towards a national cinema.

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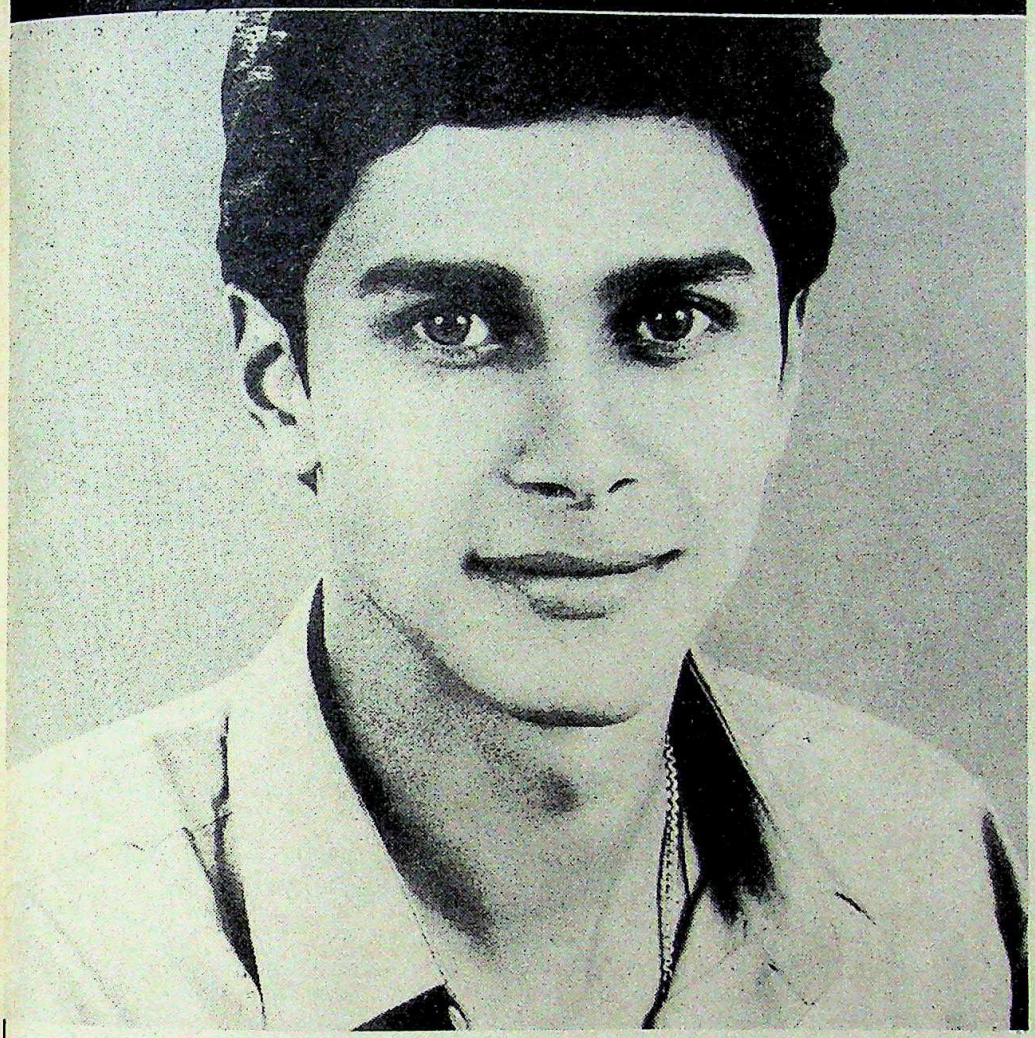

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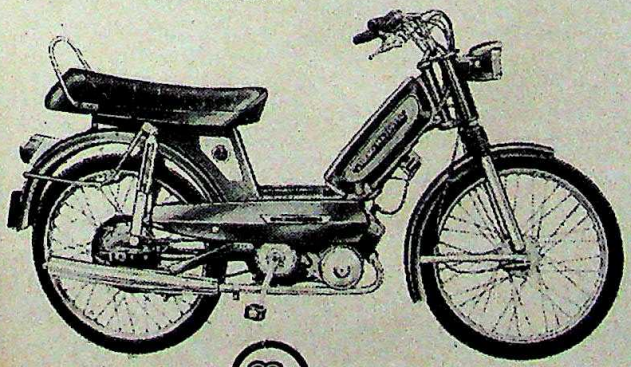

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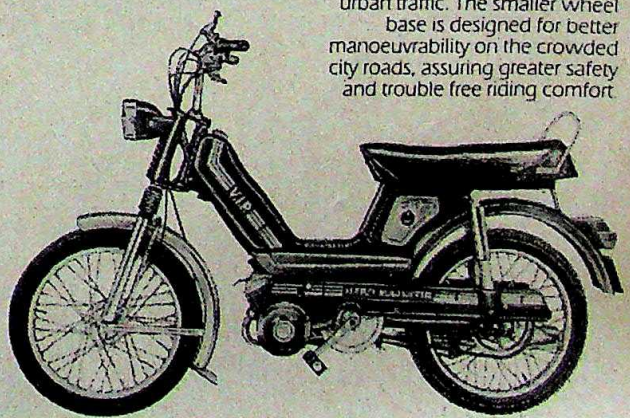

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ZENITH STEEL PIPES AND INDUSTRIES LIMITED

Speech of the Chairman Shri Ashok Birla
Twenty Fifth Annual General Meeting, 10th December, 1985.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Twentyfifth Annual General Meeting of Zenith Steel Pipes And Industries Limited.

This year, I am more than usually happy for two reasons. The first of these is that Zenith has completed 25 years of its eventful operations. The second is that we are meeting in a business environment that has been pulsating with challenges and opportunities which no member of the growing corporate community can fail to respond to.

The completion of 25 years of sustained activity is, in my view, a good time to pause and take stock of the situation. It is an occasion when one can look back and see with fair objectivity the hows and whys of what went wrong and what worked well. The exercise is not all sentimentality; its value lies in giving one an accurate measure of one's strength and weakness and, thus, enables one to chart out a course for the future.

It is in this spirit that I look back on what we have achieved since the establishment of the Company on June 20, 1960 as a manufacturer of steel pipes. We have, of course, established many landmarks over the years in the conduct of our business but I view them essentially as the inevitable manifestations of those all-important basic qualities we were blessed with from the start. I acknowledge these basic qualities gratefully because these are naturally our most priceless assets.

Over the years, Zenith has grown and diversified as many companies have done. Besides the facilities for the manufacture of pipes, steel, rolled products and a wide range of intricate, sophisticated tools at Khopoli, we have been operating a Chemical Plant at Tarapur and a Paper Plant at Banah in Punjab. We have an excellent R & D Division which keeps pace with the times and a well equipped computer centre at Khopoli.

We have been exporting pipes consistently from the third year of operations and have won recognition for our efforts in the form of numerous official awards. Indeed, we have been the largest exporter of pipes for several years now. Over the years, we have exported 3.47 lakh tonnes of pipes worth more than Rs. 100 crores. We have also been exporting chemicals on a modest scale. We have catalysed industrial ventures abroad, the P.T. South Pacific Viscose being the largest single Indian investment in Indonesia.

I recall these achievements only to show that your company has amply demonstrated its ability and its will to work. And that brings me to what I see ahead of me.

I believe,as do millions, that the country is on the threshold of a future that is both exciting and challenging. I do not have to describe in great detail all the developments that have taken place in the course of the past one year or so. For the first time in the country's post independence history of nearly 37 years, we seem to have managed to drop many of the old inhibitions and ideological hang-ups.

This is not to underestimate the achievements on various fronts registered in the preceding decades. Indeed, looking back one can see that the country would not have been able to turn a new chapter, a task it is engaged in at present, without the solid foundation laid during these decades.

Perhaps, the greatest tribute that one can pay to the native Indian genius lies in the fact that far from collapsing morally on the fateful day of October 31, 1984 when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated, the country has rebounded with renewed vigour under the undisputed leadership of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi.

What is more, it is rapidly reflecting contemporary aspirations and is preparing itself for its entry into the 21st Century, which is just 15 years away.

The new Government has taken a series of pragmatic measures on economic and political fronts which have together instilled a sense of confidence and direction so necessary for the arduous task ahead.

ASHOK BIRLA

Starting from the realistic union budget that marked a significant, though overdue, change in the Government philosophy, New Delhi has taken several steps to relax outmoded restrictions in a bid to promote rapid industrial growth in several directions. Simultaneously, much has happened to improve the political climate in the country. India was a force to reckon with in world affairs despite its poverty and backwardness even at the worst of times. It has emerged once again on the international scene as a country determined to forge ahead, and nations of the world have been quick to sense this resolve as is seen in the keen desire of several developed countries to participate actively in the country's march ahead.

At home, the new mood of optimism has served as a big impetus to the growth of industries. Realising afresh that the country's economy offers vast scope for expansion and growth because of its huge domestic market, many more ventures are imminent on the industrial landscape of the country.

Various economic measures taken so far form parts of a definite new design for India's growth. What is particularly encouraging is the Government's clear and categorical assurance, given by the Prime Minister, that the basic aim would be to inspire confidence in the business community to undertake further investment. And I have no doubt that the perspective Five Year Economic Policy will usher in a new economic order.

Already, some of the facets of the emerging pattern have become clear. Its basic goals are development and absorption of new technologies, improvement in quality, reduction in costs and promotion of competition.

In other words, the industry in this country is being given, perhaps for the first time, a framework that offers active cooperation and assistance, abandoning an attitude of suspicion and confrontation.

In response the industry will have to exert to the maximum to satisfy the consumer as he will, and should in the ultimate analysis, have the final say.

We in Zenith are fully conscious of these implications. In fact, it is against this very background, that we have been planning our growth in various directions with the confidence that we have the necessary infrastructure in terms of expertise and manpower.

While we are identifying opportunities to broaden our activity in steel and steel tubes, our first love, we have applied for a letter of intent for an INTEGRATED STEEL PLANT in Madhya Pradesh. Starting from Sponge Iron with down stream steel melting, castings and rolling facilities, the plant will have an annual production capacity of 150,000 tonnes of steel. This will involve a capital outlay of Rs. 150 crores and we have every hope of getting the necessary Government approval.

We are actively pursuing the proposal to manufacture annually 50,000 tonnes of SEAMLESS TUBES at Khopoli in our bid to assist the programme of import substitution. It will meet the fast expanding requirements of Oil, Gas and Automobile Industries. Simultaneously, we are diversifying our Chemical Division to cover OIL FIELD CHEMICALS, which are imported at present and offer good growth potential. Because of a very high levy imposed by the Andhra Pradesh State Govt. on limestone, we were advised by the Financial Institution to pursue the CEMENT PROJECT with caution. This has delayed our implementation schedule

We expect that the completion of these projects in the next 3/5 years will involve an investment of about Rs. 250 crores. These projects will no doubt test our ability seriously but we are confident of making a success of them.

It is in the context of these plans to diversify into Capital Intensive Industries with a high growth potential and of vital relevance to the national economy that it is proposed to change the Company's name to ZENITH LIMITED.

To return to matters pertaining to the Company's working for the year ended June 30, 1985, I hope that you, Ladies and Gentlemen, would be satisfied with the results which show a rise in turn over from the 1983-84 level of Rs. 104.03 crores to Rs. 132.64 crores and in gross profit from Rs. 3.17 crores to Rs. 5.60 crores. As far as the current year's operations are concerned, the Company's turnover for the first 5 months (July to November, 1985) has amounted to Rs. 45.93 Crores against Rs. 38.35 Crores in the same period of the last year.

Before I conclude I would like to acknowledge with gratitude, during this Silver Jubilee Year of the Company, its unredeemable debt to people who brought into existence and nurtured it through thick and thin. What we have with us today is the product of the courage and vision of the late Shri R.D. Birla and the late Shri Shree Gopal Nevatia, who established this Company. It was Shri B.K. Birla and the late Shri Kamal Nevatia, who piloted the company for several crucial years.

If these were the architects of the enterprise, there are numerous others who toiled hard to bring it to its present position, and I acknowledge their contributions most gratefully.

Thank you,

Note: This does not purport to be a record of the proceeding of the Annual General Meeting.

ZENITH
-the first twenty five years

PRESSMAN

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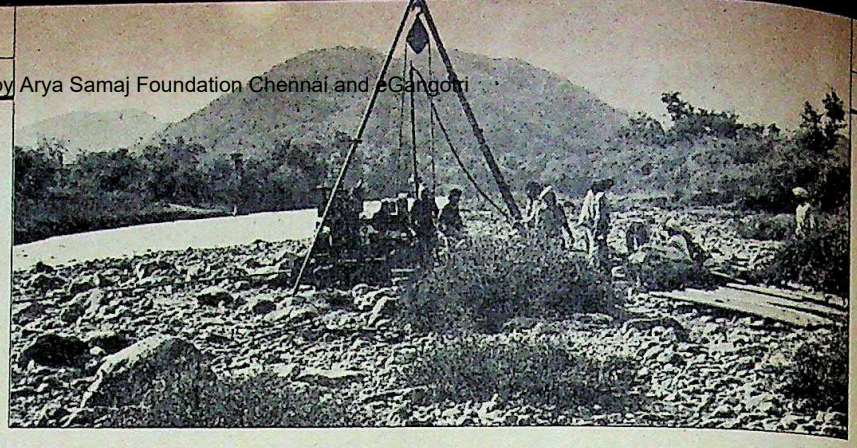
SARISKA

Wild Plans



Surveyors mapping out the dam site: a short-sighted scheme

A HYDEL generation unit plumb in the middle of a wildlife sanctuary? Incredible though it sounds, that is precisely what is being contemplated in Rajasthan's famed Sariska Sanctuary, 100 km west of Jaipur. Ironically, a survey of the proposed project—which will effectively destroy the sanctuary—was being carried out even as Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was savouring the delights of the Ranthambhor National Park, the state's only other well-known wildlife reserve.

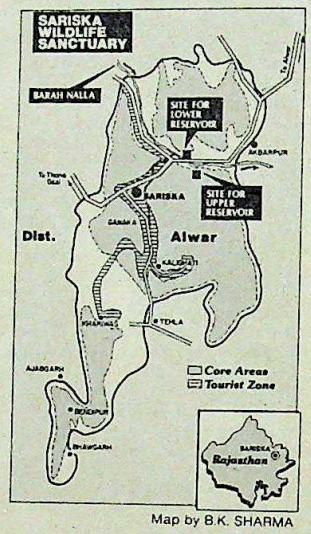
A team of the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) is presently surveying a portion of Sariska to examine the feasibility of putting up a 500 MW unit here. While the final decision is still several months away, the evidence gathered so far in the last 9 months of the Rs 1 crore survey is reportedly very encouraging from NHPC's point of view.

Opposition to the project has been vociferous, if somewhat belated. Says Rajasthan's Chief Conservator Bharat Singh: "We are totally opposed to it because it will not only ruin the forests but disturb wildlife as well." Adds the state's Chief Wildlife Warden O.P.Mathur: "Unfortunately the proposed site is adjacent to some of the thickest forests in the sanctuary which is the favourite spot for tigresses delivering their cubs." And a furious Kailash Sankhala former chief wildlife warden and the country's first director of Project Tiger, storms: "The idea is ridiculous. How can they even permit a survey in the heart of the sanctuary? If the project comes up it will finish off the very core of the sanctuary."

According to state government officials, the survey is the outcome of the near total breakdown of power supply to Delhi on July 19, 1984. A committee headed by A.N.Singh, chairman of the Central Electricity Authority, was set up to examine why the crises had occurred. The officials say the proposed unit at Sariska will ensure that this failure never repeats itself.

Official estimates predict that by 1992 the northern power grid will have an excess capacity of about 2000 MW during low demand hours—between 11 at night and 5 in the morning. At the same time, however, demand during the day will outstrip supply by more than 2000 MW. The idea, therefore, is to generate electricity at Sariska during peak demand hours and use the excess power available at night to pump water back into the upper reservoir.

Initially two possible sites had been identified by state and central officials in January 1985 near Alwar town, headquarters of the district in which Sariska lies. But later the sanctuary was chosen since the proposed new dam would be located on a local stream—the Barah Nallah—with a large catchment area of 270 sq km and an annual yield of 35 million cubic metres of water at the lower reservoir. Moreover, a natural bowl-type formation has been located on a nearby mountain top which could be converted into the upper reservoir and provide live storage for 14 million cubic metres of water. To generate 500 MW as per the proposed plan, the water flow rate from the upper reservoir will have to be 250 cubic metres per second. The area submerged has been calculated at about 4-5 sq km which, NHPC argues, is a small price to pay for so much of power.



Map by B.K. SHARMA

Valid though this argument seems, it does not stand close scrutiny, specially in the light of the fact that there is a proposal pending to upgrade Sariska sanctuary into a national park and a notification was issued to this effect by the state Government in August 1982. It's current area is 492 sq km but its upgrading will take this figure to about 700 sq km. According to the animal census figures for the summer of 1985, there are 35 tigers, 32 leopards, about 11,000 sambhar, 7,000 nilgai, 5,000 cheetal and nearly as many wild boar. Besides there are innumerable langoors, rhesus monkeys, peacocks, hyenas, jungle cats, mongoose, jackals and porcupines. The sanctuary, moreover, is home for such endangered species as the caracal and the four-horned antelope.

Interestingly, a forest cover of just over 31,000 sq km makes up a mere 9 per cent of Rajasthan's geographical area. Privately, forest officials admit that half this area is actually denuded and the only worthwhile forests remaining are those covered by sanctuaries. The Sariska sanctuary alone has about 10 per cent of the real forests.

The project will bring other problems in its wake. Explains Bharat Singh: "A project as large as this means hordes of labourers—perhaps as many as 10,000 during the peak hours of work. These people will stay for years right in the middle of the sanctuary and who is going to control them when they go about cutting wood from the forests for fuel? By the time construction is complete, there will be nothing left to save in the area. Worse, these schemes may get delayed and so much human movement will disturb wildlife." Also, the lake in the valley will submerge the road to Alwar and about 7 km of this road will have to be realigned which will literally pave the way for further destruction.

There is no harm in a survey—that seems to be the attitude of decision-makers in both Jaipur and Delhi. It buys time and deliberately sidesteps the basic issue of whether a well-endowed sanctuary can be endangered in this way. But the idea of having a hydel project inside Sariska makes a mockery of all the statements in support of wildlife made by people as prominent as the prime minister himself.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in Sariska

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(Indian Medical Gazette 118 223, 1984)

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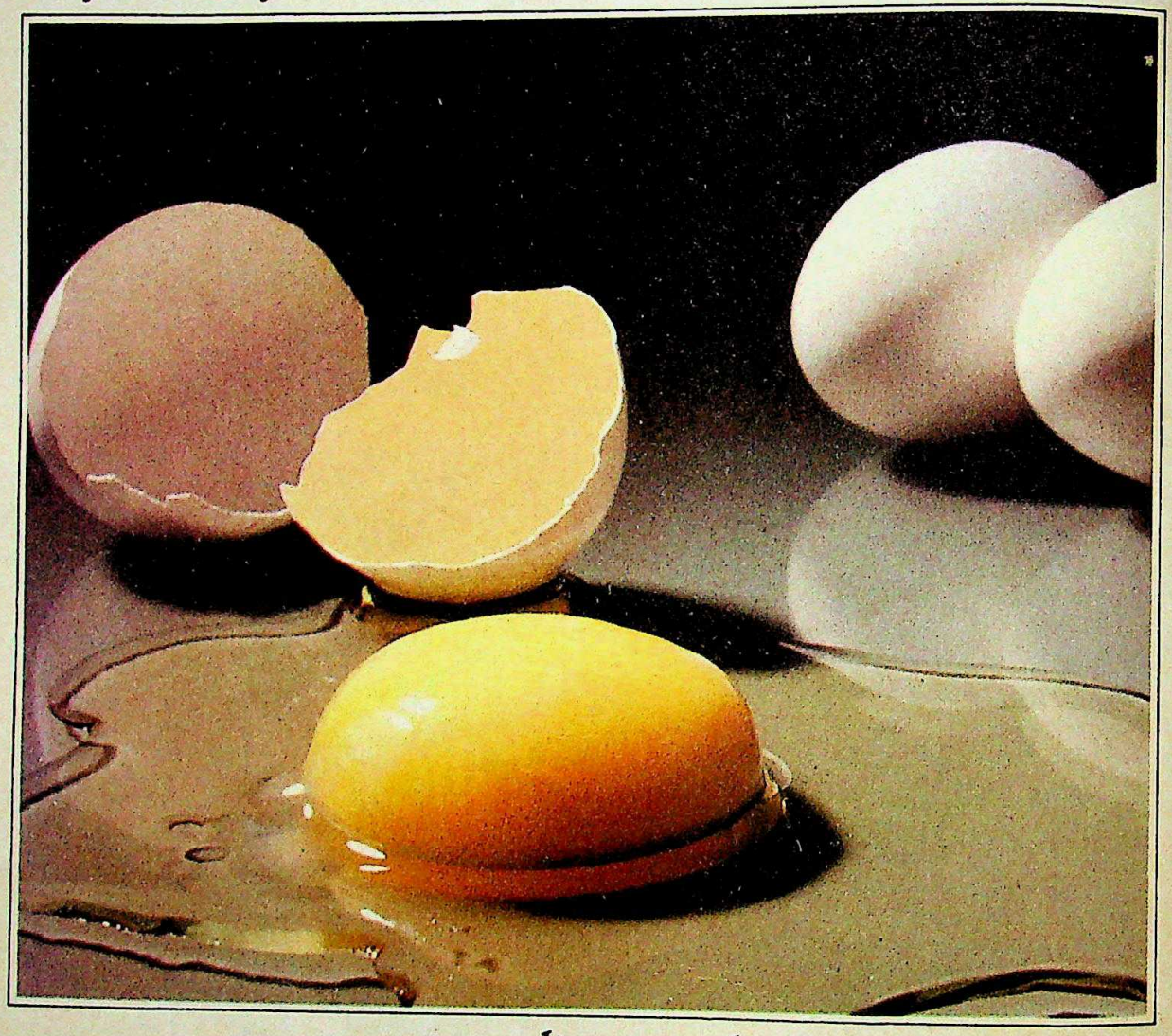

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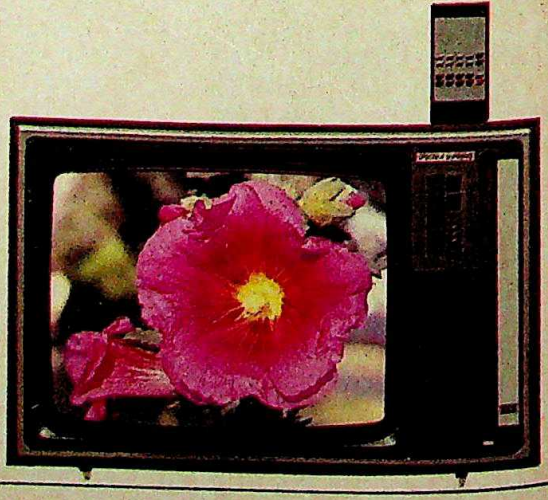

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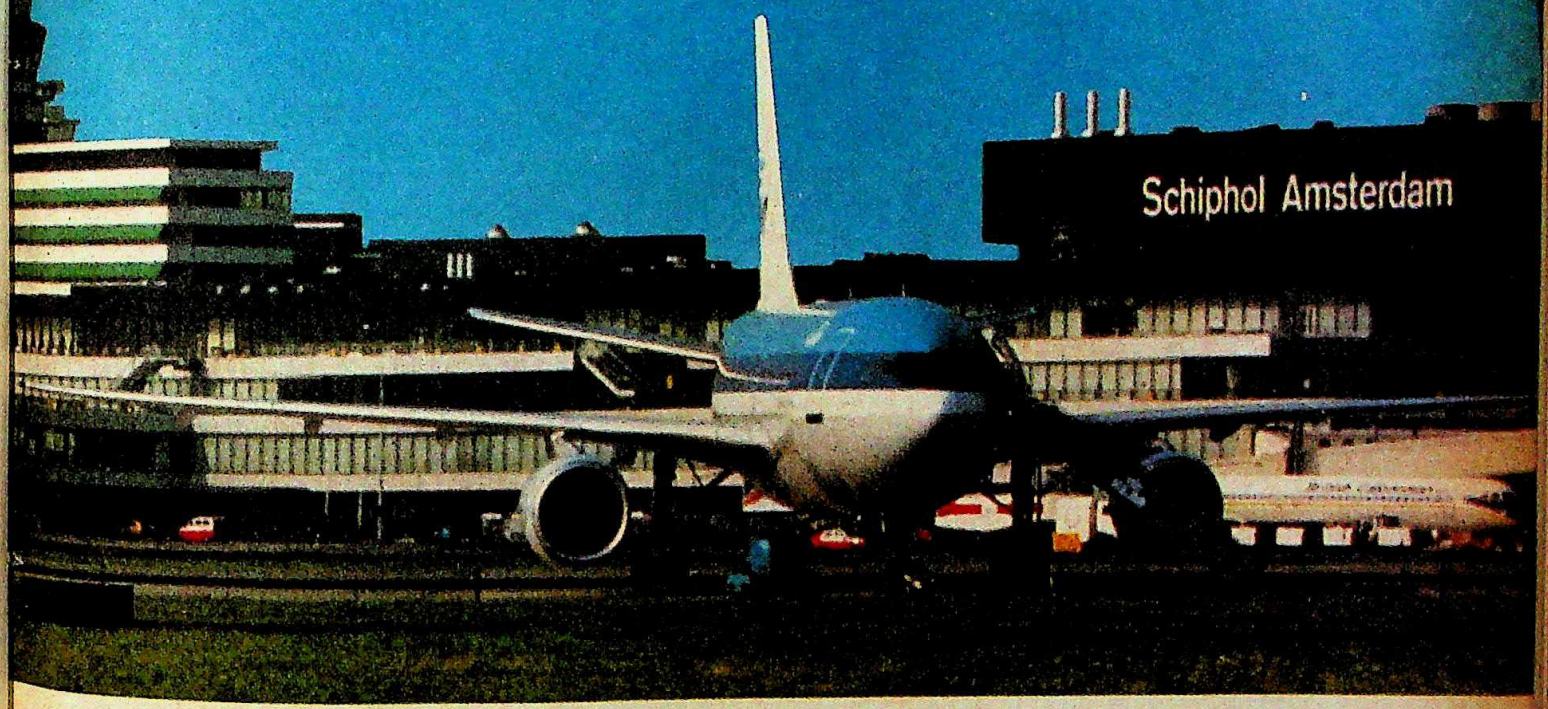

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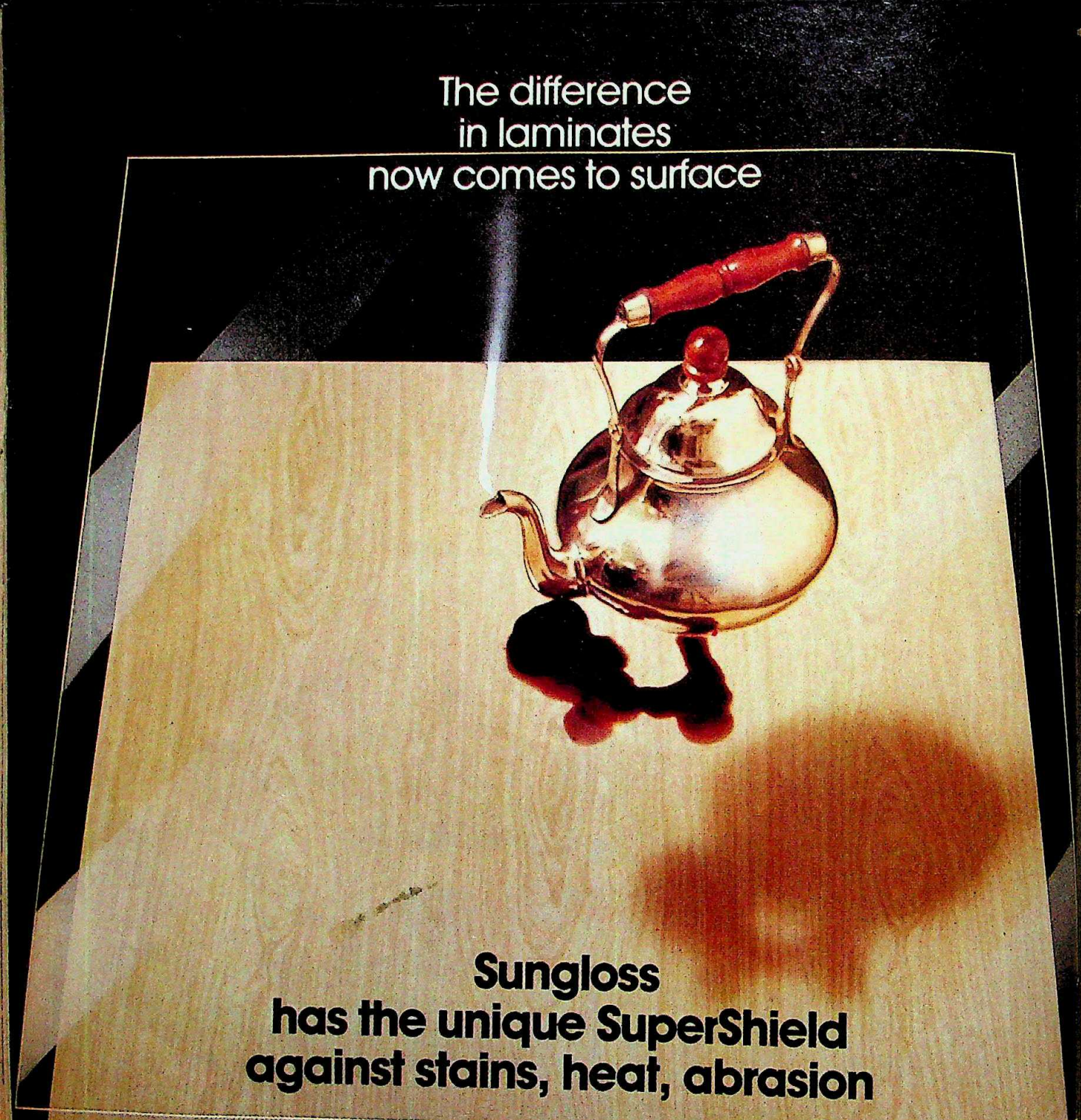

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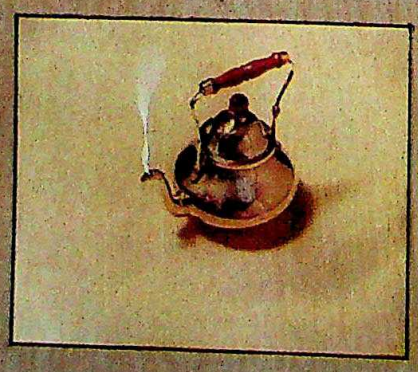

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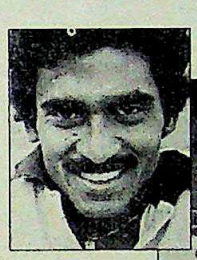
HOCKEY

Back in Form

THEIR last international triumph had come five years ago, at the Moscow Olympics. And most of the country had ceased to hope for very much from India's hockey eleven when, last month, they did the unexpected and emerged winners in two of three tournaments. Suddenly, there was no shortage of optimism regarding the future either. Said former captain Zafar Iqbal: "There is no reason why we should not win the gold at the Seoul Asiad later this year."

Those were brave words, for in the last Asiad, Pakistan had thrashed India 7-1 in the finals. But Iqbal knows what he is talking about. Pakistan, once India's nemesis, is no bogey at all: in the last five encounters India has beaten them four times, drawing the fifth. Even other sides hold no terror. India's comeback started at the Sultan Azlan Shah international tournament at Ipoh, Malaysia where it beat less-than-full-strength Australian and English teams to finish an unexpected winner.



India playing against West Germany in Dubai: (inset) Shahid (top) and Iqbal

There was nothing unexpected about the next victory. Participating in a four-nation $30,000 prize money tournament in Dubai last month, India prevailed over Pakistan (Olympic and world champions), West Germany and Great Britain (Olympic silver and bronze medallists respectively) to take the top spot. The team then went on to Kuwait where it trailed behind Pakistan, Holland and Great Britain in a similar tournament, but its confidence is unfazed. Says Captain Mohammed Shahid: "We had no business losing to Great Britain there. It was our over-confidence that was the cause of our undoing." M.A.M. Ramaswamy, the president of the Indian Hockey Federation (IHF), agrees: "Indian hockey is certainly seeing better days now because our boys are good. Even the defeat at Kuwait was not really a defeat—one goal made all the difference there."

For the Indian team what seems to have made the vital difference is 26-year-old Shahid himself. Shahid realised after two disastrous forays with his new-look team that the Indian team and he personally could not do without the services of three stalwarts who were inexplicably on the sidelines—Iqbal, full back Manohar Topno and forward Marcellus Gomes. When Ramaswamy, soon after taking over as IHF president, met Shahid in London and asked him if he wanted anything, Shahid told him that Iqbal and the others must be persuaded to come back.

Back home after the Malaysia tournament, Shahid personally got after the three, especially Iqbal. Shahid used every argument he had to convince Iqbal that he owed it to himself and the country to play for as long as he could—speaking mostly over the telephone from Varanasi, where Shahid stays, to Iqbal's house in Delhi. Shahid's sincerity and persistence worked and the players Iqbal, Topno and Gomes came back.

Shahid is quite categorical about the impact of the return of his team-mates: "Having played with Zafar *bhai* for five years, I know exactly what he is going to do in any given situation. There is no substitute for experience. You take myself. I do not want to boast but today I have the confidence that if I get the ball I know I can make something happen. But it is only now, after having played in more than 100 internationals, that I can say with confidence that I am not in the least concerned about who the opposing side is."

Says Iqbal: "There is no doubt that had it not been for Shahid's persistence I might not have agreed to come back. And let us not kid ourselves about what new blood can do: tournaments like the Champion's Trophy are not where you throw in freshers. There is so little to choose between the top six or seven teams in hockey today that self-confidence can make all the difference. It is this confidence that we have got back."

The core of the team now comprises those who have played together for at least three years: back Topno, halves Joachim Carvalho, Hardeep Singh and Victor Somayya and forwards Iqbal, Shahid, Jalaluddin and Gomes. Goalie Rajendra Singh Rawat and backs Pargat Singh and M.P.Singh, though relatively fresh, have shown evidence of class. The only weak link is the left half. "Give us a top class left half and we will take on the world," says Iqbal.

There are, of course, other lacunae. Says Ramaswamy: "It is high time our players began to concentrate on the short corner and the penalty. Also their stamina needs to be built up—they just fade out in the last 10 minutes." Hockey writers feel the Indians have to work out a response to the current trend of scoring from sudden, breakaway moves. The latest development in this is the goal scored after a hit scooped up from the home 25-yard to the opposing striking circle, much like in football: the strategy being to capitalise on any error by the defence. "That's not hockey," scoffs Shahid. Yet, the pragmatic Indian team has decided to do as the Europeans do and Carvalho is currently mastering the art of the scoop. What's important is that the Indian team is adapting, and consequently, winning.

The time may not be far off when the country will again be proud of its national game.

—AJAY KUMAR

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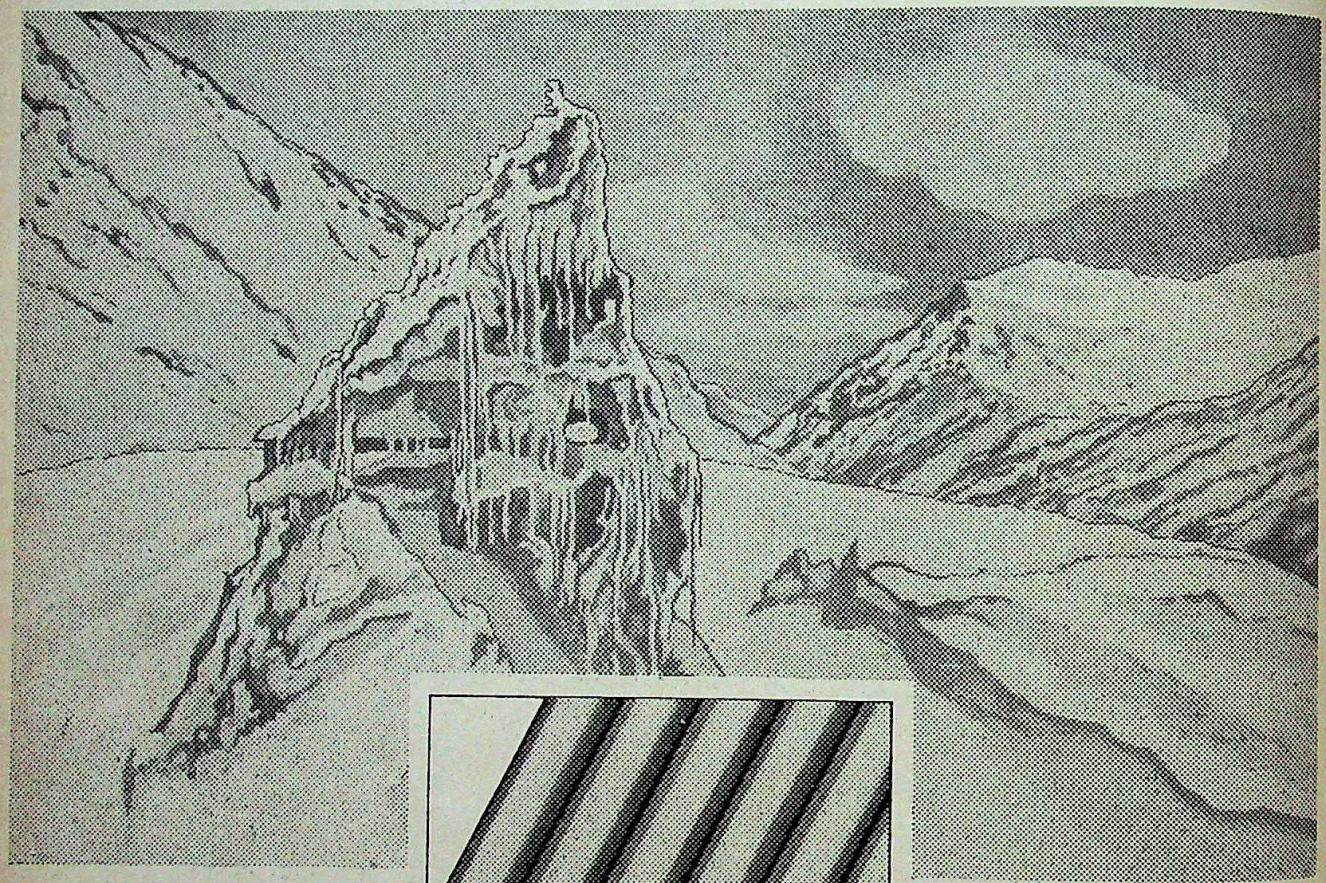

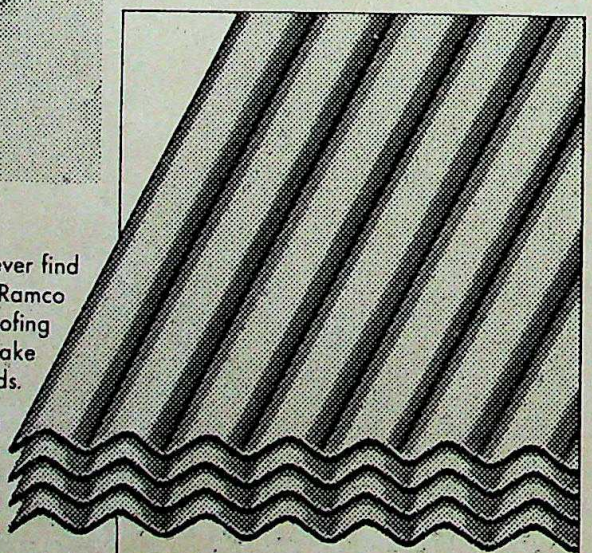

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CRICKET

Over Rated

WORLD SERIES CUP

TEN MONTHS after winning the so-called world championship of one-day cricket, India were engaged in a desperate struggle to qualify for the finals of the three-nation Benson and Hedges competition with Australia and New Zealand. After winning two of their first three matches in grand style, India tasted no success until the seventh of their 10 qualifying matches.

It was the intervening sequence of three defeats that revived speculation and rumours about a rift between the captain, Kapil Dev, and his predecessor, Sunil Gavaskar. They sprang from Gavaskar's slow batting during the closing overs of the match against Australia.

Having conceded to Australia a massive total of 292, India had no chance of winning and Gavaskar's loss of momentum did not alter the result. Where it did affect the interests of the team was that it diminished the overall scoring rate which could come into account in the event of two teams tying on points at the end of the qualifying competition.

The dust would have settled very quickly had Gavaskar not been missing from India's ranks when India played New Zealand two days later. His non-participation in that crucial match, due to a sciatic pain in the lumbar region, sparked off fresh speculation about an internal row.

On the eve of the match, manager Srinivas Venkataraghavan told the correspondent of his home town newspaper, *The Hindu*, that he had officially reprimanded Gavaskar for disregarding the interests of the side.

Gavaskar, speaking to the press during the Melbourne match, was emphatic that there was no rift between him and the captain. He said: "There has never been one harsh word exchanged between Kapil and myself in the seven years that we have played together for India." He also denied, just as vehemently, that he had been "ticked off" by the manager.

Kapil Dev himself was not happy with the way Gavaskar had batted in Sydney, but did not speak to him on the issue. There certainly was no row between them, nor is there reason to believe that Gavaskar on that occasion was consciously sabotaging the Indian effort. It must be appreciated that his own income from prize money is related to the team's success. Moreover, there are no more grounds for a personal conflict between past and present captain because Gavaskar voluntarily relinquished the captaincy.

There are various cricketing reasons why the performance of the team has not measured up to the standards achieved last year. The most obvious one is that the pitches are so different on this occasion. The world championship of cricket was played at Melbourne and Sydney at the end of the season when the pitches were worn from heavy use and favoured spin. They suited India and particularly leg spinner Sivaramakrishnan, who was a consistent wicket-taker. Not only have the pitches been less amenable to spin this time, but Sivaramakrishnan has been hopelessly out of form right through the tour.

Indian think tank of Kapil, Shastri and Gavaskar in Australia: short on ideas

The average age of the Indian side is much higher than its rivals, a fact that is reflected not only in its low mobility in the field and its efficiency in catching, but also in running between the wickets. More than one match has been lost through muffed catches and one defeat against Australia could be attributed to bad umpiring, particularly Umpire Ray Isherwood's unfavourable response in a run out situation involving Australian batsman, Steve Waugh. Waugh, who was three at the time, went on to play a match-winning innings of 81.

The Indian batting also does not have the firepower to score at speed in high-scoring matches. Their potential in this respect has been greatly limited by Srikkanth's loss of form since his rousing 50 in the first match in Brisbane, against New Zealand. Kapil Dev, another who has the eye and the timing to take an attack apart has seldom gone in with enough runs behind him to give him the confidence to cut loose straight away.

But largely it is the bowling that has let India down. The only two bowlers who have bowled well and economically match after match are Kapil Dev and Ravi Shastri. Roger Binny and Chetan Sharma have picked up some useful wicket, but most times have bowled too short a length and have been expensive in the currency of no-balls and wides.

Captaincy is another area in which India has suffered. Kapil Dev is not very sensitive to the nuances of one-day cricket. The timing and duration of his own bowling spells have often been awry and his placing of the field has been unimaginative, specially when it comes to stopping the lesser partner in a stand from feeding the strike to the more aggressive associate. This however, does not take away from Kapil Dev's intelligence or his grasp of the game. It is extremely hard to combine the roles of a frontline bowler, specially a pace bowler, and captain.

India's weaknesses alone have not marked the course of the competition. It would be short-sighted not to acknowledge the qualities of their opponents, Australia and New Zealand. Australia's bowlers have not only been remarkably accurate, but also penetrative when they have had scope to attack. As for New Zealand, Martin Crowe has batted with authority and consistency and has not lacked for support from Wright, Edgar, Coney and his brother Jeff. The great Richard Hadlee has touched high peaks and Ewen Chatfield has hardly had a bad match. Stewart Gillespie too has turned in notable performances.

If India is to remain a force in one-day cricket, it must build a young side which will field more aggressively and run more sharply between the wickets. The current squad clearly lacks the fitness to stand the rigours of a long campaign.

—DICKY RUTNAGUR in Sydney

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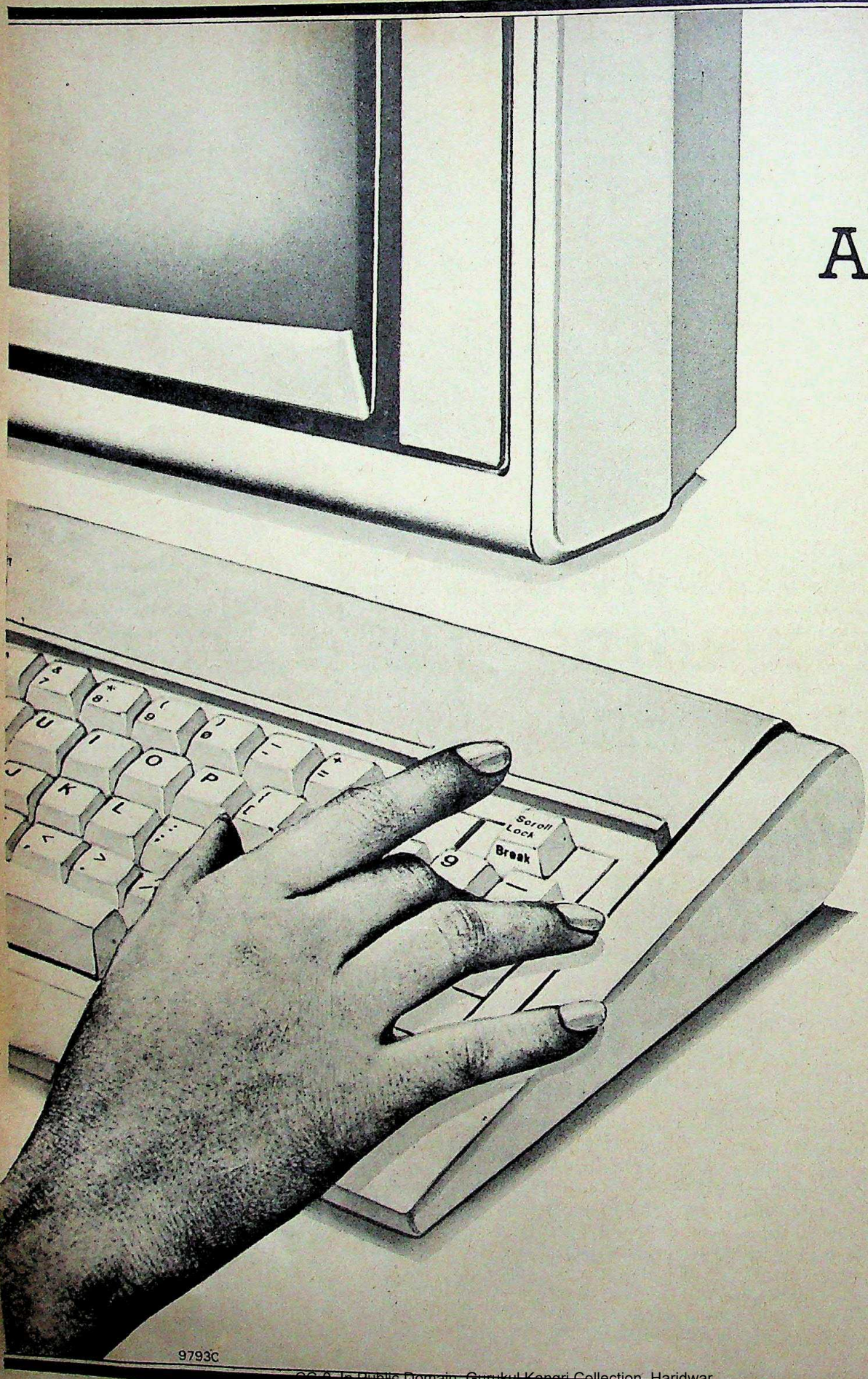

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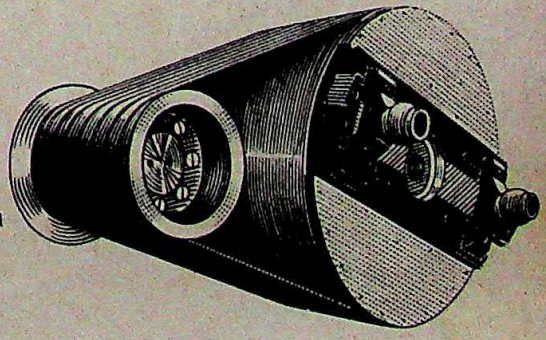

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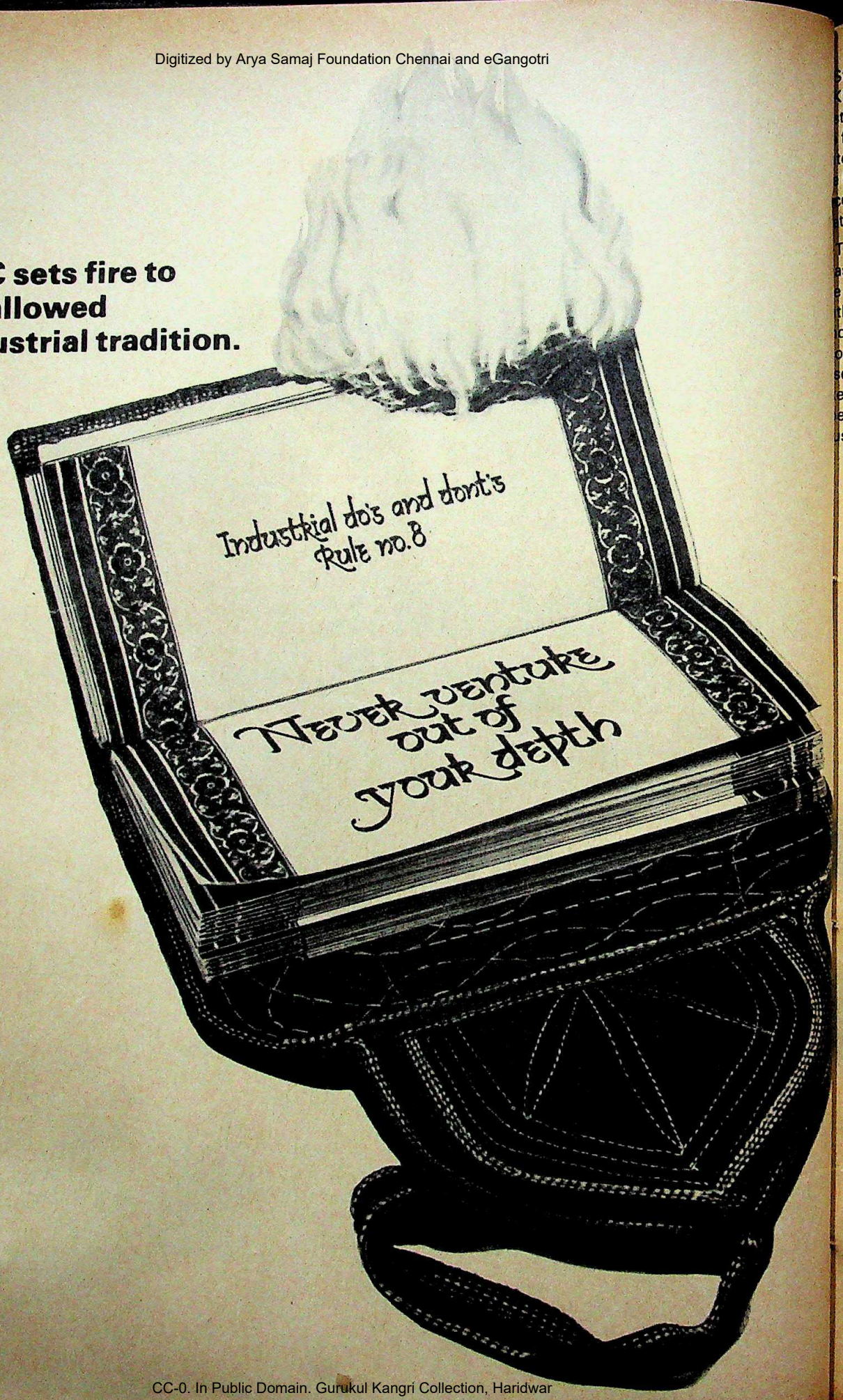

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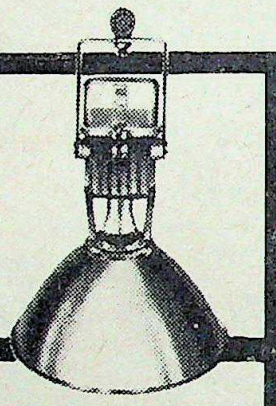

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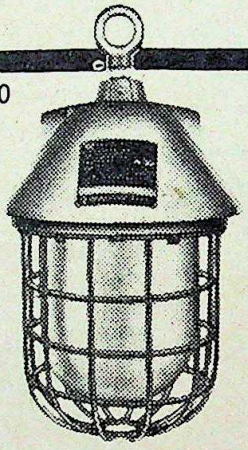

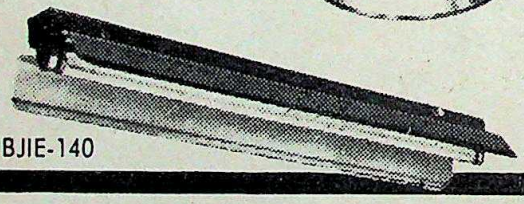

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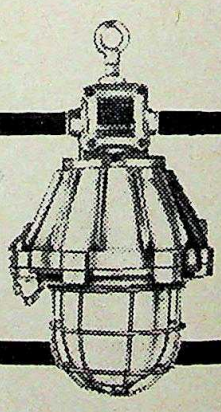

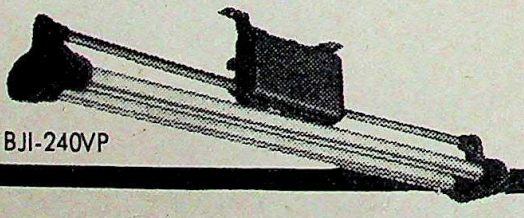

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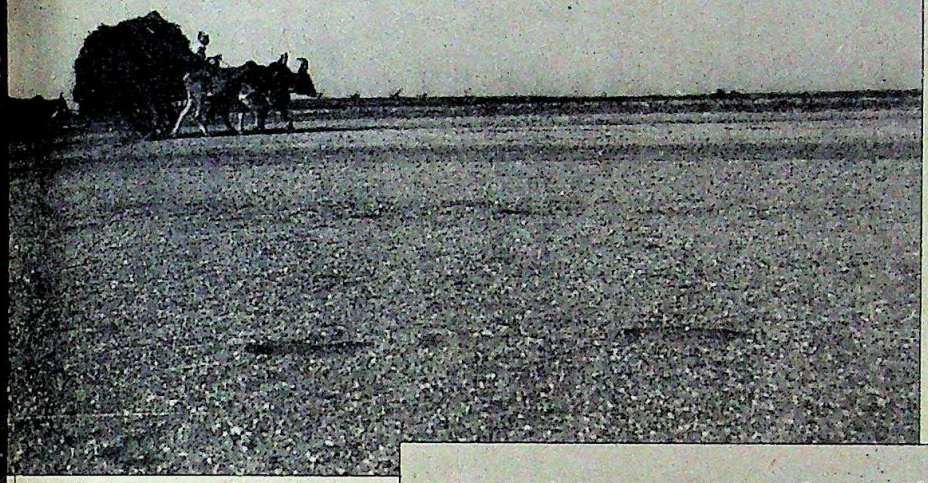
SAURASHTRA

Tears of Salt



Coastal Gujarat is grappling with a man-made environmental disaster: 1.2 million hectares of fertile land has turned saline, affecting over 1.33 million people in 779 villages.

THE VILLAGERS in Saurashtra pride themselves on their hospitality. No visitor to this western corner of the country is allowed to return without having a cup of tea and home-made snacks. But the times are changing, and serving tea has become a problem in many of Saurashtra's villages—not because the villagers are any less hospitable but because tea cannot be made with the saline water available in the area as it spoils the milk.

Coastal Gujarat is grappling with a man-made environmental disaster: 1.2 million hectares of fertile land stretching for 1,059 km between Bhavnagar and Lakhpat has turned saline, affecting over 1.33 million people in 779 villages. The area between Una and Madhavpur is the worst affected, with salinity ingress reaching 10 km inland and affecting 120 villages in the Junagadh and Amreli districts.

The residents of the area had never dreamt that such a fate would befall them. In the 1960s, Gujarati poets had been inspired to write poems on this lush area, calling it "Lili Nager" (green creeper). The area was dotted with prosperous fruit plantations and fields of sugarcane and groundnut. But now, for miles on end, not a blade of grass grows and the reassuring beat of diesel pumps has been replaced by a deathly silence.

Prosperous farmers have been forced to leave their fields and become menial labourers in nearby areas. Laments Baval Sidi, whose four acres of land in Miyani village of Junagadh district was blighted by saline water: "My land is useless. No one wants to buy it and I have been reduced to a labourer."

Ironically, coastal Saurashtra's fertility contributed in no small measure to this distressing state of affairs. In the zeal to usher in a green revolution in this fertile tract, the state Government in the mid-1960s liberally granted loans to farmers to install irrigation pumps. Soon an astonishing 90 per cent of the fields had diesel pumps. The withdrawal of groundwater increased fivefold. Crops like sugarcane—which require large amounts of water—flourished and sugar factories sprang up in places like Talala.

But the revolution upset the delicate balance of nature. Rainfall used to replenish the water table and thereby keep sea water at bay. But the massive withdrawals of water led to a steep drop in the water table, and sea water seeped in. In 1974, Mangrol's water table was 22 feet below the surface; today it is 40 feet and the wells on the coast have become brackish. Worse, many farmers realised too late that the water had turned brackish and continued to use it for irrigating their fields, ruining the top soil.

Environmentalists like Lavkumar Khacher had sounded warnings of disaster over a decade ago, but his was a voice in the wilderness. Khacher says today with some bitterness: "When we warned people, they laughed at us and dismissed us as idealistic dreamers."

Consecutive droughts from 1972 to 1974 led to the water table falling further, and the sea water flowed in. Wells in villages like Adri, Sutrapada, Dhamlej, Antroli and Shil registered a staggering salt content of 10,000 parts per million (PPM). Water becomes undrinkable after 600 PPM and unfit for irrigation after 2,000 PPM. Sea water has a salt content of 30,000 to 40,000 PPM. Predictably, crop yields plummeted. In the area between Una and Madhavpur, the mango yield fell from 40 tonnes per acre in the early 1970s to 20 tonnes, coconut from 20,000 nuts to 8,000 per acre, bananas from 19 to 10 tonnes, sugarcane from 110 to 55 tonnes and bajra from 2,800 kg to 1,400 kg. Farmer Kana Barad of Badalpara village in Junagadh district ruefully examines the sickly-looking jowar in his fields and voices a common local sentiment: "Only God can help us now."

Land prices have fallen dramatically, when there are buyers at all. Prices in the mid-1960s used to range up to Rs 25,000 or more per acre, but now most land goes abegging. "There are no buyers," says farmer Naga Narain, whose two acres lie barren in the hot sun.

Some cultivation is still possible in many places because the farmers depend on the rains to provide one rain-fed crop a year. Many farmers have also switched to crops like cotton and groundnut as these need 80 per cent less water than sugarcane, bananas and other fruits. But even one crop a year is often not possible, because the monsoons fail, as happened this year. Some, like Laka Rana Vala, pay a heavy price when this happens. Vala had sown 370 kg of wheat, resting his hopes on the monsoon. Today, he is a broken man, and his torn clothes and gaunt cheek-bones tell the tale of a pauper even though he owns 10 acres of land.

Polarama Barad talks nostalgically of the time his parents in Adri used to grow fruits on their six-acre farm. "It was very profitable," he recalls but now, the field is used to grow only one crop of rain-fed groundnut. And it speaks volumes that among the 'happiest' farmers in the area today is Varjang Barad, who owns two

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acres in the same village. His groundnut crop fetched him Rs 4,000, enabling him to make a profit of Rs 1,000. "It is ridiculous to think that I can be happy with earning such a small amount in a whole year, but 90 per cent of the farmers lost everything they sowed," he says.

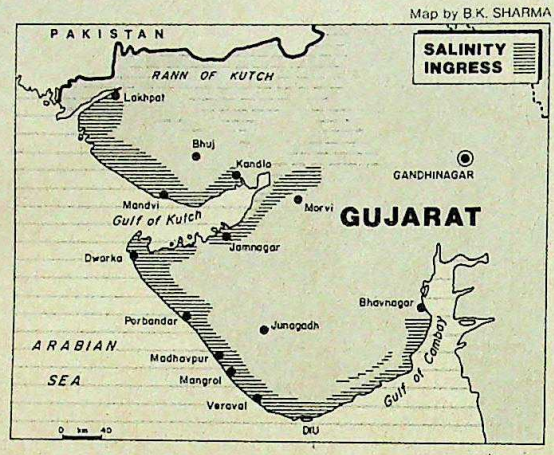
Driven by poverty, most of the Adri villagers desperately want to sell their cattle but refrain from doing so for fear that they will end up in the slaughterhouse. Says Barad: "Bullocks have been the mainstay of our lives. If they have to die, let them die in our courtyards." Many farmers have begun migrating in search of work. But others, like Kanabhai Haridas, refuse to consider that option: "We were born here and we will die here. How can we leave our land behind? All these years it gave us so much." Haridas sold his family jewellery last year for Rs 5,000 as there was nothing to eat.

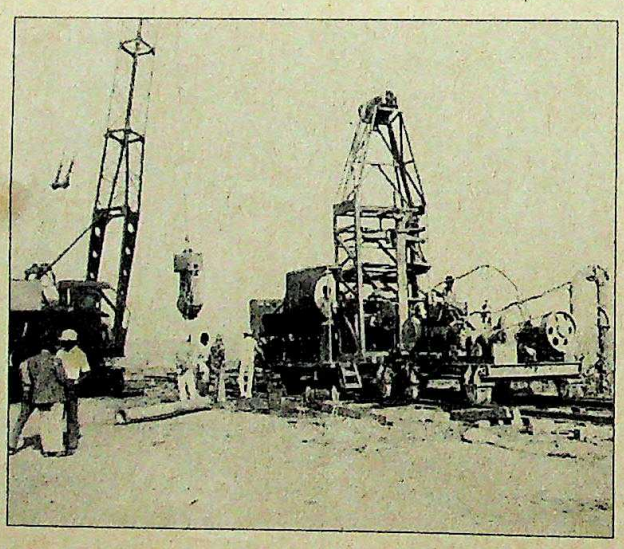
Awakening to persistent complaints from villagers in Saurashtra, the state Government appointed a committee in 1974 under the then chief secretary H.K.L. Capoor to go into the complaints. The report unequivocally stated the only solution was to artificially recharge the subsoil with water. The catch: it would cost a staggering Rs 65 crore just to reclaim the 160 km stretch of land between Una and Madhavpur. So the report was shelved. But as the salinity problem got worse, another committee was appointed in 1978 under Capoor's successor, K.Shivraj. This committee recommended bunds on rivers, artificial recharging of the subsoil with water, massive afforestation and other measures—and the cost had escalated to a whopping Rs 800 crore. The Government finally started moving in a small way—a Rs 36 crore plan was drawn up, with Rs 24 crore coming from the World Bank alone.

A spate of construction is now under way in the area for erecting 150 checkdams, two tidal regulators (to prevent sea water from entering dry rivers during high tide), and bunds across rivers to facilitate water storage, while an afforestation drive is on along the coast. The most ambitious project is the Rs 6.27-crore Medha Creek project—a concrete bund to prevent the sea from flooding flat land. When completed in 1990, it will also help store 1,340 million cubic feet of fresh water, thereby recharging the water table and irrigating over 10,000 acres of land in Junagadh and Jamnagar districts.

However, all this is confined to the 160 km belt. The rest of the coastal area still cries out for attention. But a senior state government official offered little hope: "Finances do not permit us to even think of what we can start doing in the other areas," he said. Officials are also sceptical about how the Government is going to get the Rs 800 crore it needs for further conservation work, and the fact that this is the first time in the country that such a multi-disciplinary effort is under way makes the going even tougher.

Map by B.K. SHARMA





Construction at Medha Creek: ambitious project

But the limited effort already made has started showing results. The Irrigation Department—which has been closely monitoring salinity levels in 1,500 wells—indicated that 15,000 of the one lakh acres affected by salinity had improved, and farmers had started cultivating them. Salinity levels in wells near bunds or tidal regulators had dropped, and wells in 35 villages had become potable again. But with the failure of the monsoon, salinity levels had once again shown an increase last month. Says J.F.Mistry, irrigation secretary: "Our projects can only be successful if there is enough rain. We cannot fight nature."

The situation is likely to get worse in the coming months as none of the checkdams now hold water, making sea water ingress inevitable. And since the rock strata all along the Saurashtra coast are of miliolite limestone—full of cavities and very porous—water easily flows in. But 10 km ahead, the formation ceases and non-porous rock checks sea water ingress. And a checkdam in Visenvel village in Junagadh district wards off sea water while stopping the river water from flowing into the sea. Tarmohammed Daud, who lives near the checkdam, says his wheat crop is now flourishing. "If more such dams come up thousands of farmers will be freed from the curse of salinity," he says.

Rather late in the day, the Government has also decided not to permit any more well energisation in the coastal zone, and the land development bank and commercial banks have been restrained from advancing loans for buying motors. But this is hardly enough. Capoor and Shivraj had called for water legislation to prevent farmers from drawing excess water. "It is impossible to tell a farmer that he should use water sparsely as that would stunt his profits," laments geologist Anil Bhatnagar. "The legislation will ensure that water becomes fit for irrigation purposes, but if the farmers start withdrawing too much we will have the old problem again on our hands."

Water legislation is one solution, but as Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary pointed out "it will be politically impossible." The multi-dimensional plan for all of coastal Gujarat seems equally unlikely because of the state government's shortage of funds. Said Chaudhary: "We may need about Rs 1,000 crore to control salinity for which we will have to ask the World Bank for loans. And we do not know whether such a huge loan will be possible." And there is no third solution in sight at the moment. In that situation, the thousands of farmers in Saurashtra may be fated to see only mirages of fresh water.

—RAMESH MENON in Veraval and Porbandar

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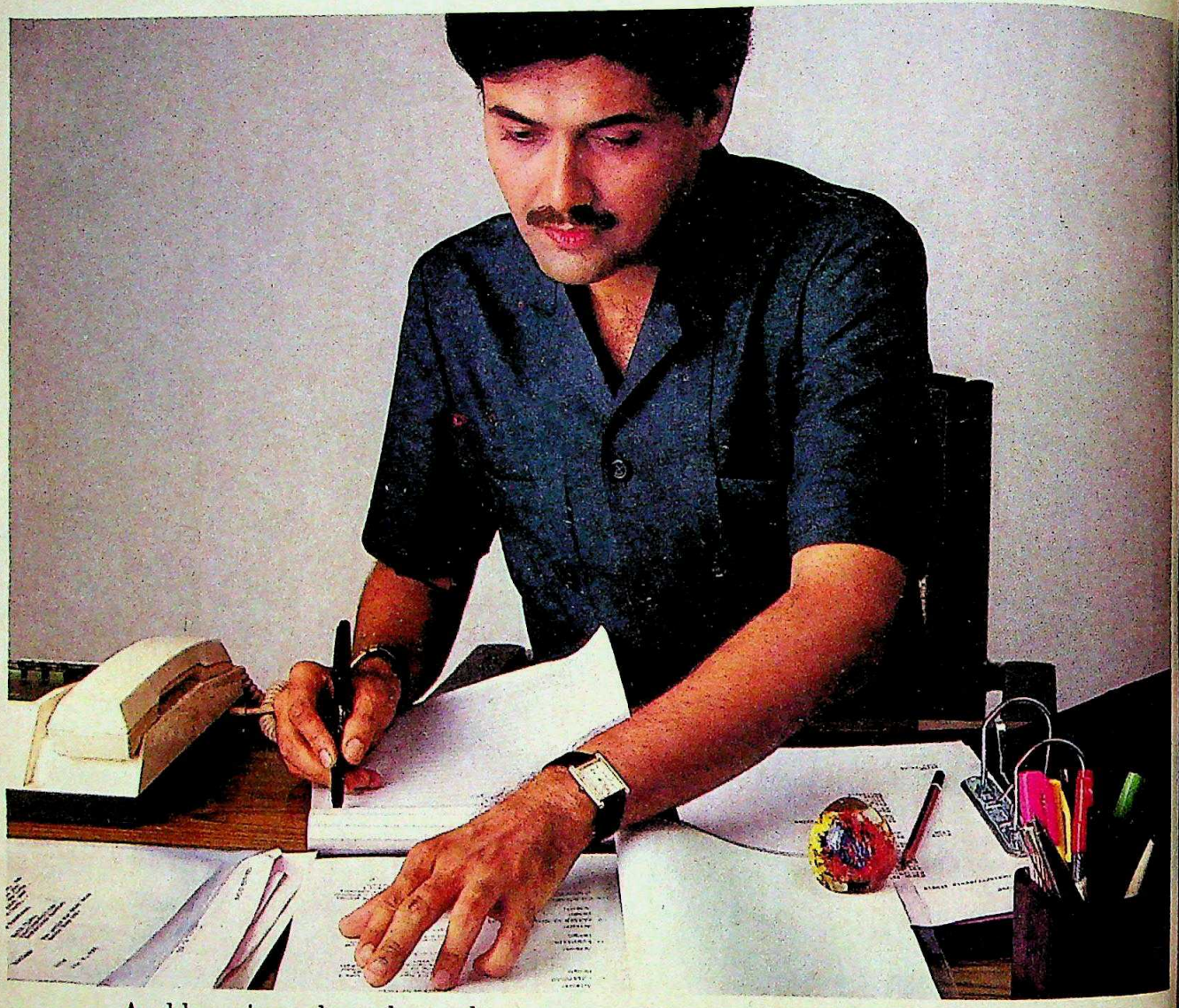
Come to think of it, it's very simple to be happy.



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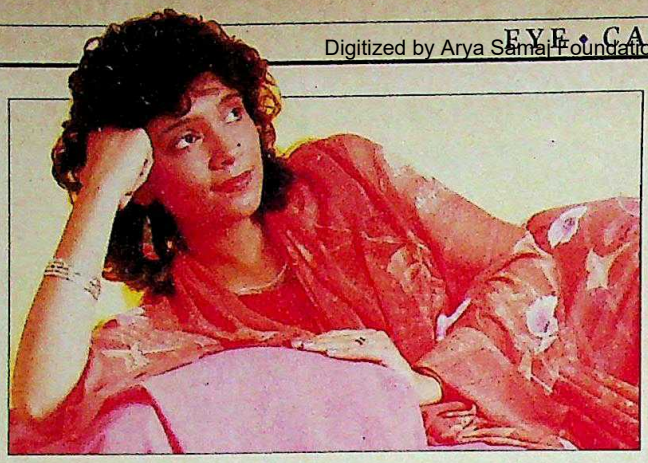
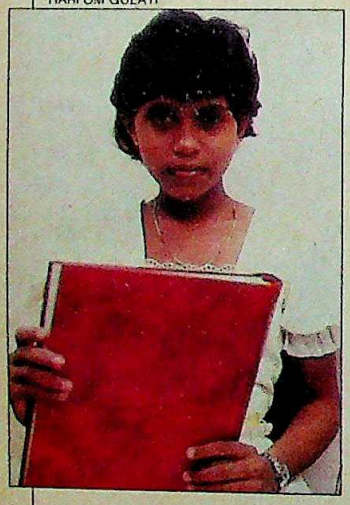


Masani: audio-visual

◆ The postman rang only once but it was more than enough for **Manique Cooray**. For the shy, dusky, 12-year-old schoolgirl of Colombo's Moratuwa suburb, it was a dream come true. She had wanted to become an air-hostess when she grew up—just so she could meet him. But here was his letter. "Be my guest," he had written; and she flew to Delhi to meet her famous pen-friend for the first time in her

HARI OM GULATI



Cooray: red-letter week

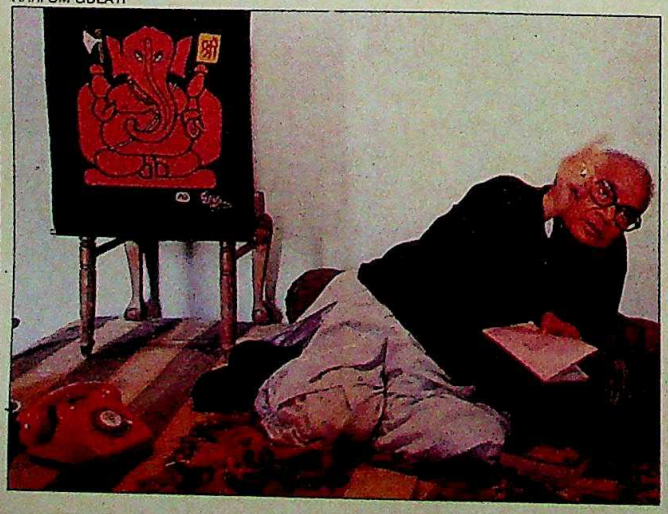
life—the Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi himself. Cooray, as Rajiv's personal guest, went sight-seeing in Delhi and Agra, watched the Republic Day parade and could not understand why their countries could not be friends like she and her pen-pal. She went back happy, breathless and gushing over her friend Rajiv: "He is so nice and friendly and he loves children." There's one snag, though. Now that she has met him and needn't become an airhostess, poor Cooray doesn't know what she wants to be when she grows up.

◆ They always said her looks were better than her voice. She took them on their word and now, after making herself heard, she is bent upon making herself seen too—if only in a soap opera. **Penaaz Masani**, the *bawi* ghazal singer from Bombay, will now breeze into living-rooms—perm and all—every once in a while through the national tube. The serial is *Suwarnarekha* and the role—you've guessed it—is of a singer all set to make it big despite a couple of odds—rich, obstinate parents in this case. The odds too are for real—it took weeks of smooth talk by the serial-makers to convince her father, who was averse to the idea of his daughter acting in a serial to begin with. But once allowed, it didn't take long for Masani to slide into the role. "I am singing the title song and have already recorded a Meera bhajan for the second episode," says the singer. Her only bother is: "There is a boy opposite me and the least we can do is hold hands. I don't know how Dada will react to it." As if ghazals were all about the birds and bees!

◆ You can't keep a good man down and guess what he's pulled out of his green bandana this time? A role in a movie—**Raj Narain** as Guru Nanak, if you please, shooting begins February 1. No, it's no comedy of errors. For once, the former Janata jester is dead serious. "It's a social-religious film called *Sadbhav* (goodwill) and I'm doing it to cleanse society," comes the lofty pronouncement. It's the beard that did it. "My friend who's making the film said my beard was just like Guru Nanak's," says the leader, stroking a chin that's ironically shorn of its glory these days. But what of the *sammelans* and *padyatras*? "I won't have any problems finding time, since I always have time for noble deeds," he assures. To the coterie of *bhaiyas* surrounding him, he is already something of a star as he chortles: "So far we've only had actors becoming MP's; now I will reverse this trend." Competition at last for Amitabh Bachchan.

Narain: star turn

HARI OM GULATI



SIGNPOST

◆ **Nikhil Bannerjee**, 55, who died of a cardiac attack in Calcutta last fortnight, was the only sitar-player in India who could manage to retain his identity without being a clone of either Ravi Shankar or Vilayat Khan. A musician of extraordinary depth, Bannerjee learnt his sitar from Baba Alauddin Khan.

But the sitarist ploughed a lonely furrow, absorbing the grammar and discipline of Alauddin Khan's Senia school, yet coming under profound influence of vocalist Amir Khan. By the late 50's, Bannerjee was reckoned as an original artiste, with a style that had the formal symmetry of the Senia school and the spiritual depth of Amir Khan's singing. He cut several discs, both at home and abroad, and

Bannerjee: autumn *raga*

performed and lectured extensively in Europe and the US.

It was all this and more that got him the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1974, as well as the Padma Shri, besides other frequent honours. Three days before his death, he aptly played at a public concert in Calcutta, Raga Hemant, created by Alauddin, which, in its austerity, captures the melancholy of the autumn.

—Compiled by MOHAMMED ASLAM

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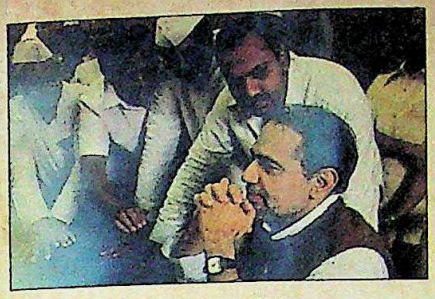
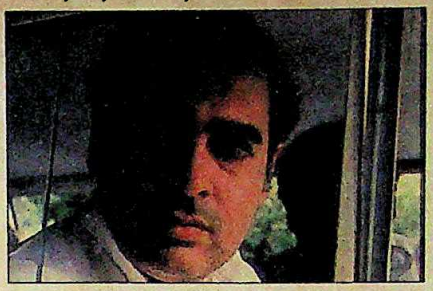


The Resignation Drama

The dramatic resignation last week of R.K. Hegde, chief minister of Karnataka, took the nation by storm. By one stroke, he turned the table on his critics who had been gunning for him in the wake of the adverse high court judgement against his government.

COVER STORY 26



The Fading Glitter

The harsh popular reaction to the Government's petroleum price hike coming close on lost by-elections and the bungled Punjab accord spelt the end of the Rajiv Gandhi euphoria. A special report on the changed mood.

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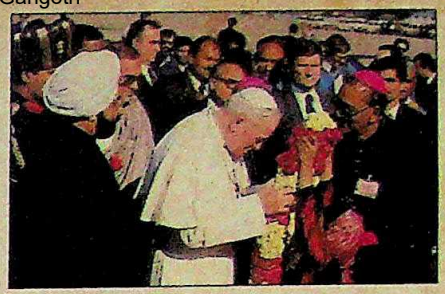

A Pope's Pilgrimage

Last fortnight's whirlwind tour of India by Pope John Paul II was as much an event for the faithful as for the curious. Despite protests from fanatic Hindu groups, the "People's Pope" lived up to his image with multitudes swarming around him. A pictorial feature.

PHOTO FEATURE 78

Rewarding Links

Dealerships for Maruti cars have become surefire business propositions. But the manner in which Maruti Udyog Ltd has gone about selecting its dealers has become a questionable issue with people close to the Congress(I) being favoured.

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Calling the Shots

If Punjab today is different from what it was a year ago, it is also uncannily similar. The guns and saffron turbans of yore have been replaced by grim, more portentious symbols. And it is Bhindranwale's young inheritors who are now in charge.

SPECIAL FEATURE 90

Going Down Under

India's standing as world-beaters in one-day cricket suffered a serious setback in the Benson and Hedges Cup in Australia last fortnight. The team's performance raised serious questions, not the least about the captaincy issue. An on-the-spot report.

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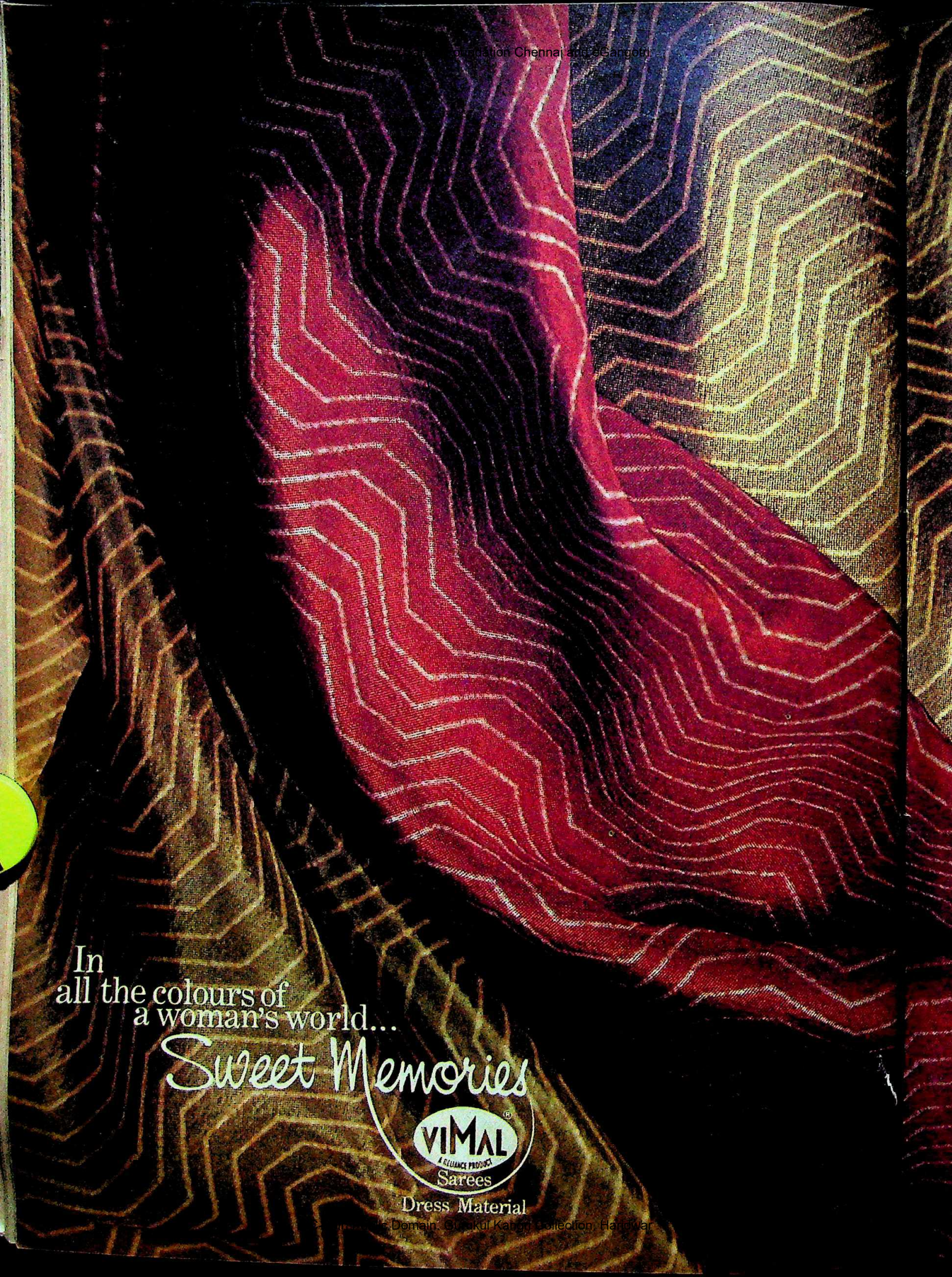

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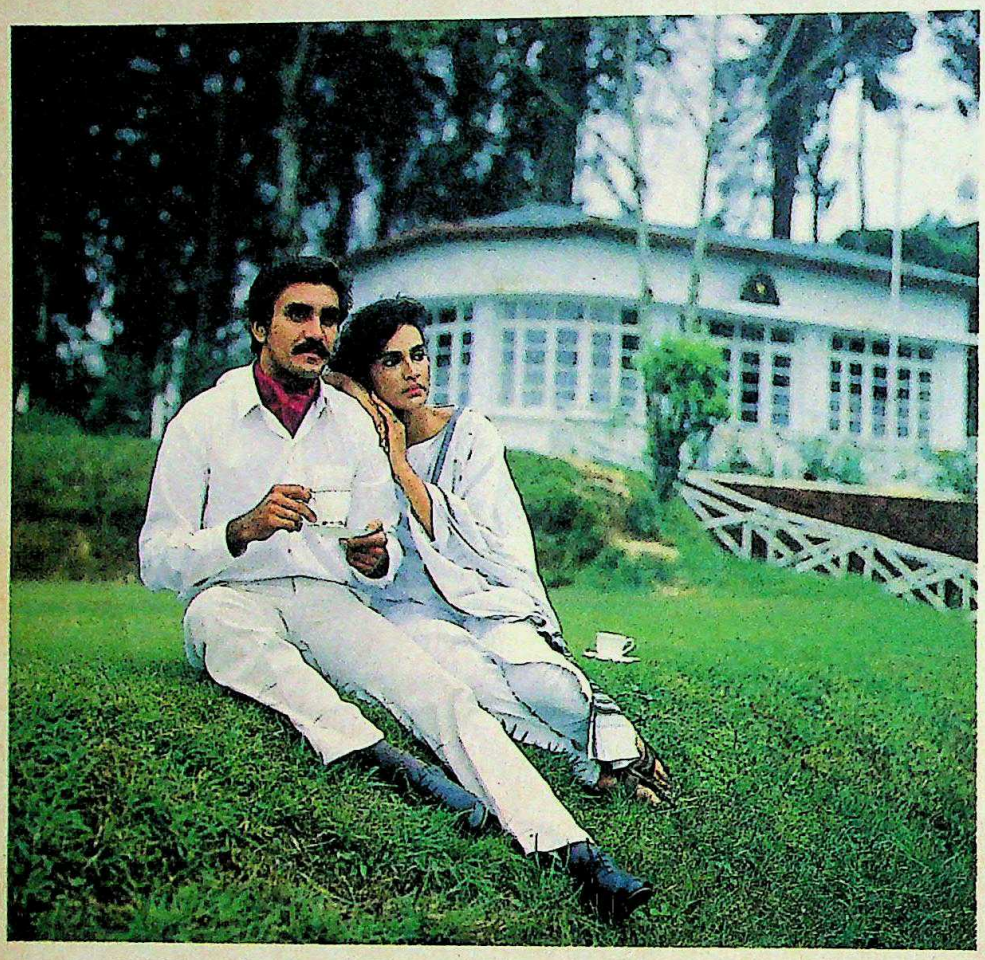

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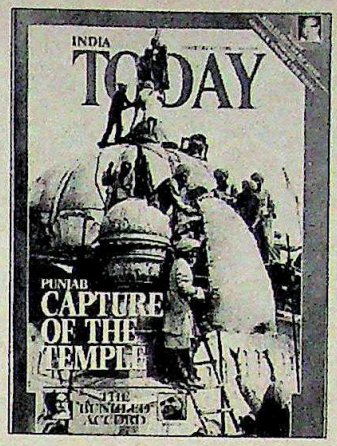

DIRECT ACTION

What is happening in Punjab ("Capture of the Temple", February 15) is deplorable and the sooner it is controlled the better it will be for the entire country. Whatever the consequences of the takeover, the blame will be on G.S. Tohra and S.S. Barnala. The excuse of avoiding bloodshed put forward by Tohra is very flimsy. There will be a lot more bloodshed if the situation continues to be the way it is.

Delhi — **UDAI KHANIJOW**

■ The takeover of the Golden Temple complex by the followers of Bhindranwale has thrown out an aura of sinister and powerful menace in Punjab. The situation is once again in a labyrinth. The arrogance of the Taksal and the AISSF is a lucid indication of the burgeoning of yet another crisis. To add insult to injury, the implementation of the Rajiv-Longowal agreement was not carried out on Republic Day. This, beyond a shadow of doubt, spelt the doom of the implementation of the first phase of the accord.

It seems Punjab is unfortunately going back in time. This is something that has to somehow be stopped immediately. Otherwise the situation will get totally out of control.

Bangalore — **CHIDANAND KUMAR**

■ As a leader of the ruling party, Surjit Singh Barnala should change his attitude towards the followers of Bhindranwale, and instead concentrate on maintaining law and order within the Golden Temple and strike a peaceful settlement with the militants and try to rebuild a prosperous Punjab. Barnala should implement the accord and get control over the temple without any kind of violence or bloodshed.

Madras — **K.V. RAJAGOPALAN**

■ It is very surprising to see the Central Government not taking any action against the extremists. What is alarming is the fact that not a single Sikh seems to oppose the activities of the extremists. The breaking down of the Akal Takht makes no sense, but who has opposed it?

Falna — **SANJEEV KUMAR DEV**

WINDOW DRESSING

Ever since Independence there has never been a politician who has not made money for himself. Your Comment, "Political Immunity" (February 15) is a widely known fact and repeating the same story does not serve any purpose for no politician can reform himself at least in the near future. It is doubtful whether the Government has been successful in carrying out its drive against corruption in the big industrial houses since everyone at the top seems to escape without punishment, probably due to political backing.

Madras — **FRANKLYN STANLEY**

■ Your editorial has rightly blamed politicians for the present corrupt life of the country, they have gained as much as businessmen through the creation and operation of the licence-permit raj. And the fact that those who surrounded the late prime minister in the last years of her power have been sent into wilderness shows that there was something wrong with the old regime, but a lot of the beneficiaries still occupy important positions. Your suggestion that the politicians should now be included in the taxman's net is a sound proposal but whether the finance minister would like to attack his own tribe has to be seen.

Moradabad — **V.S. GARG**

POWER PLAY

Cabinet reshuffle seems to have become an important tool in the hands of the new leadership to strengthen its grip on the party ("Shuffle Puzzle", February 15). In the process, the veterans get sidelined on the pretext of their being power brokers. It should be remembered that it was the very ideals and principles of these traditional professionals which made the Congress Party such a big organisation.

Saharanpur — **NARENDRA M. PANT**

A MUSLIM PROBLEM

The cover story "Muslims: A Community in Turmoil" (January 31) shows

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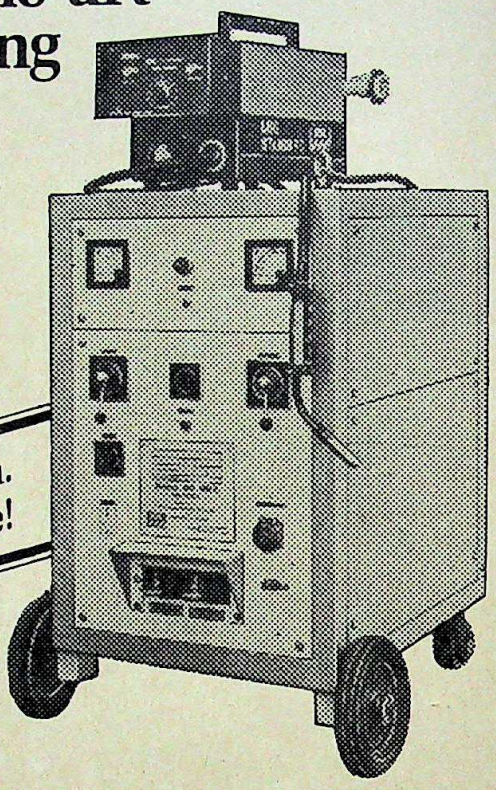
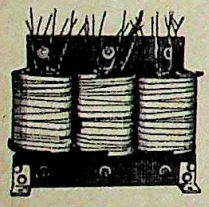
Presenting the state-of-the-art in semi-automatic welding



Indarc MIG/MAG welding system

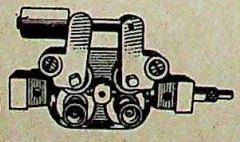
Each component beyond competition. All together— incomparable!



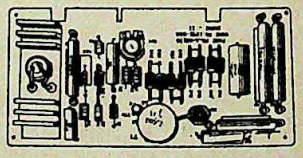
The power source: unmatched duty cycle rating—the most reliable.

Quite simply, India's best. So rugged, it works on 75% and 85% duty cycle ratings, depending upon the model (while others can offer only 60%). So reliable, it's produced no complaints in the last 10 years! And steadily improving in its dynamic characteristics... with ongoing technology upgradation by IOL research and development.

The wire feeder: precision engineered 4-roll drive and solid state control module.

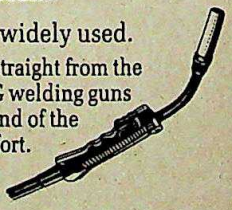


Taken apart, and redesigned all over! The modified feedblock is manufactured with precision tooling to give it unmatched welding performance continuously, through ensuring uninterrupted kink-free as well as distortion-free wire feeding.



The electronic control module is in a detachable black box, with PCB's of glass epoxy base. All contacts gold plated for maximum reliability and fail-safe operation.
You cannot find a more dependable wire feeder.

The torch: internationally the most widely used.



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how unaware the Muslim women are about their rights and the protection enjoyed by women of other communities in the same country. The reactions of the educated class came as a shock and discouragement to those who want to improve the status of Muslim women.

New Delhi — K. PRASAD

■ When the Muslim fundamentalists say that a divorced woman cannot claim maintenance from her former husband, they ignore the dependence of a woman upon her husband and therefore treat the woman at par. If that be the case, then why are most Muslim women forced to wear a purdah. And why do they forbid a woman from marrying four men?

Madurai — K.S. RAMESH

■ If the Congress(I) leaders think in terms of Muslim 'vote banks' and play into the hands of Muslim fundamentalists and shirk their responsibility to strive for a uniform civil code, they are indeed doing grave injustice to our proclaimed 'secularism'.

Z.R. Ansari, the minister of state for environment, who lambasted our courts and judges and talked for three hours as a neurotic in Parliament should know that under secularism "all are equal and no one should claim to be more equal". They should realise that Muslim fundamentalism may strengthen the Hindu fanaticism.

Madras — A. SESHAGIRI RAO

■ What has touched, rather shocked the Muslim sentiment is the portrayal of the holy Quran being weighed against the Constitution of India. The Quran is the words of the creator, and the Constitution of India has been framed by the created. Hence, a comparison between the two is sheer desecretion of the holy Quran, which is absolutely unconstitutional.

Ranchi — NAHEED SHAKEEL

■ How and why the Supreme Court judgement has come into conflict with the Islamic faith is still incomprehensible. What is wrong in granting a maintenance allowance to divorced helpless women? It is actually much ado about nothing. There should be no separate law for different communities in a single country. There should be a common law for all Indians. The Government should be very careful and not yield to such pressures of fundamentalists.

Rangpur, Gujarat — DAVID C. THOMAS

■ I fully commend the decision of the Supreme Court to decide in favour of Shah Bano. The Quran's views on women are very backward and clearly emphasise their inferiority. However, what is most surprising is that most Muslim women are not prepared to fight for equality. It is such a paradox that educated women like the two teachers from Kasganj vehemently defend old values that are incompatible with today's society.

Kent, England — SUNITA BHAMBRI

PUPPET PRESIDENT

It had once been thought that the President had not been making a good impression wherever he went on state visits abroad and that this was the reason for his being confined to the barracks ("Grounded President", January 31). But had that been the case he would not have got so many invitations from fellow heads of state. Is it not indicative of bad blood between the President and the prime minister?

While constitutionally the President is a mere figure head, his position was made more so during the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi. She introduced the precedent of nominating a President of her choice, someone who was malleable. In fact when Zail Singh became President it was remarked that while one had heard of presidents becoming puppets, here was the case of a puppet becoming a President.

Bangalore — A. BRITO

LEFT IN DISARRAY

Some people never seem to learn but some refuse to. The Marxist party has debated for a long time the reasons for its sluggish growth in the Hindi belt ("Status Quo Ante", January 31). It has conveniently glossed over the the fact that in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, which witnessed fairly strong communist movements earlier, the party is not in a position to win even 10 seats in the Assembly. It is strange that the CPI(M) never asks the reasons for the party organisation being in a shambles in the states.

The only strategy that can revitalise the party is to remove all such persons who represent none but themselves, from important positions and replace them with people who have shown results. A task which will not be done by the present leadership.

Dehra Dun — A. BANERJEE

AREA OF DARKNESS

Your special feature on money-lenders in Rajasthan (January 31) was shocking. Indeed, the evils of money-lending die hard. It is bound to continue as long as the problem of poverty is not confronted and removed. The World Bank, a money-lender to the developing countries in the guise of 'aid' is not welcome in Philippines now. It imposed on the country more debt than it developed. The Commonwealth Heads of Gooovernment Meet also declared that the IMF and the World Bank were discriminating against the poor nations.

Agartala — L. ZATHANG

■ It is shocking to note that neither the Government administration nor the legislators feel responsible for safeguarding the basic rights and interests of the tribals living all over the country. The bania community not only controls the economy of the tribals but also the district level Congress(I) politics. Unless the ruling party extends its influence from the top to grassroot level, the banias will defeat all further tribal developmental programmes of the Government and continue to exploit the tribals brashly and without restraint.

Bombay — MAHIPAL BHURIYA

WASTEFUL EXPENDITURE

It is abominable to give such publicity to a family outing (January 31) in which perhaps crores of rupees were spent uselessly. What India needs today is not what is being done by the prime minister and his sycophants during electioneering, an outing or at the fanfare organised in Bombay, but the maximum utilisation of money, power and other resources for eradicating poverty and striving for mass development, thus bringing the country into the streamline of economic and social prosperity. If money continues to be squandered the way it has been by the ruling party one can't hope to achieve much.

Deoghar — MRINAL KANTI

SON SHINE

It is surprising to note that yet another son of a political leader is entering politics ("Rising Son", January 31) and that too in the capacity of nothing less than a party president. The way political parties and their followers are accepting inexperienced sons is amazing.

Motihari, Bihar — ALOK KUMAR TILAK

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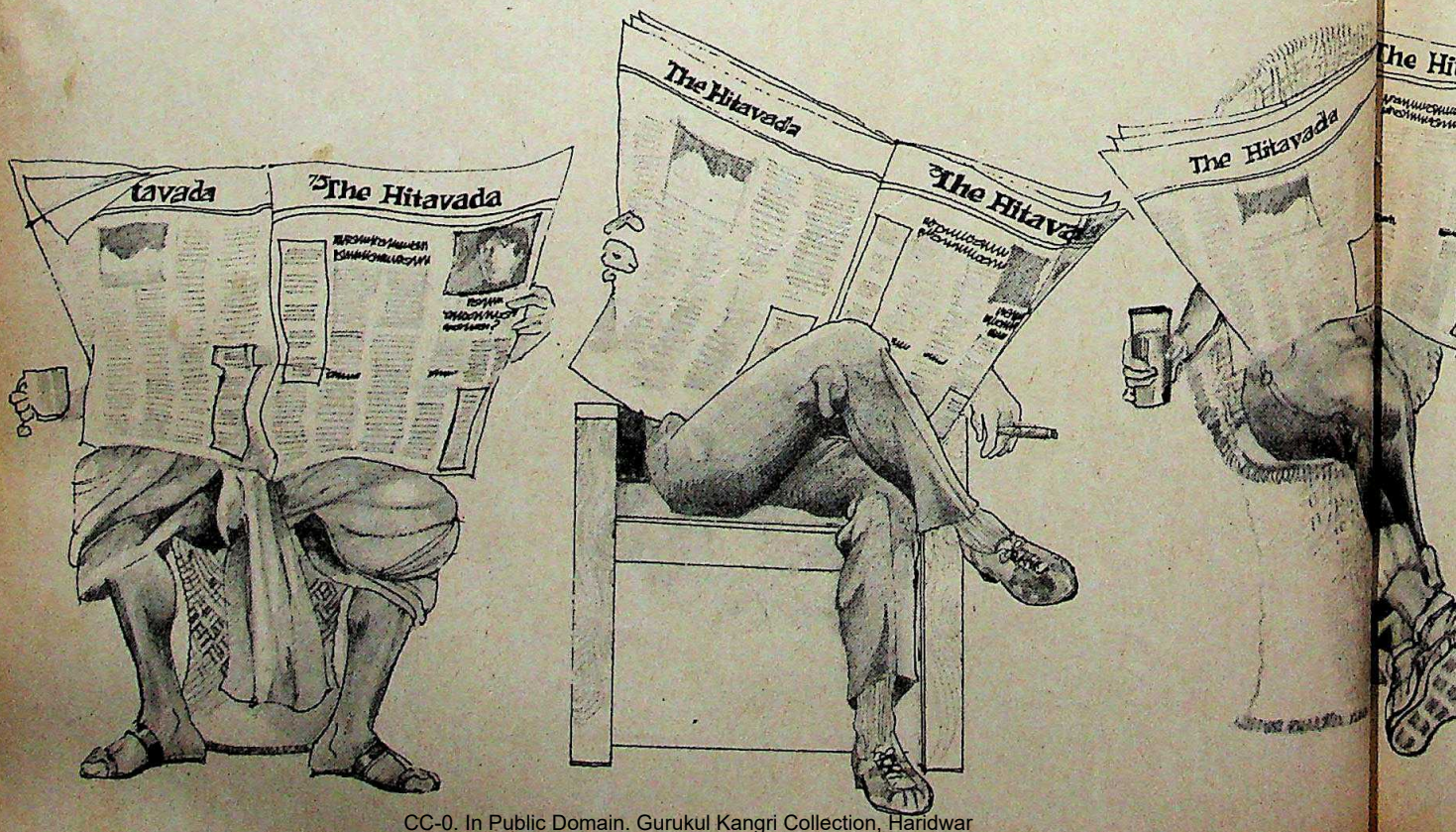
With an average ABC certified circulation of 27,000 during January-June '85, The Hitavada has proved to be the highest circulating English daily in the region.

During the last five years, the circulation of The Hitavada has shot up by an impressive 300%.

This is the result of the extensive, in-depth and well-written news coverage of this daily.

And its superior print quality. A quality that has won it the First Prize for Excellence in Printing and Designing, both in 1981 and 1982.

Today, The Hitavada is read by the most vital demographic segment of Central India.



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A segment comprising the decision makers, the opinion leaders and the bulk of the region's elite, cosmopolitan market.

Equally popular amongst them is The Hitavada's complimentary Sunday Magazine. A four colour publication that makes good, worthwhile reading. For every kind of reader.

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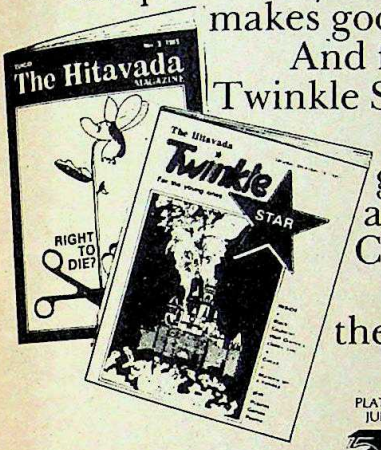

Today, beyond doubt, The Hitavada has grown to become an excellent courier of news and advertisements for Nagpur, Vidarbha, Mahakoshal, Chattisgarh. And the rest of Central India.

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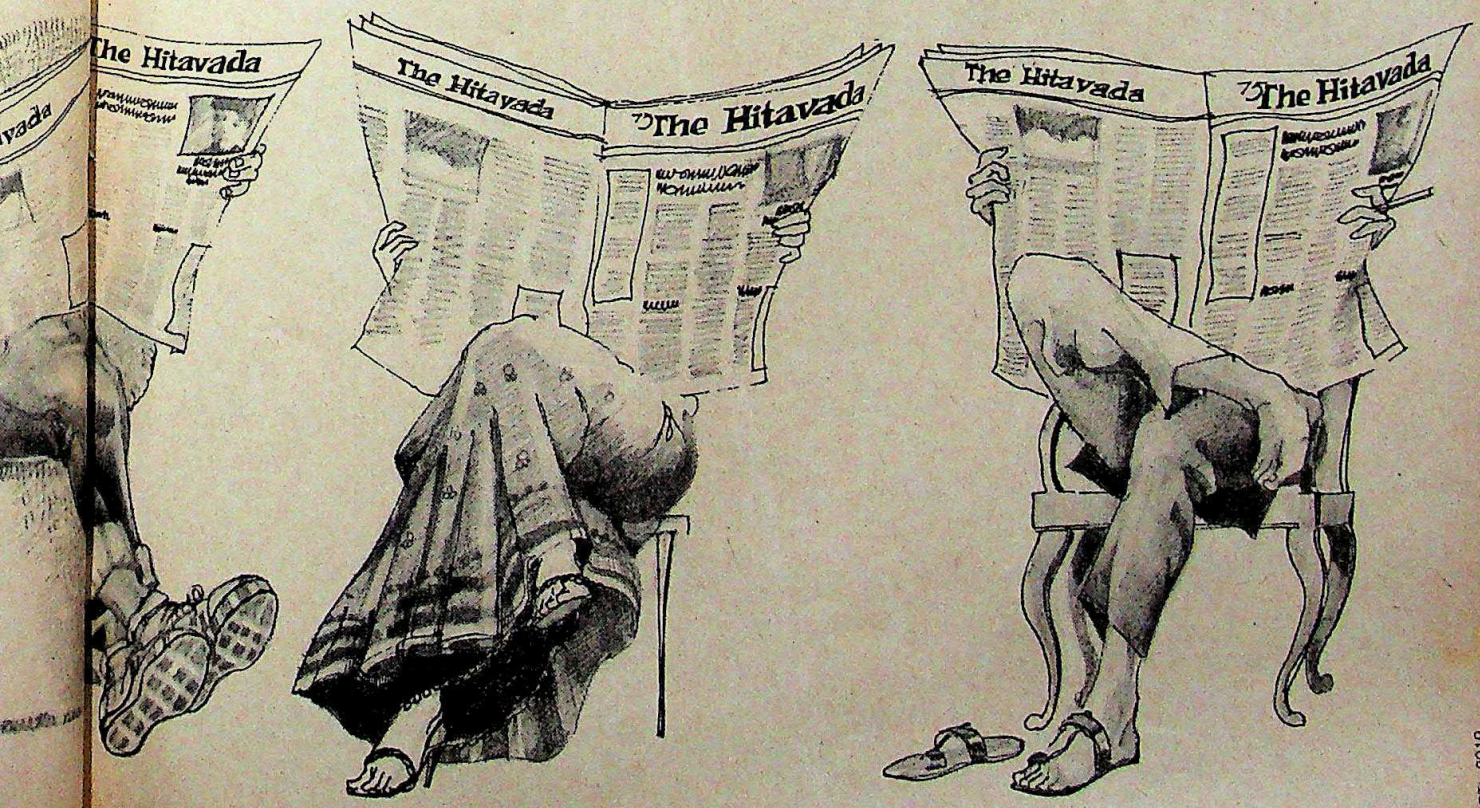

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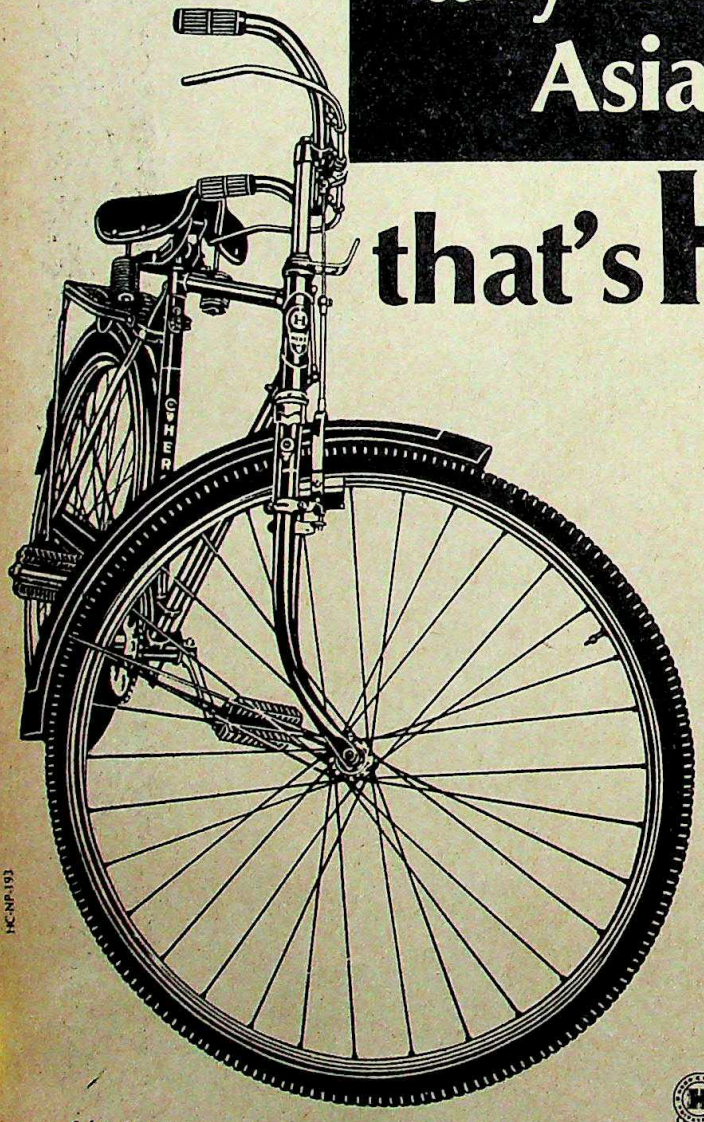

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Sale price in Punjab will be less by 2% because of exemption of Central Sales Tax in the State.

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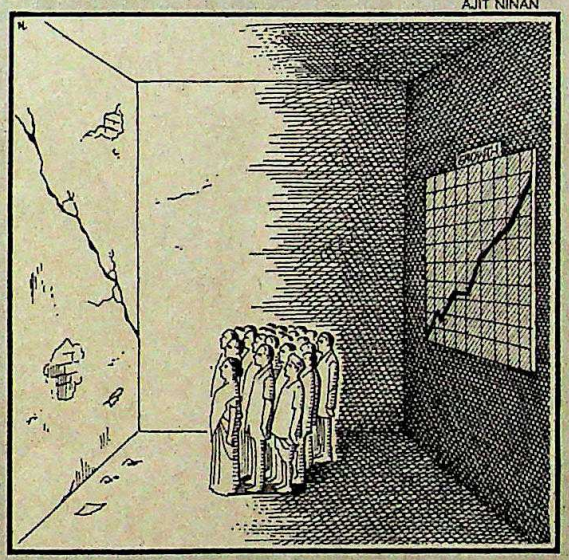
Projection Perils

IMAGES once formed tend to stick, and if the wrong kinds of images have attached themselves to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his government then it is more a failure of the Government's public projection and the high hopes aroused a year ago than the substance of its policies—or the lack of them. Time and again, the Government has come across as functioning in an amateurish and shortsighted manner. Decisions taken one day seem to be reversed the next; people appointed to one job are abruptly shifted to another; the prime minister says he believes in one thing, his government does quite another. Mercifully, the official media's overkill on Rajiv has been halted, but nobody has replaced that sort of thing with a well-thought-out projection of what the Government is trying to do and why, and what thwarts its efforts. The Government's public relations machinery—whether it is Doordarshan, All India Radio or the Press Information Bureau—cranks along in such low gear that it doesn't matter who is in the driver's seat, it just hasn't been able to pick up momentum.

AJIT NINAN



In some instances, the projection is laughable. The night of the Opposition bandh in Delhi protesting the recent hike in petroleum prices, Doordarshan wanted its nation-wide audience to believe that the bandh had been a failure. It was, in fact, a near-total success and not all of Doordarshan's subterfuge could produce convincing evidence to the contrary. Two days later, the network seems to have suddenly realised its mistake: the Left Front sponsored West Bengal bandh was declared a total success!

In fact, the Government found itself in an unenviable mess on the petroleum prices issue precisely because it somehow manages to send out the wrong signals. When Finance Minister V.P. Singh unveiled his Long Term Fiscal Policy, he went on television in a carefully arranged interview to educate the public. Doordarshan even arranged a panel discussion though the subject was somewhat obscure; and beyond the fact that Singh promised to leave direct tax rates unchanged for the next four years, the policy didn't really impinge on anybody's day to day activity.

This time round, with a sharp increase in the prices of items of daily consumption, nobody felt it necessary to get up and defend what is in economic and national terms a highly defensible decision. The timing may have been wrong (on the eve of the budget, the day before the two by-elections, at a time when the Government is caught on the rebound in Punjab) and at the best of times a price increase is unpalatable medicine. But the fact is that kerosene and cooking gas are heavily subsidised when they shouldn't be, that the Government is short of resources for the seventh plan, that a small increase in petroleum prices yields handsome revenues and that a high-price energy policy does in some measure encourage reduced consumption.

The Government is ill-served in the projection of most of its economic policies. The image that it is pro-rich and not for the poor is tending to stick and not all the raids on big business nor a revamped 20-point programme will peel it of. Why? Because the Government doesn't bother to project its own achievements—the relative improvement in plant utilisation in power generation, the control until the January price increases on inflationary pressures, the relatively high industrial growth rate—and what it is doing to cope with on-going problems such as the balance of payments problem, the resources crunch and so on.

If good cases are shelved by default, what can be said of instances where the Government hasn't, in fact, performed with distinction? Such as Punjab where, in the ultimate analysis, the spirit of the accord could not be mobilised to serve the letter of the accord. Punjab was a cliff-hanger for most of January even though it was patently clear day by day that elbow room was shrinking as the January 26 deadline loomed closer. Prognosis by hindsight is an easy way out, but it was clear all along that the damage in the public mind was being needlessly exacerbated by the lack of clear, authoritative information and the unchecked speculation it inevitably resulted in.

If the idea is to promote open government, a phrase which was heard freely a year ago, to take people into confidence, to project and justify actions and policies to the electorate than the Government—and that in concrete terms means ministers and top civil servants—have to accept that they owe it to the country to explain what they are doing, to come forward and explain what is going on. Not merely in isolated venues like *Janavani* on Doordarshan, a commendable effort which for some reason seems to have slacked off, but at times when decisions are taken or policies unveiled.

Nobody is likely to disagree with this in principle; it is the practice which is lacking. Why has the prime minister held no free-wheeling press conference in the last four months. How many times do Cabinet ministers come forward to explain policy announcements? Or party luminaries take the initiative to keep the public informed of what is happening except at times of crisis? Why is there a dearth of radio or television programmes which inform and educate through discussion and elucidate facts without degenerating into coarse propaganda? If the Government is not willing to make its own case, then it has no one to blame but itself if the public believes whatever it hears.

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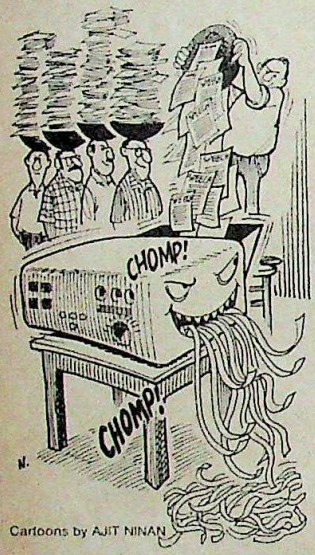
Shredder Happy

● It started off as the erstwhile minister of state for power Arun Nehru's little obsession with gadgets, but now it seems to have grown to become an obsession in a belatedly secrecy-conscious government. Last September, when Nehru was moved from his office at Shram Shakti Bhavan to North Block, as minister in charge of internal security, the only office equipment that followed him was a



Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

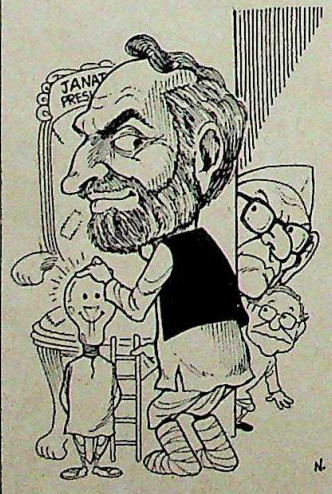
Japanese paper shredding machine. Now a shredder has been installed in each ministerial room in the capital, under orders from the Ministry of Home Affairs, of which internal security is a department. And shredders are making their way into the rooms of key bureaucrats—such as those in the prime minister's rapidly burgeoning secretariat.

The accompanying circular, distributed with the sleek Sony Panasonic set, says that all jottings made by ministers on loose papers are to be shredded first, and that the minister, before leaving office, should *personally* make sure that "dispensable letters" are not kept "floating around". The private secretaries are not entrusted with this sensitive job. One result: each minister is now obliged to spend about 10 minutes at the end of the day's work putting piles of disposable paper to the shredder's teeth. Recently when one minister was spotted by a visitor walking off with a shopping bag full of presumably sensitive documentation, he smiled his response: "Must light a bonfire at home."

The shredder is certainly not the lost cordon of security for sensitive papers in ministerial offices. The brand new Xerox machines set up next to the private secretaries' desk are now fitted out with a device that numbers each copy in the middle of the text, so that even a copy of a copy cannot shield the "mole". Or so is it hoped.

Back Track

● Janata party president Chandra Shekhar indicated some time ago that he intends to step down from the office in May. Hearing of this, Morarji Desai dashed off a postcard to Chandra Shekhar that if this were so, former Union minister and Congress(O) colleague, Ravindra Varma, should



be made the president. But Chandra Shekhar let it be known that if Morarji should decide to sponsor Varma, he would get him trounced by putting up a rank outsider like Mohan Guruswamy, the Harvard-trained social scientist who forms part of Chandra Shekhar's brain's trust but who has little following in the party. The news late last fortnight was that Varma was still going around the country drumming up support for his candidature but Chandra Shekhar's men were sceptical of Varma's chances.

Big Apple

● With India's ambassador in Washington K.S. Bajpai, due to retire soon, speculation has hotted up on the choice of his successor. To the foreign

service's dismay, the Government is considering two politicians for the plum post: former Kashmir maharajah Karan Singh, and former external affairs minister Dinesh Singh. The latter, however, is not interested as he will have to report to a foreign secretary who was no more than a middle-rung officer when Dinesh Singh headed the ministry.

Originally, the career candidate for the Washington post was A.P. Venkateshwaran, currently a secretary in the External Affairs Ministry. But he is likely to be posted as ambassador to Moscow. The post of foreign secretary is also expected to be up for grabs after it is vacated by Romesh Bhandari, who is reportedly Rajiv's choice to replace veteran G. Parathasarathy as chairman of the Policy Planning Committee.

Little Big Men

● After the last major Cabinet reshuffle, ministers of state now get their portfolios from the prime minister, without the risk of being shuffled around by the Cabinet ministers who oversee their work. But in the last few months it has quickly become evident that some ministers of state are more equal than others. Arun Nehru practically runs the Home Ministry, with S.B. Chavan happy to be kept informed of Nehru's decisions. But Janardhan Poojary in finance is virtually under the thumb of Finance Minister V.P. Singh. In industry, R.K. Jaichandra Singh (in charge of petrochemicals) has managed to wrest relative autonomy from the 'strong' Cabinet Minister N.D. Tiwari, but not M.V. Arunachalam (industrial development), who is more of a newcomer. And in the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, Ghulam Nabi Azad (Lok Sabha) has been able to get a relatively free hand because

he has struck an equation with Cabinet Minister H.K.L. Bhagat. In transport, Bansi Lal has quite happily given a free rein to his three juniors, Madhavrao Scindia (railways), Jagdish Tytler (civil aviation) and Rajesh Pilot (surface transportation): perhaps because all three have direct access to the prime minister.

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Believe me, it's not always so easy to mind your creases on the social circuit. Sometimes fabrics let you down badly. And you feel really miserable. Like you've played at a ball outside your off stump and missed!

Recently, I discovered fabrics which always provide a perfect fall and an immaculate crease. Gwalior's Golden Glade Worsted Suiting and Dornfab. I decided to endorse their new range. After autographing so many cricket bats, here was my chance to autograph a quality suiting.'

Gwalior Suiting – In a class of its own.

M.A.K. PATAUDI

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When elegance whispers, the world stops to listen.

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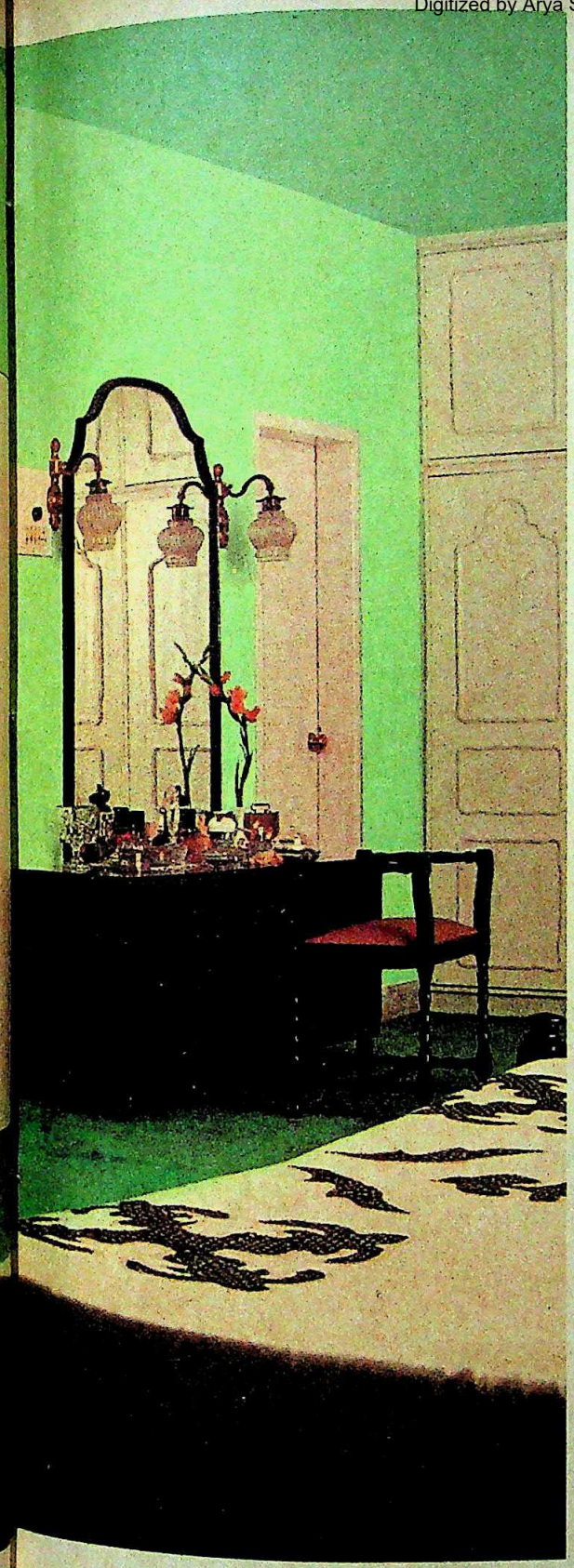

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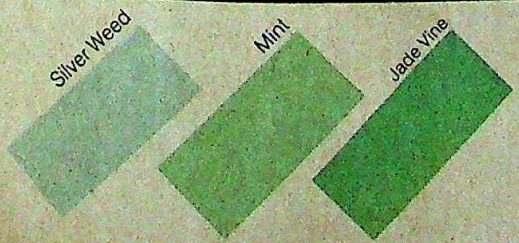
We've tied up for high performance paints, with Sherwin Williams, USA, the world's largest paint company.

GARCOAT PETALS

You have good taste. Let it show.



Garware Paints Ltd. GARWARE गरवारे

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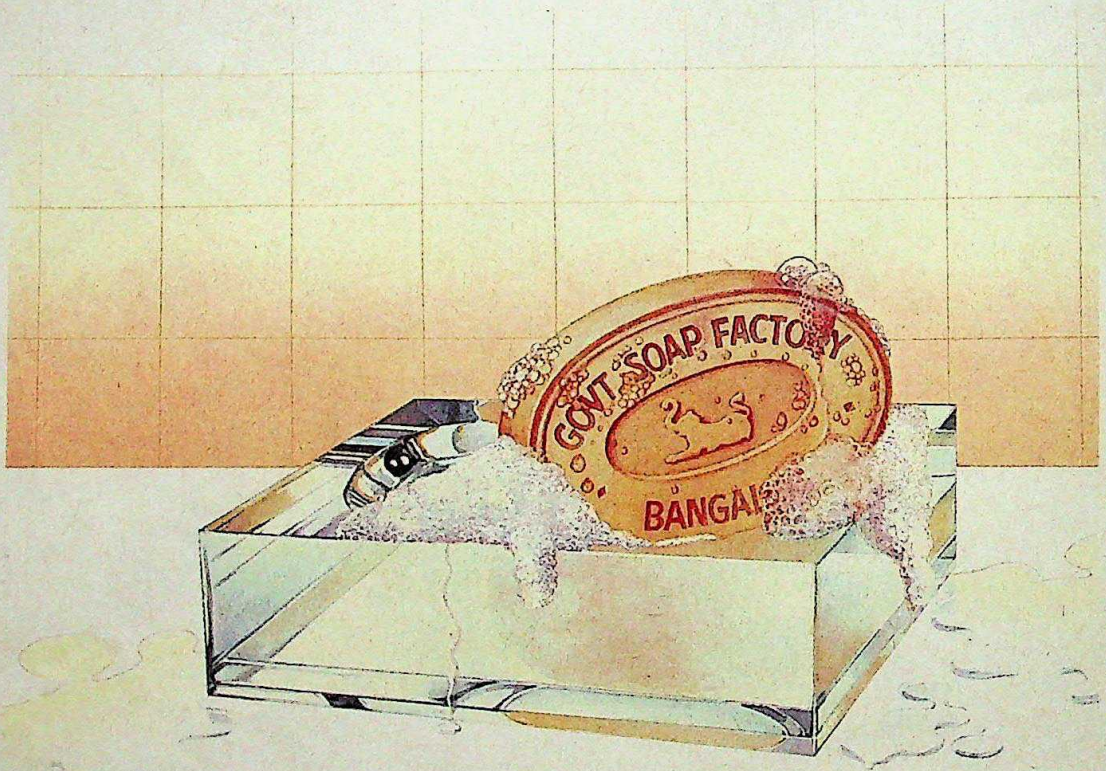
VERY FEW THINGS IN LIFE CAN MAINTAIN THEIR STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE FOR SEVEN DECADES AND MORE.



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Delicately fragrant Mysore Sandal. One of those rare soaps that have become synonymous with an exclusive way of life. Sought after not only in India but all over the world.

A lesser known fact is that Mysore Sandal comes from Karnataka Soaps.

Beginning with sandal oil distillation, Karnataka Soaps went on to set up the modern Government Soap Factory in as early as 1918. Mysore Sandal was only the first in a range of luxury soaps. Washing soaps and detergents like Point followed. Still more recently, we have developed essential industrial products like stearic acids, glycerine, acid slurry and soap noodles.

Each of our products remains worthy of its seven-decade-old tradition of excellence. And many more projects lie ahead.

At Karnataka Soaps, we have a rare fragrance to preserve. A message from the past expressing an abiding faith in excellence. The sweet smell of success that, we are determined, will infuse our every new venture.

KARNATAKA SOAPS

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Silver Sacks
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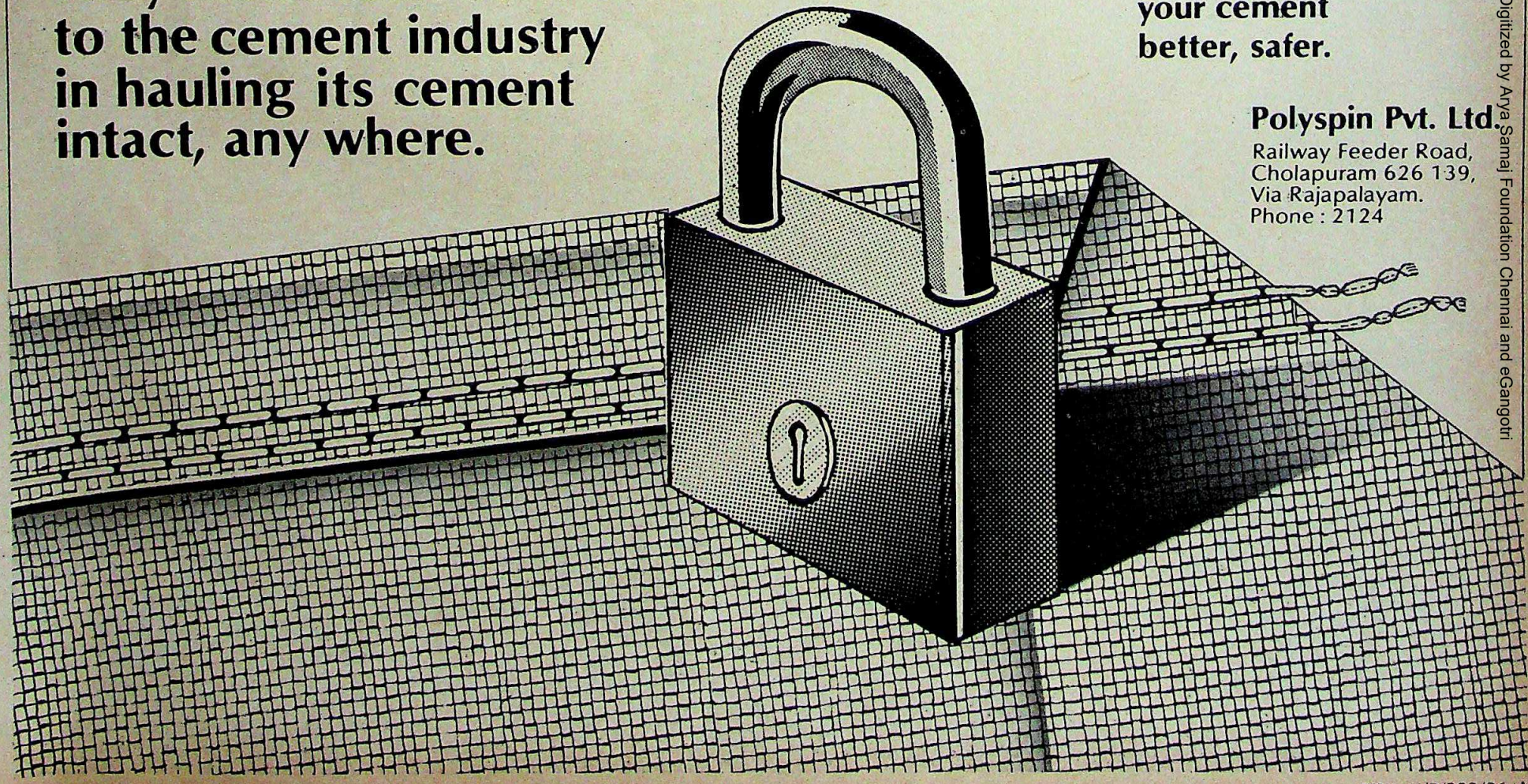

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The Times of India

● *Ultra-sensitive to his self-image as the country's most upright and principled politician, Mr V.P. Singh may resign; he should if only to save the prime minister's face.*

■ Editorial on the petroleum price hike in *The Times of India*

● *The Pope is here to bless and communicate with those who believe in him, and he has every right to do so. It would be a sad day—a disastrous day—for our country if we began to define secularism in the terms the* RSS *uses.*

■ Editorial in *The Telegraph*

● *The days of Mr Vasantdada's 'kho-kho' team are over.*

■ MADHU DANDAVATE on the Congress(I) defeat in the Sangli by-election, quoted in *The Times of India*

● *If I had enough money I would have defended Satwant in a much better way. I would have used the computerised screen to prove that Satwant is innocent.*

■ P.N. LEKHI in *Onlooker*

● *The most important achievement of Punjab in 1985 is that it has remained united with the rest of the country.*

■ KHUSHWANT SINGH in *Surya*

● *My competence is not for me to judge and if my leader has a "fancy" for me, if I may use the word because in politics the word "fancy" has no place, I am the last one to complain on that ground.*

■ ARJUN SINGH in *Sunday*

● *It was not as though we needed a reason to be corrupt, so I joined the Congress.*

■ VYJANTHIMALA BALI, Congress(I) MP in *Society*

● *Rajiv Gandhi, unfortunately, has not been overburdened with brains. But he is a sincere man and means good, as far as I can see. He is trying to do his best.*

■ MORARJI DESAI in The *Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *Critics used to scold me for not writing in my native tongue. Now they seem happy that I have a world public.*

■ R.K. NARAYAN in *Newsweek*

● *We believe in domestic harmony and professional diversity.*

■ ANUP JALOTA, on why he and wife Sonali never sing together, in *Sunday*

● *I think the audience likes south Indians. There are so many other girls, beautiful and talented, but somehow the south Indian girls catch the eye of the public.*

■ HEMA MALINI in *Surya*

● *I know it is high time I got married. But does anyone realise how difficult it is for an actress to find a suitable husband? I am not a teenager any more to go out and pursue a relationship.*

■ SULAKSHANA PANDIT in *Stardust*

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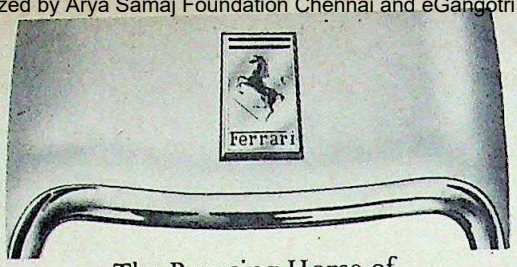
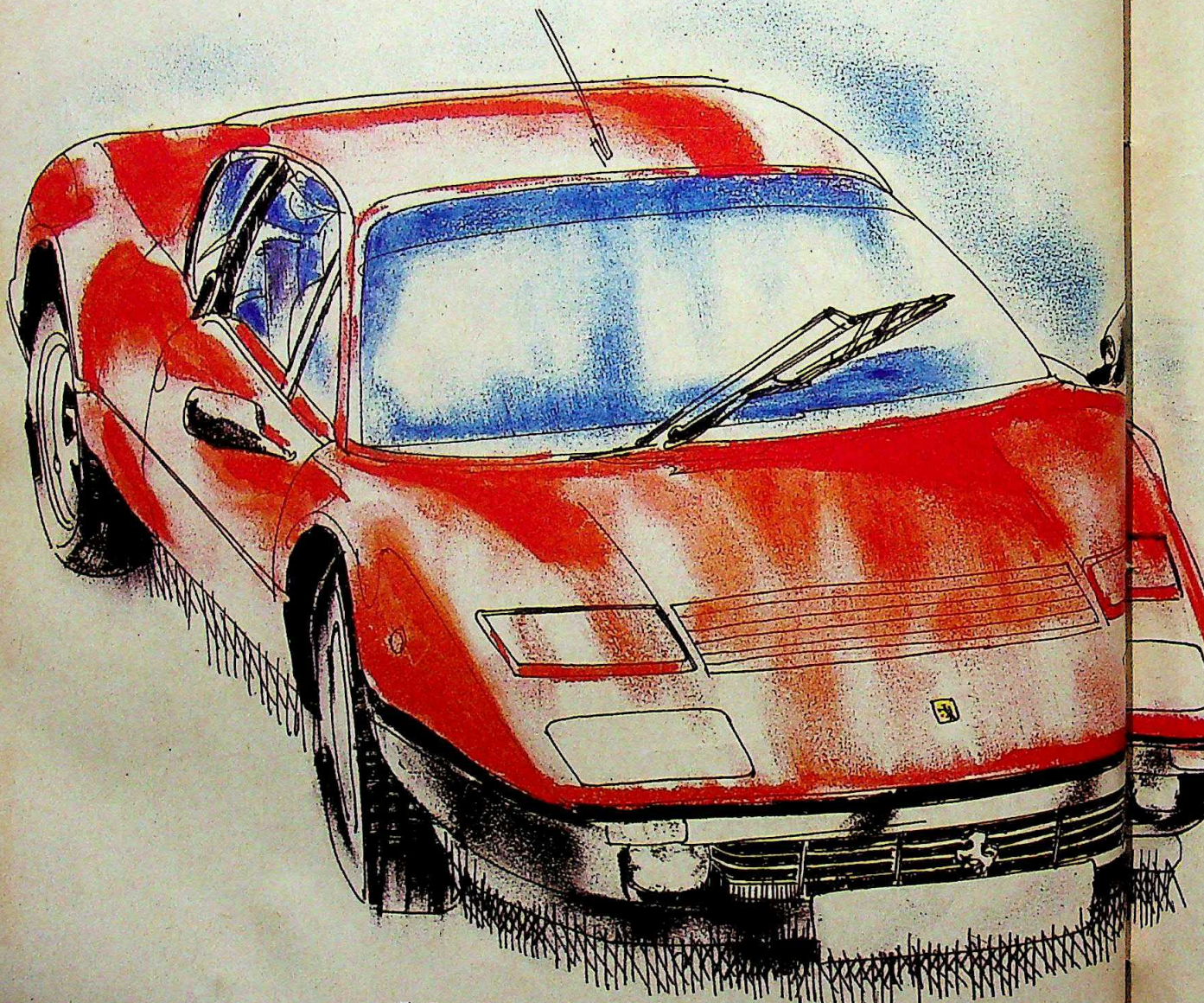


The Prancing Horse of Maranello. Ferrari's emblem is possibly the most revered one in racing.

The Great Exotics of Motoring presented by Engine Valves Ltd.



The Ferrari Boxer Berlinetta 512. One of the finest exotic cars in the world – and Ferrari's fastest road car.

The name 'Boxer' is derived from its flat 12-cylinder engine, in which the cylinders oppose each other. The 5-litre engine with a Grand Prix racing heritage is mounted amidships – and gives the car balanced weight distribution and remarkable cornering ability. This 360 bhp projectile has been clocked at a blistering 197 mph!

OBM 9464

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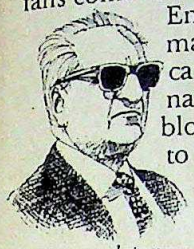
"For pure theatre, the Monza autodrome in Italy has no equal," writes a motoring correspondent. "Monza is the shrine at which the fans come to worship one God, Enzo Ferrari. This man single-handedly carries the hope of a nation every time his blood-red cars take to the track..."



Il Commendatore Enzo Ferrari. He was awarded the title by Mussolini's government.

Enzo Ferrari was born in Modena, Italy in 1898. Like most young Italian romantics of the time, he wanted to pursue opera singing or race driving. His ambition to be a racing driver was fuelled by his visit to a race in Bologna. He was ten at the time. There he was mesmerised by those artistes of automobile racing ... Felice Nazzaro and Vincenzo Lancia.

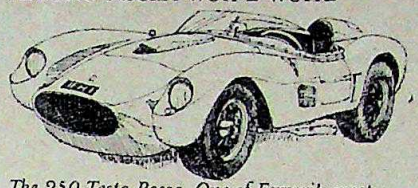
When World War I was declared, Ferrari was called upon to serve the Italian Army. After the war he travelled to Turin to seek employment with Fiat – but was turned down !

The Prancing Horse on the shield of Modena. The initials 'SF' stand for Scuderia Ferrari – the Ferrari racing team.

In 1920, he joined Alfa Romeo as a driver and tester. His most famous victory was during the 1923 circuit of Savio at Ravenna, behind the wheel of a 3-litre Alfa Romeo RL.

Ferrari quit Alfa in 1939 after a disagreement and decided to design his own cars. The first racing car to bear his name emerged in 1946. A 60°V-12 of 1498 cc was designed by the great Colombo and was the foundation of Ferrari power for many years.

The '52 and '53 seasons were highly successful for Ferrari. Alberto Ascari won 2 world championships in a Ferrari 500.

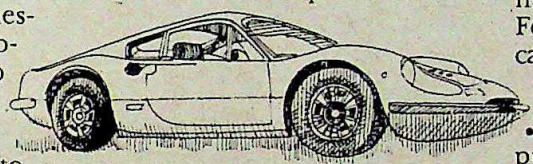


The 250 Testa Rossa. One of Ferrari's most successful sports racing cars. The name came from the red crackle finish on the engine's camshaft covers.

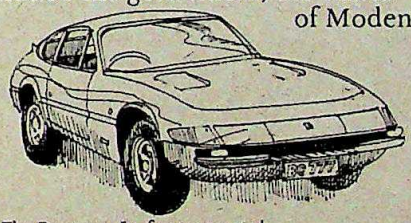
Ferrari had made his indelible mark on racing.

Ferrari facets

• The prancing horse symbol, the 'Cavallino Rampante' was used by Franco Baracca, a legendary pilot in World War I on the side of his airplane. He shot down 34 adversaries before being killed. Countess Baracca gave Ferrari permission to use the symbol on his cars. Ferrari then added the gold shield, the shield of Modena.



The Dino. Named after Ferrari's son, and one of the loveliest bodies built by Pinin Farina.



The Daytona. Its front-mounted V-12 engine gave it a top speed of 174 mph.

• Though Ferrari had no formal engineering education (he refused to go to technical college) he was particular about being called "Engineer Ferrari".

• In 1951, when Ferrari finally beat Alfa Romeo in the British Grand Prix, he said "It was like killing my mother ."

• After Ferrari's son Dino died at the age of 24 (of leukemia) he decreed that all his V-6 engined cars would be named Dino. Dino had been actively engaged in the V-6 project.

• During the Le Mans race of 1961, a Dino entered by Ferrari was out of the running due to a blunder made by the pit crew – the car ran out of fuel !

• Ferrari is a very direct person as champion racing driver Jody Schecter discovered at their first meeting. As Schecter recalls, Ferrari said "Hello," and then came across with his first question "How much do you want?" !

Niki Lauda at speed in a Ferrari 312 TF1. Lauda was one of the most successful drivers for Ferrari.

• Which of his cars did Ferrari prefer to use? None. He usually drove a Fiat !

As fiery as his cars

Back in 1969, Fiat bought 50% of Ferrari. But they had no intentions of tampering with the genius of Il Commendatore, and largely control only the production side. Ferrari who is highly temperamental has often threatened to withdraw from racing. Fortunately, his passion for the motorsport has always persuaded him to return. Racing would be very much poorer without the red cars from Maranello.

The 308 GTS. Its V-8 engine produces one and a half times the horsepower of a Detroit V-8 twice the size!

World-famous cars use EVL valves

Did you know that EVL valves are used on cars like BMW, Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz, Peugeot and Volvo? EVL, a member of the Rane Group, began operations in 1959, collaborating with Farnborough Engg of UK, makers of the famous Tranco valves. EVL exports mainly to UK, USA, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia. In India, EVL products are original equipment on every vehicle... more recently on the Maruti-Suzuki.

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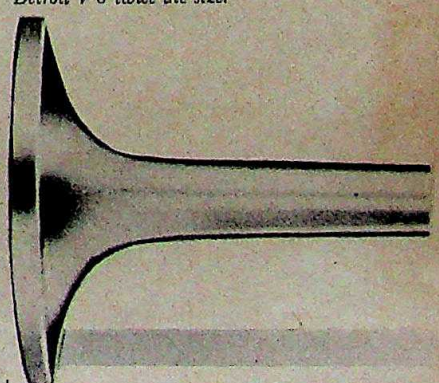

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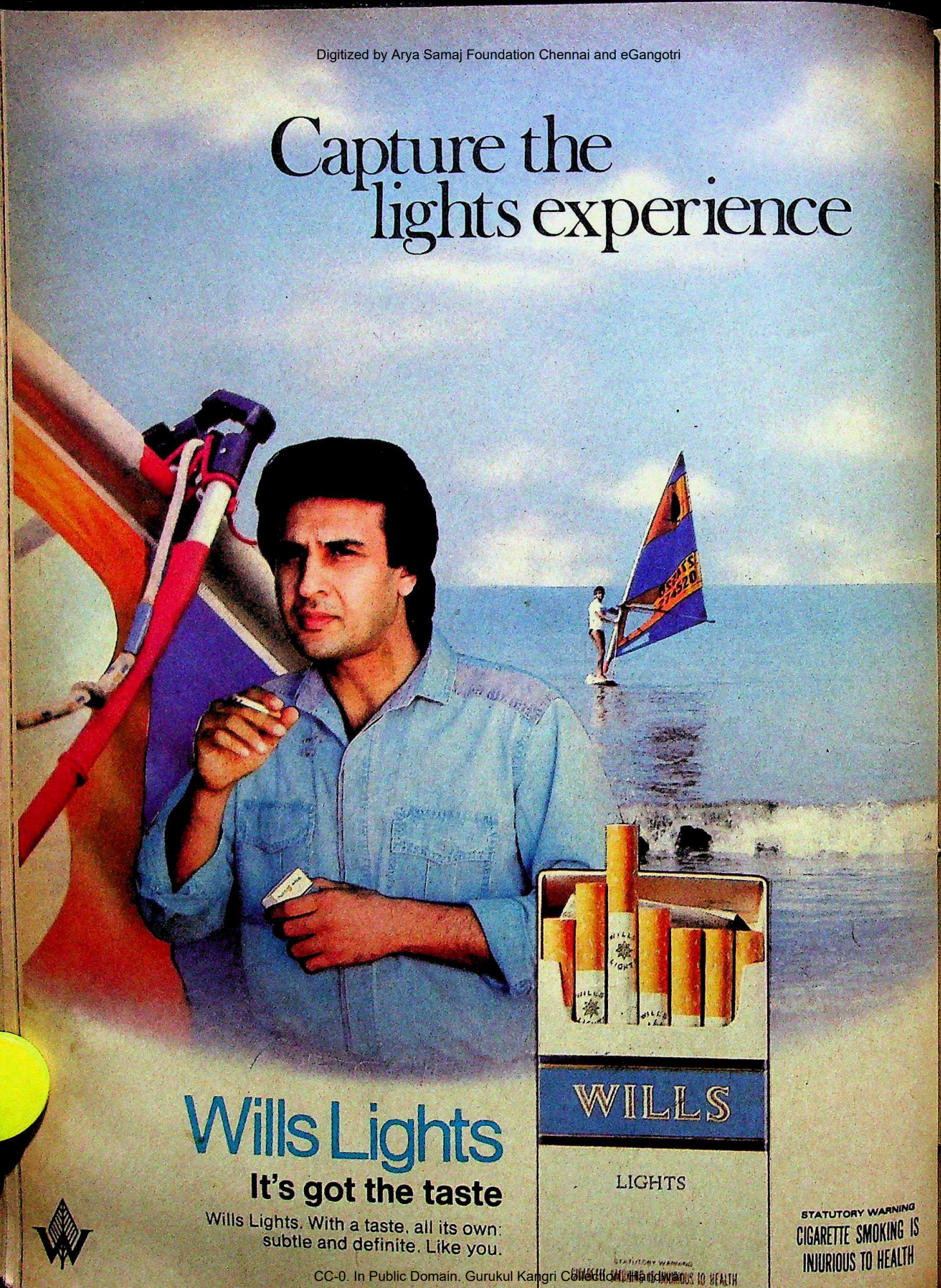
Capture the lights experience



Wills Lights

It's got the taste

Wills Lights. With a taste, all its own: subtle and definite. Like you.

STATUTORY WARNING
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FATHERS & FRIENDS

■ Charles Darwin once pointed out that man is just a few evolutionary steps removed from the monkey. Although he was scoffed at when he first said so, proof comes from Kaikalur in Andhra Pradesh.

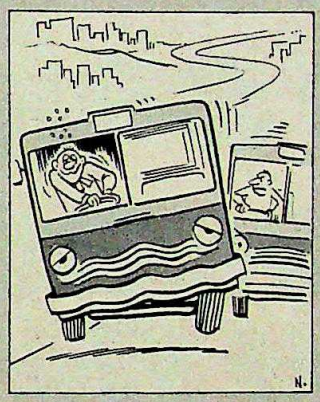
Chiranjeevi is the 14th son of a hotelier called Immadi Krishna Murthy and a year ago, when Chiranjeevi was just two months old, he (the son, not the father), was crying his tiny heart out because he was hungry. Everybody was probably attending to the idli mix in the kitchen and Chiranjeevi would have gone hungry but for a monkey who appeared from nowhere, picked up the feeding bottle lying nearby and put it to the baby's lips.

From then on, the monkey became Chiranjeevi's best friend. He would make regular visits, see that the baby was being fed properly and play with it. It was quite a jealous buddy too, and was visibly put out whenever anybody else approached the kid when it was around. Murthy once got fed up with such loving friendship and tried to drive it away, but the monkey wrapped itself around his legs and looked pleadingly into his eyes. Since then, Hanuman has become a part of the family. Darwin must be pleased.

JAUNTY JUDGE

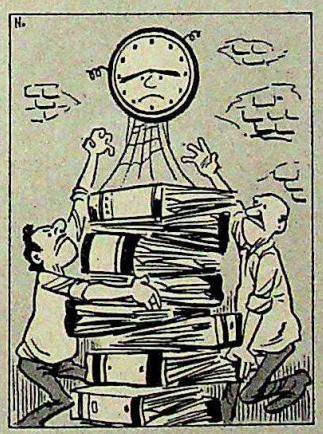
■ The judiciary is not given to pranks, jokes and such opiates of the masses—its denizens are expected to set high standards of behaviour. This common belief, however, went for a six last month in a town near Nagpur, Maharashtra.

There, a magistrate who shall go unnamed was waiting to board a state transport bus. Fellow passengers noticed that he was a little tipsy but did not think all that much of it until, that is, he vanished inside a parked bus, started up the engine and lurched away. It was a few minutes before the driver of the bus, drinking *chai* at a nearby stall, realised what was going on and by that time the magistrate was already in high gear and revving away to glory.



Of course, the judge's merry jaunt didn't last long. The legitimate bus-driver commandeered another vehicle and set off in pursuit. He screeched to a halt in front of the hijacked transport a few kilometres away. And a hiccuping though cheery magistrate was hauled out of his seat and to the court—not his own—on charges of, among other things, drunken driving.

TICK TOCK TICK



■ Oh, to be a babu and while away the hours in blissful languor as time ticks slowly by! But in the sub-registrar's office of Periyakulam, Tamil Nadu, time does not tick.

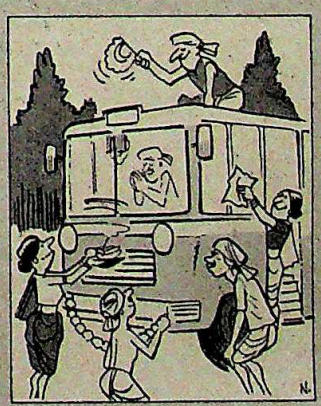
It's wall-clock stopped in 1982 and the main office was sent a message asking for immediate repairs. Somebody else, in traditional style, opened a file in the registrar's office. The file, as files tend to do, travelled, stopping at various desks on the way and ended up on the joint registrar's desk. The joint registrar, obviously a stickler for rules, asked the original sub-registrar's office for 'classified data' such as the date of purchase and the price of the clock. Nothing happened for some time, and a stern reminder elicited only the reply that the bill had been lost. Now the registrar's office got ambitious. It asked all 13 sub-offices for details on how to deal with this. This got startling responses—two offices didn't have a clock and the clocks in the other offices had not broken down.

That is where the matter stands at the moment. The sub-registrar's office wall-clock is silent since 1982 and few people, and certainly not the sub-registrar, know how to get out of the tangle and get it working again.

BUS CARE

■ Most railway compartments carry wishful requests asking travellers to treat them as the "nation's property" and guard them as if they were their own. But of course, no one bothers to do so. They would do well to take up the example of the villagers of Veladi Kottapalem in Andhra Pradesh.

They had been requesting the state road transport corporation for a special bus to link them to nearby towns, and after much toing and froing and representations and meetings with the authorities, they got one. Villagers, unlike their sophisticated urban counterparts, know the value of a gift, and immediately set out doing up 'our' bus. They pooled in money to buy a tape-recorder and a radio, which was installed in the bus with the help of a local electrician. They then collected a few pictures and statuettes of gods and goddesses and installed these too, after due ceremony.



The bus is spotlessly clean on each one of the six trips it makes to the village daily. For, the villagers take turns to keep it that way. Just shows that civic sense is not an urban sensibility only.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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Putting service first

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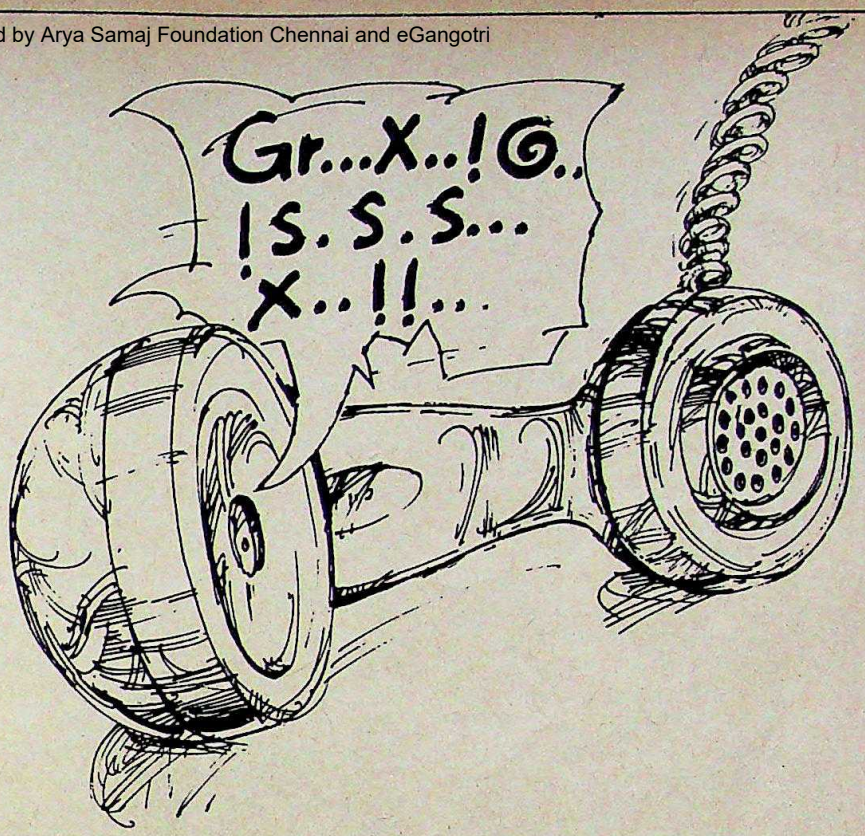

What's communication coming to?

Have you wondered why an international call sounds like it's from nextdoor... and the line between you and the next city connects you with four different voices?

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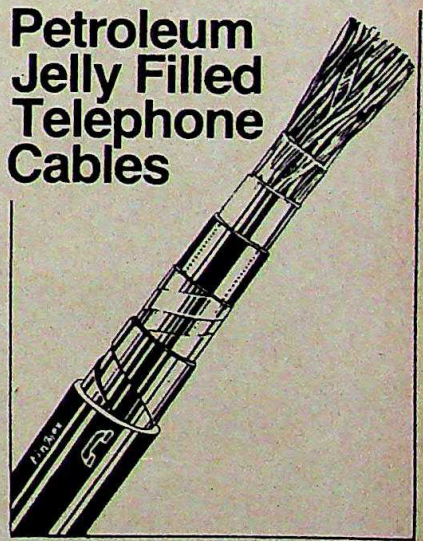

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R.K. HEGDE

The Resignation D

AT ONE level, it was the momentary eclipse of the Opposition's only authentic political star. At another, it was an astute move to turn adversity into strength, defeat into victory, stigma into a dazzling badge of honour. But, looked at it from any angle, the resignation last week by Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde was electrifying showbiz.

For 11 days after the Karnataka High Court passed severe strictures against Hegde's Janata Government, the embattled chief minister had been backed into a tight corner: unable to fight back convincingly against a Congress(I) onslaught in the state, his promise of 'value-based politics' seemingly reduced to hollow posture, and his resignation forced on him by the leak by his own partymen of a confidential letter addressed to the party president, Chandra Shekhar.

But from the time that the first news of the Janata stalwart's resignation from office filtered out on February 11, till a groundswell of public appeals to stay in office reduced the political impact of the court strictures, Hegde's image was set on a soaring curve. His star shone brightly again, seemingly unclouded by the governor accepting the resignation and by the uncertainty of whether he would come roaring back to power on the strength of continued support from Janata legislators in the Assembly.

The state had been in political turmoil ever since the high court ruled on January 31 that the awarding of 19 arrack bottling contracts by the Hegde Ministry to eight companies in the state was unlawful, capricious, arbitrary and shocking to the "judicial conscience". While the bottlers went promptly in appeal to the Supreme Court, which admitted the petition, there were uproarious scenes in the Assembly and the Janata Party was reduced to arguing weakly that the court had not found *mala fide* motives in the awarding of the contracts.

But just when the state seemed set for a prolonged battle that seemed certain to damage Hegde's standing in the eyes of a watching public, news-agency teleprinters began clacking across the country and instantly changed the whole scenario. Hegde was in the middle of a meeting of the Assembly's Business Advisory Com-

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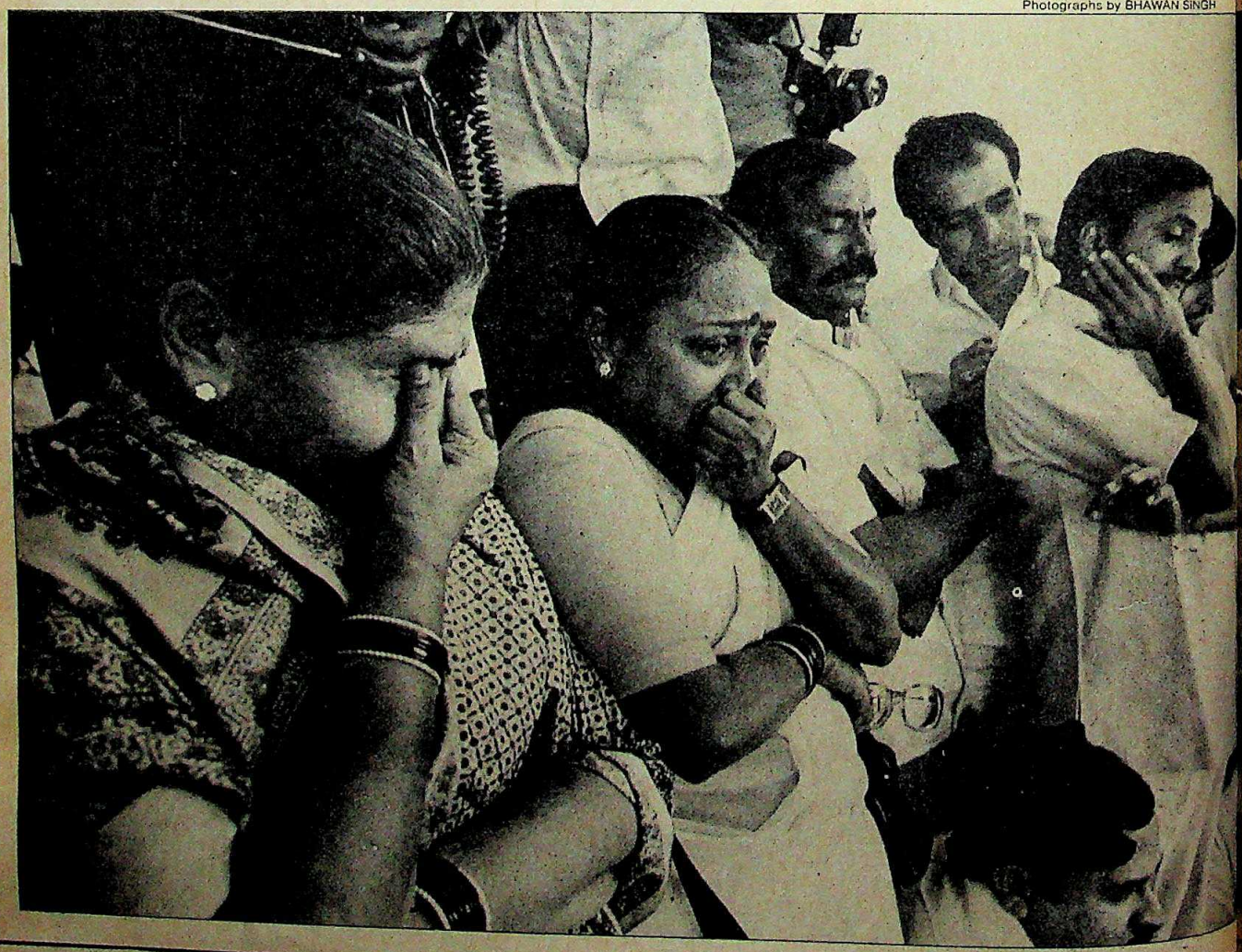

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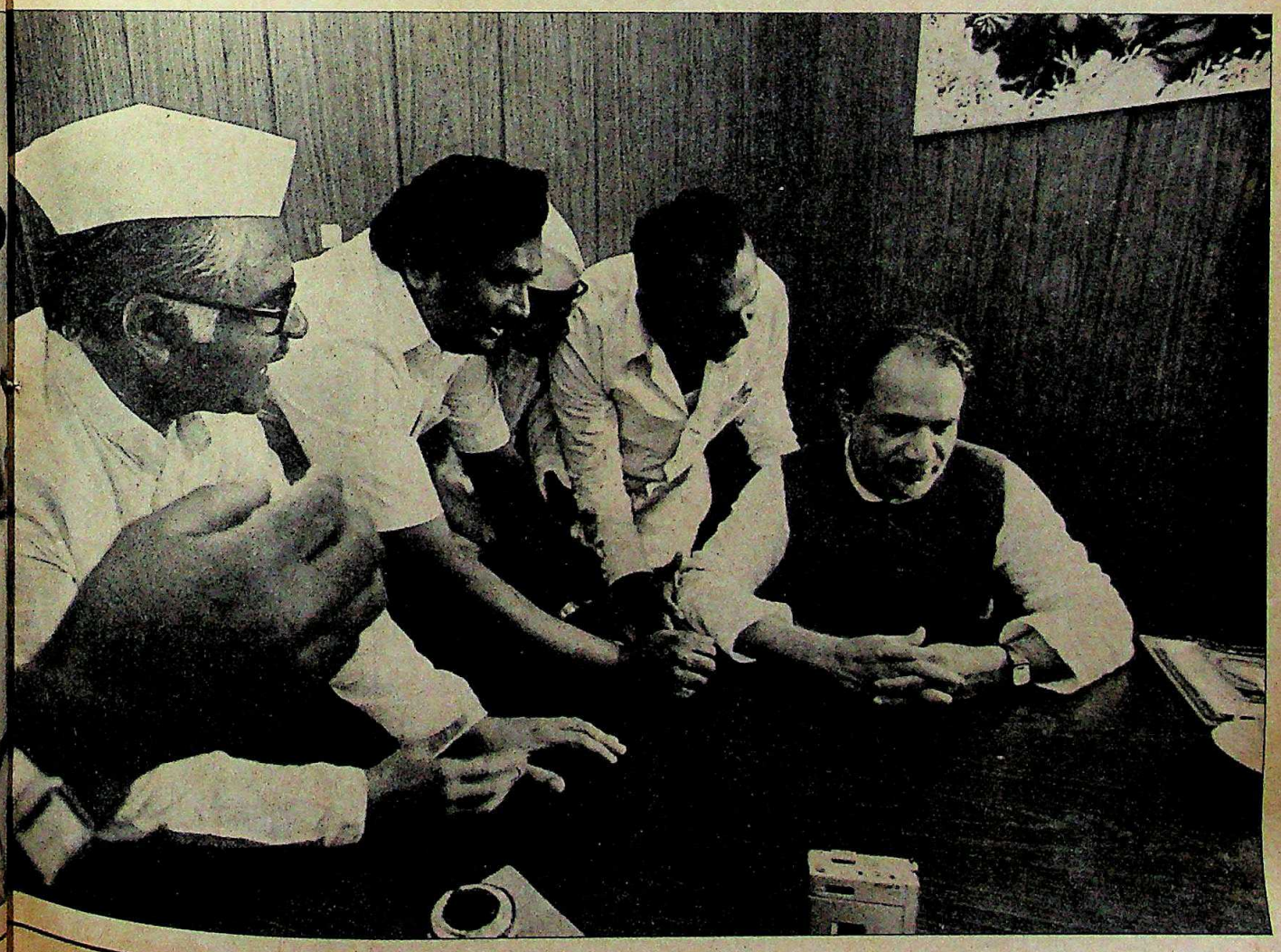
Drama

mittee (BAC) when party legislators heard the news of his letter to Chandra Shekhar, written two days earlier but kept secret from his cabinet colleagues. "I do not want people to entertain even the slightest doubt about the integrity of our government," Hegde had written while expressing his wish to resign. The letter was pigeoned by a common friend via Delhi to Chandra Shekhar, then camping in eastern Uttar Pradesh on yet another *padyatra*. Contacted at his walkathon headquarters as soon as the letter became public, Chandra Shekhar told INDIA TODAY: "I was surprised. I immediately scribbled back to him on a piece of paper saying that he shouldn't decide in a hurry." Nevertheless, the letter was leaked to the press, and whoever leaked it must have known that this would force Hegde's hand.

And so it did. Hegde sent his resignation at 6 p.m. on February 11 to the office of Governor A.N. Banerjee, then touring in Dharwar. Almost immediately after that, he drove off with two of his senior cabinet colleagues to the Air Force Training Command guest-house, a familiar retreat, leaving dismayed partymen behind. Many ministers first heard the news from enquiring journalists, and their response was uniformly distressed, indicating what was to come.

The chorus of the anguished exhortation began the same evening when unbelieving partymen thronged their leader's vacant office at the Secretariat, some with tears in their eyes, saying: "We'll not let him go." By 5.30 the next morning, all roads led to Krishna, the shiny fortress-like "home office" of the chief minister in downtown Bangalore. A resplendent memorial to the forgettable days when R. Gundu Rao held office in the state, Krishna normally has its doors barred to favour-seekers and assorted callers. But there was no holding back the crowds that day. They surged across the well-kept grounds into the waiting hall, the office rooms and even Hegde's bedroom, chanting in unison, *Neevu rajiname koda baradu* ("You should not resign"), while party MLA's shouted *Neevu rajiname kottare navelle rajiname* ("If you quit we shall all quit too"). Hegde looked drained and his baritone had turned husky. It was all he could do to shout at the top of his pitch, "I have already resigned," before pausing to wipe wet eyes with a handkerchief.

MANY ministers were upset at having been kept in the dark: "You didn't even inform your cabinet colleagues. You can't do this; take your letter back," screamed Home Minister B. Rachaiah, standing in the midst of the crowd. M. Raghupaty, the education minister, was seen weeping, his head buried in his hands. Hegde tried to reason with them, saying that he was leaving for Delhi



MLA's crying (left); and supporters pleading with Hegde not to resign: shock waves

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INTERVIEW

"My conscience is clear"

RAMAKRISHNA Hegde has acquired the reputation of a master survivor, and not without reason. In 1983 he successfully withstood a Congress(I) attempt at toppling him in the unsavoury Moily tapes episode. Twice he was called back to office by his party after he resigned, first in 1983 when his government was in a minority and again after his party's poor showing in the 1984 Lok Sabha poll. But last fortnight, as the arrack scandal once again put his principles to the test, Hegde resigned once again, this time with an air of quiet finality. When his letter of resignation sent to party chief Chandra Shekhar was leaked to the press Hegde's resolve to finally put an end to the suspense drama took final shape. Since then, he has quietly withdrawn from the public eye, apparently unwilling to discuss the crisis that his resignation has triggered off in the state and the party. He did, however, agree to meet Assistant Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *with whom he had only a week earlier discussed the high court judgement. Excerpts from the two interviews:*

Q. *Why this belated announcement about your resignation to the Janata Party president?*

A. I have been thinking over it again and again since the day the judgement was delivered by the high court. I consulted the party president and other colleagues of the Janata national executive on this matter. All of them were of the opinion that the judgement had not indicted me personally and no malafide was proved on our part. But later on I realised that it was very serious. The honourable judges while setting aside an executive order have used certain expressions which I thought were harsh—though they have not expressed an opinion I am convinced they must have had some reason for passing such a critical judgement.

Q. *But your initial reaction was that the judgement was not serious and it did not warrant the resignation of the Government.*

A. That is not true. I have expressed my views in private. I would be the last person to ignore a judicial verdict. My conscience is very clear in this respect.

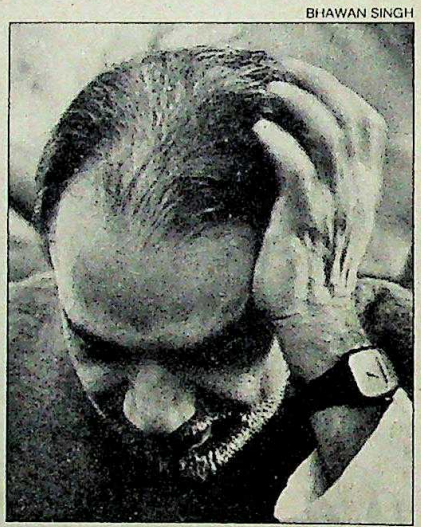
Q. *Don't you think that by resigning you have boosted the morale of the Opposition?*

A. I have not yielded to the Opposition's pressure. Who are these Bangarappas and Subbaiahs to demand my resignation? What is their credibility in public? When they raised the question in the Assembly I made it very clear that I was under no obligation to resign. My decision to quit now is based on moral commitment.

Q. *How come your public stance on this question was different from what you personally believed?*

A. I wanted to discuss this matter with my colleagues in the state and outside. I was certain that the party would not accept my request due to its affection for me. I had no intention of bypassing the party. But keeping in view their emotional commitment towards me I decided to act independently and resign. Technically, I have committed a mistake by sending my resignation to the party high command.

BHAWAN SINGH



Hegde after resigning

Q. *Will it not create a crisis in your party?*

A. In fact, it will strengthen the party in the state. At this time the party is fully united and it will be possible to throw up a new leadership. After all I am not going to stay in Karnataka for life. Morever, I feel no one should become indispensible in politics.

Q. *What was the immediate provocation for resigning?*

A. I took every thing into consideration before quitting. To begin with, a daily published from New Delhi carried a story on February 7 saying that the Janata's central leadership was in favour of a change. This came after all my colleagues gave me an assurance and a directive not to quit. I began to think that maybe a section feels that it is in the party's interest to step down. Later on various well meaning newspapers came out with editorials which were not favourable. I am not one who would ignore these comments especially when they come from the friendly press.

Q. *Don't you think that your resignation will be a major setback to the national opposition?*

A. On the contrary, it will help the Opposition. We promised the people value-based politics. By accepting the moral responsibility for an act which has been declared illegal we have shown we believe in what we say. I think people will now realise the difference between the Congress(I) and the Janata.

Q. *What is the background to this whole controversy about the arrack bottling contract?*

A. One of the recommendations of the Desai Commission was that arrack should not be sold unbottled. Gundu Rao when he was chief minister appointed an expert committee which took the first step that the bottling (system) should be on the Tamil Nadu model. When our government came, I decided that not only should bottling be introduced, it should also be done by an independent agency so that there was no scope or very little scope for hanky-panky.

Q. *Do you think that people who were adversely affected by this decision were determined to sabotage it?*

A. Last year I again increased arrack excise duty by Rs 2 per litre. This was after the arrack shops were auctioned. This decision made big arrack contractors more unhappy and they went to court and the matter is pending in court. Now the Government has to recover Rs 8 crore as arrears from them. This was the new policy. The excise minister sent his people to Tamil Nadu to study the system there. He fixed the price on the basis of expert committee recommendations and invited applications.

Q. *But no tenders were invited so that the Government must have lost very little revenue in terms of bottling fee to be paid to the contractors.*

A. Bottling plants have not been given on the basis of tenders anywhere

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in the country. Only applications were called. In the meanwhile I received certain complaints saying many people from Tamil Nadu and Kerala who were involved in liquor scandals had come to our state and therefore I was requested to verify their antecedents. I asked the home secretary to conduct confidential inquiries. It was done and I sent this report to the excise commissioner.

Q. Was the report on each individual?

A. Not on each individual but on those who were from outside. Regarding people from Karnataka there were no specific complaints and the inquiry was not held.

Q. When was the policy change decided?

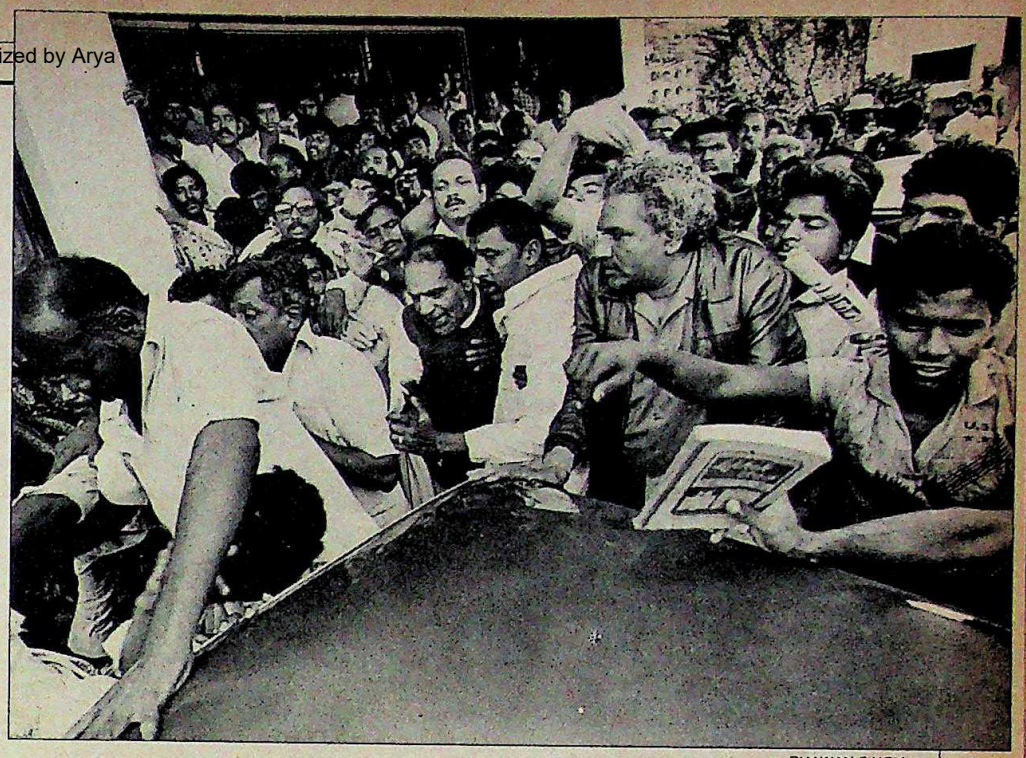
A. You see in a meeting it was decided that manufacturers, distillers and contractors should be kept out of the bottling business. But it was finally the excise commissioner who was convinced that only these people would be able to deliver the goods. While sending his proposals to the Government he also expressed the view that if the new policy was to be implemented it required amendments to the existing rules. While the proposed amendments were sent to the law department, contracts were sent to the excise department. Here their proposals got approval without delay because the new excise year was to begin soon. But the other matter of amending rules got stuck because there was no such urgency so the notification was issued after the selection of these candidates by the Government.

Q. But why couldn't the selection process be stayed till the amendments were finalised and notified? Even in the court, government advocates could not justify this subsequent amendment?

A. But the court has not held the Government guilty of malafide. In fact, some contractors by their performance have proved that their selection was not bad.

Q. But one thing is not clear, why have both the excise commissioner and excise minister mentioned your name in their notings. Does it not create the impression that you were taking an interest in this matter?

A. As a matter of fact, files were never sent to me and I had nothing really to do with them. Moreover, the day the minister approved the contracts, I was not even present in the city...I was out of Bangalore.



BHAWAN SINGH

Partymen at Hegde's home: dismay

the same evening to meet Chandra Shekhar and that he would soon come back to address the party legislators. "Ask Shekhar to come to Bangalore. You don't go," the crowd demanded in reply. Earlier, an informal meeting of the cabinet was disrupted because legislators stormed into the room.

When Hegde stepped out, the crowd followed him in such strength that he had to step down from the car and walk a furlong with them. So overwhelming was the fervour that, despite the tension, Hegde seemed buoyed by the growing support. One legislator was seen at Krishna distributing photocopies of blank resignation letters to the party MLA's and MLC's, imploring them to step down *en masse* if the chief minister did not backtrack on his decision. The Government staff willingly made photocopying facilities available to the eager flock. The Cabinet and the Janata Legislature Party (JLP) also held an informal meeting at Krishna where, in an impromptu resolution, Hegde was asked to "continue as our leader and there should be no second thought about this."

While Bangalore was swaddled in sentimental fog, the resignation sent shock-waves across the nation, rejuvenating an opposition that had been rocked on its heels by the court indictment. Even the AIADMK Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M.G. Ramachandran, friendly to the Congress(I) at the Centre, was quick to cable Hegde, saying: "The country should not lose the services of a leader of your stature." MGR's fellow-thespian N.T. Rama Rao of Andhra Pradesh called from Hyderabad with the same entreaty. Equally fervid were the old patriarchs of politics, such as former president N. Sanjeeva Reddy, former prime minister Morarji Desai and former Congress president S. Nijalingappa, in their appeal to Hegde. The Janata Parliamentary Board (JPB) went into session shortly afterwards, and the party's internal tensions were drowned in a strident, unanimous appeal to Hegde to stay in office and not leave. Even the two communist parties, whose leaders in Karnataka had been demurely campaigning for the "right-wing" chief minister's resignation, joined the "don't leave" chorus. The state CPI(M) leader, S. Suryanarayana Rao, made a sudden appearance at Krishna and braved the ridicule of the Janata legislators to walk up to Hegde and request him to reconsider his decision.

IT TOOK quite a while for Banerjee to return to Bangalore. But by then Hegde, accompanied by wife Shakuntala and Revenue Minister S.R. Bommai, had already left for the airport, without waiting for the nicety of handing over the letter to the governor personally. The Hegdes were headed for Delhi *en route* to Kanpur where they had a wedding to attend. However, a delay in the flight's departure enabled a puzzled Banerjee to speak over the telephone to Hegde at the airport. Apologetic about not having waited to meet the governor, Hegde nevertheless said he was firm in his resolve, and that he would meet the governor as soon as he returned in two days. But even on the aircraft to Delhi, Hegde was not to

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be left alone. Basavarajemani, a senior Congress(I) MP, walked up to Hegde and enquired gently: "Why are you resigning? Please don't resign." "But that's what your party wanted," Hegde shot back, albeit with a disarming smile.

The state Congress(I), which had stalked its prey like a hunter sensing the kill, now felt its quarry was giving it the slip. Earlier, the party's 80 MLA's had almost brought the roof down on the Assembly, which had been in session, staging interminable walk-outs and sitting in the well of the House. The Congress(I) MLC's, who are in a majority in the council, had forced it to adjourn the session. "He (Hegde) will have to go back from Bangalore with his face blackened,"

ARRACK CONTRACTS

Favoured Few

THE CASE that brought down the Hegde ministry began in September 1984, shortly before the Lok Sabha elections, when contracts were awarded to eight out of 131 applicants for bottling arrack. The contracts could have been worth over Rs 55 crore: three million litres of arrack annually for four years, at a bottling charge of Rs 4 per litre.

But as soon as "the chosen eight" were awarded the contracts, the Government was hauled to court by 45-year-old K. Rudraiah Raju, a civil contractor, and 35-year-old G.S. Shivanna, a general merchant. Last fortnight, the Government finally got a sharp rap on the knuckles when Justice Rama Jois and Justice N.D.Venkatesh declared that the awarding of the contracts "smacks of arbitrariness and is a flagrant violation of the rule of law" and that it "shocks the judicial conscience".

The case established that:

► Of the 131 applicants for the contracts, 124 were eligible. Yet all but one of these were rejected on the ground that the Government did not want to give the contract to those who had liquor manufacturing or vending licences.

► Of the eight who were selected, seven were not eligible under the Karnataka Excise (Bottling of Liquor) Rules. Yet they got the contracts;

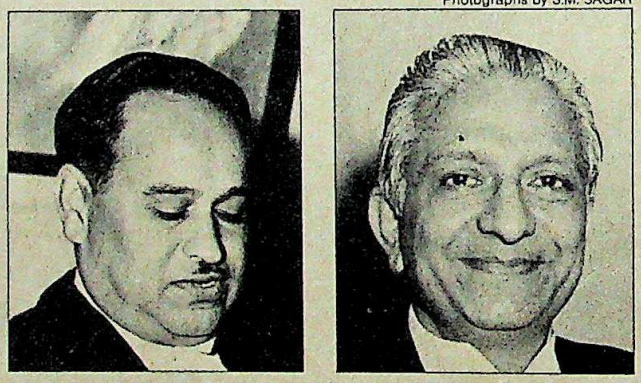
► T.V. Sarangadharan was given a contract though, like the 123 others rejected, he was an excise contractor.

► The bottling rules themselves were "hurriedly" changed in November 1984, *after* the writ petitions were submitted to the high court so as to make it possible for the Government to award bottling licences to the "chosen eight"; and these changes were notified in the official gazette only after the last date for filing objections to the changes in the rules had passed. In other words, the changes were made in such a manner that no objections could be filed.

► The rules were changed yet again, five months later, when it was realised that those who had already been awarded the contracts were not even eligible to apply.

► All this happened after the Government had claimed that these rules were not applicable to the bottling contract, so that the Government had negated its own stand; and the changes were made without the cabinet's consent.

Photographs by S.M. SAGAR



Justice Rama Jois and Justice N.D. Venkatesh: strong verdict

► Excise contracts were normally awarded for one year; in this case, however, the contract was for four years, so that their value quadrupled to a staggering Rs 55 crore and more.

Investigations by INDIA TODAY show that four of the eight successful applicants were not traceable at the addresses they had given. Yet the Government had said in court that intelligence agencies had vetted the successful applicants.

Further, four of the applicants had not even deposited the required Rs 10,000 per district before the stipulated date. Two of them—K.M. Srinivasmurthy and H.S. Somasekhar—submitted bank drafts for this sum after the last date for applications was over. And Chaitanya Kumar, a close relation of information minister Jivaraja Alva, submitted a draft for only Rs 10,000, although he was awarded contracts for three districts.

The Government rejected the application of a state Government-owned company, the Mysore Sugar Company, which supplies 66 per cent of the state's arrack, on the ground that this unit might adulterate arrack given to it for bottling. As the court pointed out, no one acting reasonably "would have excluded the application of an eligible state-owned undertaking which had all the facilities and prefer a private ineligible applicant." The judgement went on to say that the exclusion of this company on the ground of possible adulteration "is not only a glaring and flagrant violation of ...the bottling rules but also an outrageous defiance of logic."

The excise commissioner wrote shortly before the contracts were awarded that the "chief minister conducted confidential enquiry through the Police Department about the applicants in question"; but the court was told that the enquiry had been conducted by the excise commissioner.

Although the excise commissioner called all 131 applicants on the same day to satisfy himself about their ability to carry out the contract, no proper scrutiny had been done, as the home secretary pointed out later. The excise commissioner's notings show that one of the applicants was chosen partly because he appeared to be "young and energetic", and another was picked although he said that all he had was a plot of land in Bangalore and that he would have to set up a bottling unit before he could start bottling work.

The home secretary was one of two officials who objected but they were stopped short by an order from Excise Minister Ramesh Jigaginigi that the 'chosen eight' be given the contracts. Thus,

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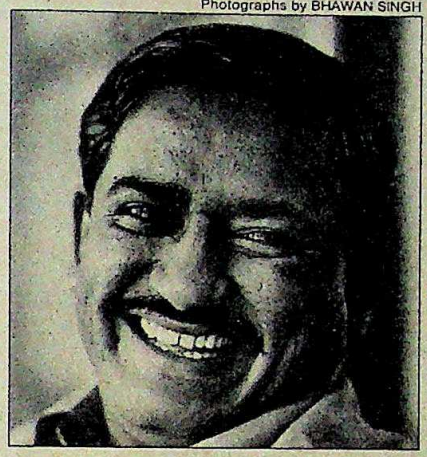
prophesied Veerappa Moily, whose famous tapes had once rolled in scandal. "Hegde has already got one foot in his political grave, and the Janata will keep him company there," jested the unflappable Gundu Rao.

The Congress(I) plan of action had been to orchestrate a state-wide campaign against the Janata Government that would culminate in late February with a memorandum to the governor (the Centre, in other words), urging him to dismiss the ministry. But Hegde's lightning move had changed the rules of the game. Oscar Fernandes, the newly-appointed Karnataka Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (KPCC-I) president, who had been on a tour of the state with

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH



(Clockwise) Jigaginigi, Ravi Hegde, bottled arrack and Kumar

the home secretary pointed out that "there are no details forthcoming regarding the creditworthiness of these individuals who are to be entrusted with the bottling work. No information is forthcoming regarding the infrastructure facilities available with them and the time frame within which they can set up the bottling plants."

Despite the sanction from on high, the deputy secretary in the Finance Ministry said: "It is not clear from the file as to how the excise commissioner has selected 19 bottling contractors out of 131 firms." Then, in a noting of unusual prescience, he added: "This has to be brought on record clearly. Otherwise, the selection is subject to challenge in the court of law."

Inevitably, when faced with all this, the court came down hard on the Government, and the judgement is replete with all manner of indictments. Hegde kept harping through the 11 days that he took to decide on resigning that the court did not charge either him or his government with mala fide intentions. But this is not the whole truth: the court did not say there was no mala fide; all it said was that it considered it unnecessary to go into the issue as the Government's decision on the bottling contracts was being struck down as unlawful. In short, there may well have been mala fide motives involved, but the court chose not to go into the question.

Interestingly enough, the case went through several twists and turns. In the period immediately after the contracts were awarded, a host of applicants whose papers had been rejected rushed to the courts with writ petitions. But strangely, no fewer than 18 writ petitions were withdrawn at various stages, leaving just two litigants who fought the case not as aggrieved applicants but as ordinary citizens fighting a case in the public interest.

However, the proceedings were hardly one-sided. The case initially involved charges to the effect that Hegde's son-in-law was involved in the deal through a business associate of his; but the petitioners had to withdraw this charge and express their "sincere regrets" as it was unfounded. Another minister, however, was not to get off without special mention, for it turned out that one of the successful applicants was none other than the brother-in-law of Alva. But it was not proved in court that this relationship had anything to do with the awarding of the contract. The court also rejected the contention that the bottling contract had been handed out on unnecessarily generous terms, and said the payment offered for bottling was reasonable.

Hegde's signature does not appear anywhere in the papers relevant to the case; but he does figure because some of the applicants are supposed to have been weeded out following a confidential enquiry that he conducted (implying that he had vetted and cleared the people who finally got the contracts). Also, the excise minister cites him in ordering that the eight be given the contracts.

Hegde contended that his role was limited to conducting an inquiry into various complaints. Hegde told INDIA TODAY: "The Tamil Nadu liquor scandal was fresh in our memories and we did not want to take any risk, so we conducted ourselves with extreme care. Beyond that I was not concerned with the whole exercise which was terminated at the level of commissioner and the minister. How do I come into the picture? My role is confined to policy making only."

Meanwhile the eight affected contractors whose bottling contracts have been cancelled by the high court have decided to go in appeal to the Supreme Court against the judgement. Said Chaitanya Kumar: "None of us were given this contract on the basis of any recommendations." Added Ravi Hegde Of Sea Shell: "By investing huge amounts of money and constructing bottling plants in record time, we have proved that we had the necessary financial background and the expertise to do the job."

Even as the debate continued, two more judges of the Karnataka High Court began inquiring into charges of favouritism in the export of rectified spirit from the state and bribery charges against Hegde's son.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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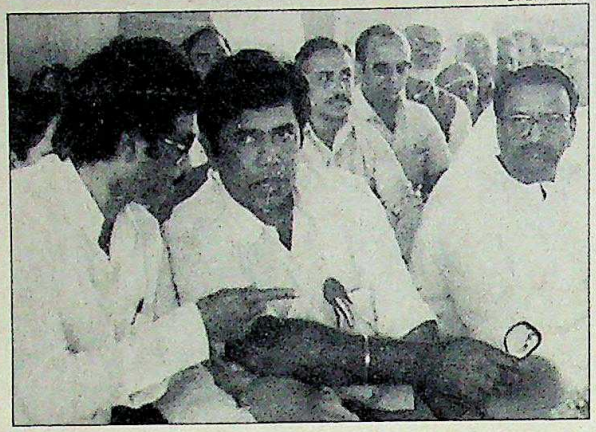
Bangarappa rustling up support against Hegde, now tried to change course in midspring. Addressing a "Hegde *hatao*" rally of the Youth Congress(I) at Shivajinagar that had obviously been planned prior to the resignation, he said: "Hegde must continue in power till the Janata regime grows so corrupt that the people will throw it out of office themselves."

D. BABURAJ



Bangarappa and Fernandes at Congress(I) meeting

Oscar Fernandes, the newly appointed Karnataka Pradesh Congress(I) Committee president, who had been on a tour of the state with Bangarappa rustling up support against Hegde, now tried to change course in midspring.

IN THE event, it was Hegde's own cabinet colleague who forced the governor to accept the chief minister's resignation without waiting for him to return from Kanpur. Law Minister Lakshmisagar announced in the Assembly that the chief minister had resigned, the speaker promptly adjourned the House, and the governor was left with a *fait accompli*. It now remained to be seen whether Hegde would come storming back into office on the strength of sustained support among the legislators, or the party would change its mind and allow Hegde to seek fresh pastures: a desire that he himself has often expressed. Either way, the Janata's most charismatic figure has used a cleansing resignation to convert political disaster and public ignominy into a moment of triumph.

Nevertheless, the Congress(I) had not been inactive. Its leaders met secretly with AICC(I) General Secretary Nawal Kishore Sharma, who had been deputed by the party high command to guide the KPCC(I) on its future course of action. The party prepared a long memorandum to the governor, saying that by not accepting Hegde's resignation he was creating a constitutional problem in the state. Bangarappa demanded that both the Houses should be called to discuss the chief minister's resignation. And he accused Hegde of violating democratic norms by not informing the House about his action. Soon after his meeting with the Congress delegation, Banerjee spoke to the chief minister in Kanpur. A few minutes later, he accepted the resignation on the ground that he had no option.

But the intriguing question remained: why did the law minister preempt the issue with his announcement in the Assembly? And was this of a piece with the earlier leaking of Hegde's letter to Chandra Shekhar? Political observers in the state were quick to point out that both Lakshmisagar and Chandra Shekhar are former socialists, while Hegde is of Congress(O) lineage.

Whether helped by forces within the Janata Party or not, the Congress(I) had finally managed to dislodge Hegde for the moment, at the third attempt. Earlier, within nine months of Hegde's Janata Ministry coming to power in January 1983, the Congress(I), determined to avenge its electoral defeat, had resorted to a favourite sport of the time: buying MLA's. But Hegde had guarded his flanks with remarkable alacrity and exposed the taped document of Moily's bargains with MLA's and built up a nation-wide campaign that helped him survive. Again, in December 1984, when 24 of the 28 Lok Sabha seats from Karnataka were swept up by the Congress(I) in the sympathy wave that followed Mrs Gandhi's assassination, there were orchestrated demands for his resignation. Hegde obliged, only to storm back into office by wresting 139 of the 225 assembly seats last March.

This time, the Congress(I) leader in the Assembly, S. Bangarappa, had raised the issue of arrack bottling contracts, and the noose was tightened round Hegde's neck by the high court. The judgement had all the ammunition that the Congress(I) could have prayed for *(see box)*.

While the court indictment and two commissions of inquiry looking into other charges against Hegde's government and relatives could conceivably do a great deal of damage to Hegde's political career, last fortnight's political drama gave Hegde a badly-needed shot in the arm, for both he and his government had been losing both appeal and conviction in less than a year of being swept back into office. Hegde had essentially managed to grab the imagination of the people by promising a cleaner political culture and by initiating a

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

Bommai and Deve Gowda

Hegde was rattled by political dinners hosted by MLA's belonging to two dominant castes and threatened to resign if they continued.

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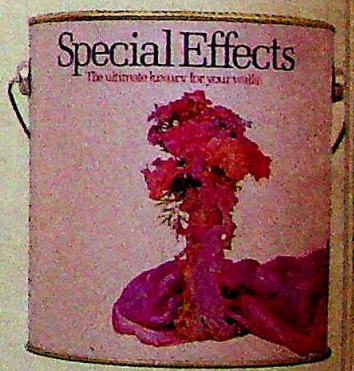

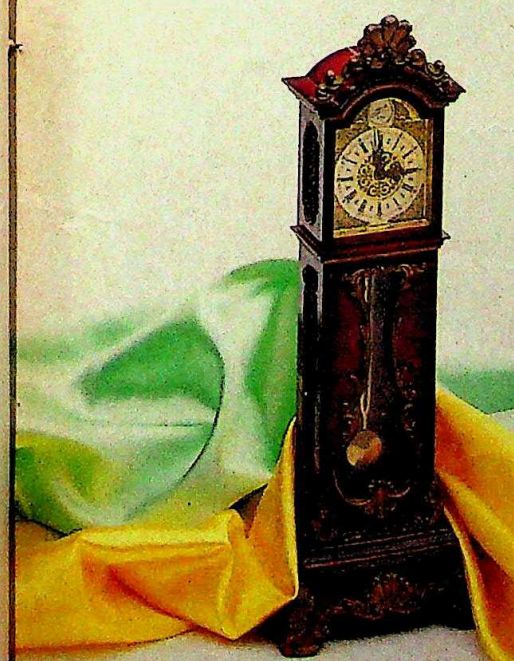

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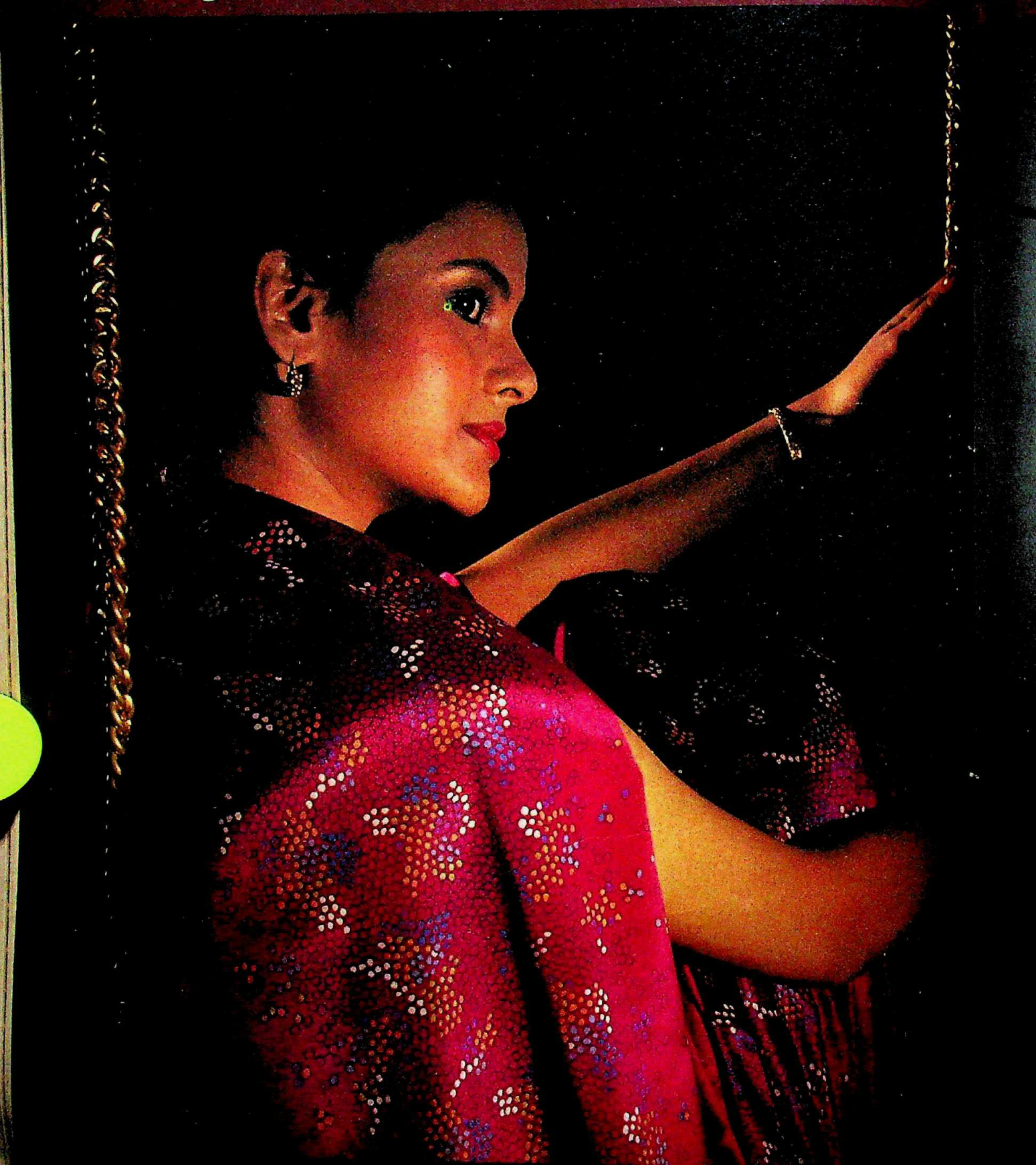

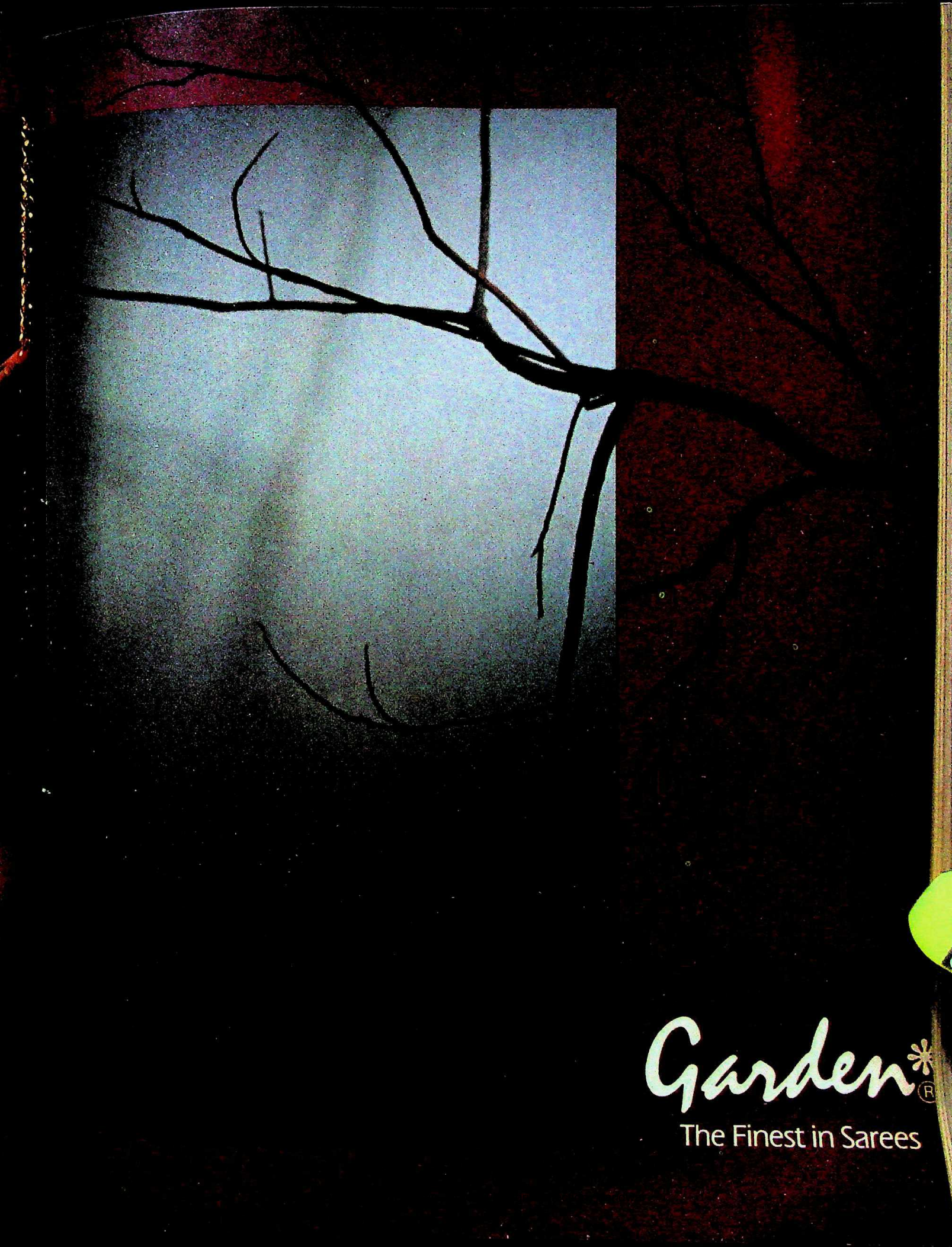
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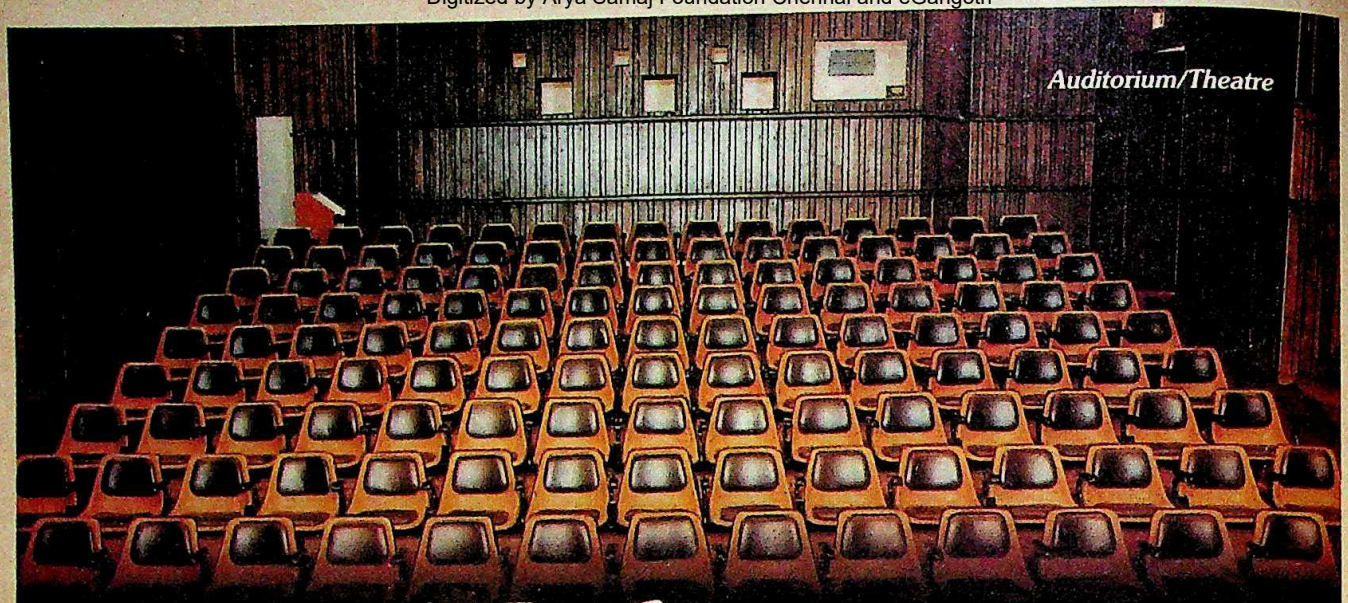

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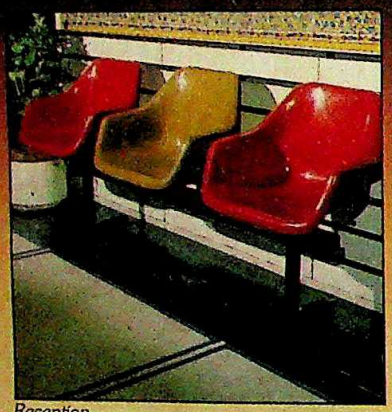
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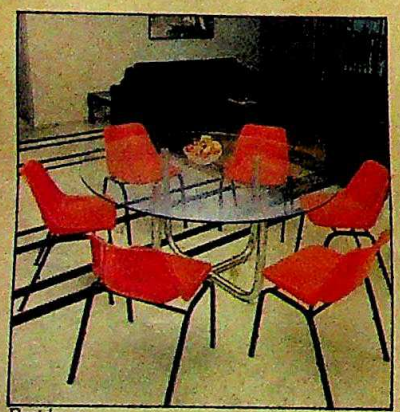
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degree of openness in the state's body politic, both lacking in the Congress(I)'s corruption-riddled and crony-oriented politics.

But even many of the Hegde Government's well-wishers admit that its image had begun to get tarnished by his partymen's scramble for the loaves and fishes of office. Last year, Hegde was forced to follow in the footsteps of Congress(I) regimes by giving in to the spoils system: over 20 corporations were created, with a party MLA or MLC or a party worker heading each one.

Electoral promises were violated too. The Janata Party had said that it would abolish the capitation fee system for medical and engineering colleges and clean up the vestiges of the pay-your-way-into-professional-institutions syndrome. But Hegde sanctioned not one but four such capitation fee-based institutions and allowed the existing ones to continue in business.

MEANWHILE, the state's economy floundered. In two years between 1983-84 and 1985-86, the plan outlay crept up at a snail's pace from Rs 630.53 crore to Rs 651 crore. The net domestic product rose by a moderate 3.4 per cent during 1984-85, only to fall by 0.4 per cent in the next year. An unprecedented drought ate into agricultural production, ruining cotton and oilseeds crops, and taking a heavy toll of coffee. Distress in the state has been widespread.

While the state's coffers were empty, Hegde introduced populist schemes, *a la* the Telugu Desam Government in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh: Rs 45 crore were spent in 1985-86 to buy dhotis and saris for subsidised sale, Rs 50 crore were spent on providing subsidised rice, and Rs 4.11 crore were spent on textbooks for schoolchildren. "Hegde wants the Centre to subsidise his subsidies," charged Moily, who had served as finance minister in the Gundu Rao regime.

Finally, Hegde began crumbling under the pressure of the same caste politics that he had vowed to eradicate. Even though two-thirds of his MLA's belong to the Lingayat and Vokkaliga groups, he had reduced their representation in the Cabinet to just 14 out of 30 ministerial berths. The backward castes and Harijans got as many berths, despite having far fewer MLA's. And in Hegde's absence, cabinet meetings were chaired by Home Minister Rachaiah, who belongs to a Scheduled Caste, ignoring the presence of the Vokkaliga and Lingayat stars Deve Gowda and Bommai. Another rising star was Nazir Sab, who made a reputation as rural development minister by digging 16,000 borewells in record time.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Chandra Shekhar and Hegde

Hegde has an image that now clearly overshadows Chandra Shekhar's whose anaemic leadership has taken the party along a nowhere road of *padayatras*.

Inevitably, caste tensions came to the fore in very quick time. But compromises were inevitable. Last September, Hegde was rattled by political dinners hosted by MLA's belonging to the two dominant castes let by Bommai and Devegowda and threatened to resign if they continued. Then, to buy peace, Hegde allowed the opening of capitation fee colleges for the Vokkaligas and the backward castes: in gross violation of the electoral promises that he had made in his first term.

There were other tensions within the Janata Party. Hegde's unquestionable personal charisma was often cited as an attempt to smuggle in a personality cult. The differences surfaced last year when Deve Gowda addressed a widely-publicised party meeting in Bangalore where he deplored the feeling that the Janata Party had owed its victory in the March assembly elections to Hegde's personality. The subsequent budget session witnessed the chief minister blocking the funds of Deve Gowda's ministry in deference to the Congress(I) charges of financial irregularities.

That wasn't all. Hegde was due to hold the panchayat elections in December, but was sufficiently unsure of the result to postpone them indefinitely. Jostling within the party increased with Hegde saying that he didn't want to stay the full five-year term, an admission which indicated that he may well have been bored with state-level problems. Yet without him, the state unit of the Janata could turn out to be orphaned and a less effective force at the hustings.

But Deve Gowda was small fry in comparison with the heavyweights of the Janata Party who never liked Hegde, and saw him as a threat on the national political scene. To many of the fire-eating socialists in the Janata pantheon, led by George Fernandes and Chandra Shekhar himself, Hegde represents a rival force. So while Chandra Shekhar stated that he was opposed to Hegde's resignation, there remained the unresolved mystery of the leaked letter.

But the fact is that Hegde is at his best in the face of adversity, thinking on his feet, working out adroit moves, outmanoeuvring those in his way and taking the battle into the enemy court. In addition, Hegde has an image that now clearly overshadows Chandra Shekhar's, whose anaemic leadership has taken the party along a nowhere road of *padayatras*. Chandra Shekhar's hold on the party machinery is getting shakier with the passage of time. This is perhaps the time for Hegde to look out.

Hegde is a warrior soldier and hardly a peacetime general. His genius is rebuked in the drudgery of day-to-day state-level politics, its tedium, its routine, its anxious wait for Central funds and its vexing interface with narrow parochial interests. Perhaps the resignation drama will yank the sturdy crusader out of his home base and throw him back into the vortex of national politics.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with SRINIVASA PRASAD
In Bangalore and bureau reports

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RAJIV GANDHI

The Fading Glitter

THE CLICHES and mixed metaphors come tumbling fast and furious. The high flier who has gone into a tailspin. The Midas who has lost his golden touch. The promises that have been scattered on the winds of non-performance. Suddenly, in the space of a mere two months, the seemingly invincible Rajiv Gandhi, messiah of a year ago who would deliver this land from its ills and evils, is being portrayed in less than ethereal robes. Mutedly, no doubt, in whispers and—so far, at least—mainly in the symbiotic, urban trinity of 'intellectuals', politicians and bureaucrats, Rajiv is no longer invulnerable.

The teflon, it seems, is beginning to come unstuck. Where once he could do no wrong, last fortnight's petroleum prices bungle, the stalled Punjab accord, even the cancellation of a Doordarshan showing of the telefilm, *Rajiv's India*, are being blamed squarely on the prime minister. Losses in by-elections are seen as evidence that his tremendous vote-catching ability—which surpassed in December 1984 the best of Indira Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru—may have lost its magic. The Government's continuing grassroot slovenliness clashes starkly with his assertion that his would be "the Government that works faster". Power brokers were abolished with a verbal flourish in the tumultous closing weeks of 1984, but power-broking continues.

The result: the charismatic, almost mesmerising hold of Rajiv on his party and the Government machine appears to have been prised loose—a little. As one young and influential MP put it: "There was a sense of movement during those early days, a feeling that we would surge. That feeling of Camelot has dissipated." This sentiment reflects an apparently growing sense of frustration, even among diehard Rajivists, that the administration is failing to implement promises, that there is a growing credibility gap between performance and promise punctuated with instances of apparently confused thinking. Rajiv himself, who soon after his December 1984 victory had said that people's expectations were scary, last fortnight told INDIA TODAY: "The euphoria has to stop."

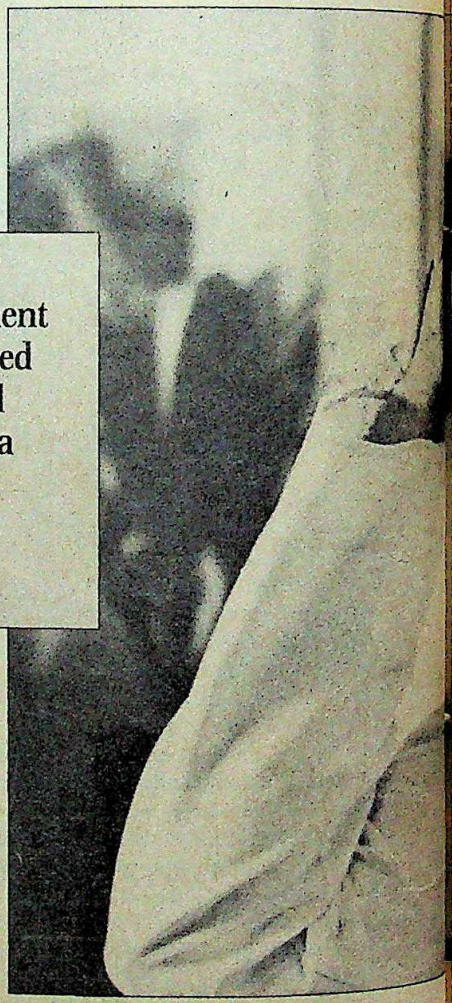
Independent opinion is quick to seize on the new mood. Govind Talwalkar, editor of the *Maharashtra Times* believes that Rajiv's "glitter has definitely faded". The slide, he believes, began with the Congress centenary celebrations, and was accelerated "by the recent bungled handling of the petroleum products price hike. Now the middle class is suspicious of Rajiv because of the massive increases, and the industrialists are wary because of the raids. There is also a feeling that he gives in to pressure very easily. Thus his two biggest urban support segments are not as enthusiastic as before."

The almost mesmerising hold of Rajiv on his party and the Government machine appears to have been prised loose—a little. As one young and influential MP put it: "There was a sense of movement during those early days. That feeling of Camelot has dissipated."

Political seer Romesh Thapar comments: "No prime minister can afford to dither. For instance, when the Mathew Commission failed to arrive at a clear decision, it was for the prime minister to summon the two chief ministers, give his award, and make it mandatory. But that did not happen."

There is guarded criticism of Rajiv from his own supporters too. They talk of him more in sorrow than in anger. They admire him for his guts and his idealism which they say still burns within him with a consuming ferocity. They point out that he hasn't really changed much in his desire to shake things up and to move the nation. They point out that his speech at the Bombay centenary celebrations was an act of sheer courage—even if politically naive. But what they criticise is the lack of follow-up action, and it seems as if a landmark speech was to no particular point at all.

This was not the case earlier on. During those halcyon days, just weeks ago, Rajiv bounded on to the stage as the slayer of seemingly invincible giants. Like all politicians before him, Rajiv promised changes. The difference this time was that people took him seriously. Promises were backed by speedy action and rapid fire decisions. Quickly, he purged his secretariat of his mother's hangers on. He rammed through the anti-defection bill, and embarked on political reform, consulting the opposition parties and seeking to carry them with him. He began to reshape his party in his own popular image—clean, fresh-faced, and possessed of the political and moral will to undertake precipitous reforms at the grassroots level. He started sweeping changes in taxes and economic policy. And notwithstanding jokes about



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his Computerji image, even the wags had begun to take him seriously.

As one Congress(I) cabinet minister put it: 'We were convinced, along with the rest of the nation, that things would begin to happen in a time bound fashion. We were convinced that he did not give a damn about his own personal political fortunes. The accomplishment of a mission was the most important thing." But perceptions have changed.

When Punjab was "lost" to the Akalis, Rajiv and much of his Congress(I) sighed with relief: it was, in the event, an appropriate result, to let a party that said it was of the Sikhs handle a problem caused by the Sikhs. But there was criticism that he and his party hadn't campaigned hard enough during the Punjab elections.

And, in Assam they pulled out all the stops, trying to work the Rajiv magic in what, ultimately, became a no-win situation. It didn't work. Far from it. Related by-elections saw the Congress(I) humbled; even stalwart Arjun Singh, the catalyst for the Punjab accord and recently appointed vice-president of the ruling party, won by a greatly reduced majority.

Last fortnight, Sangli was another bitter pill of defeat to swallow; a constituency that had been a safe Congress(I) stomping ground, the preserve of former chief minister Vasantrao Patil whose nephew gained the ignominious distinction of being the one to lose to a Janata candidate.

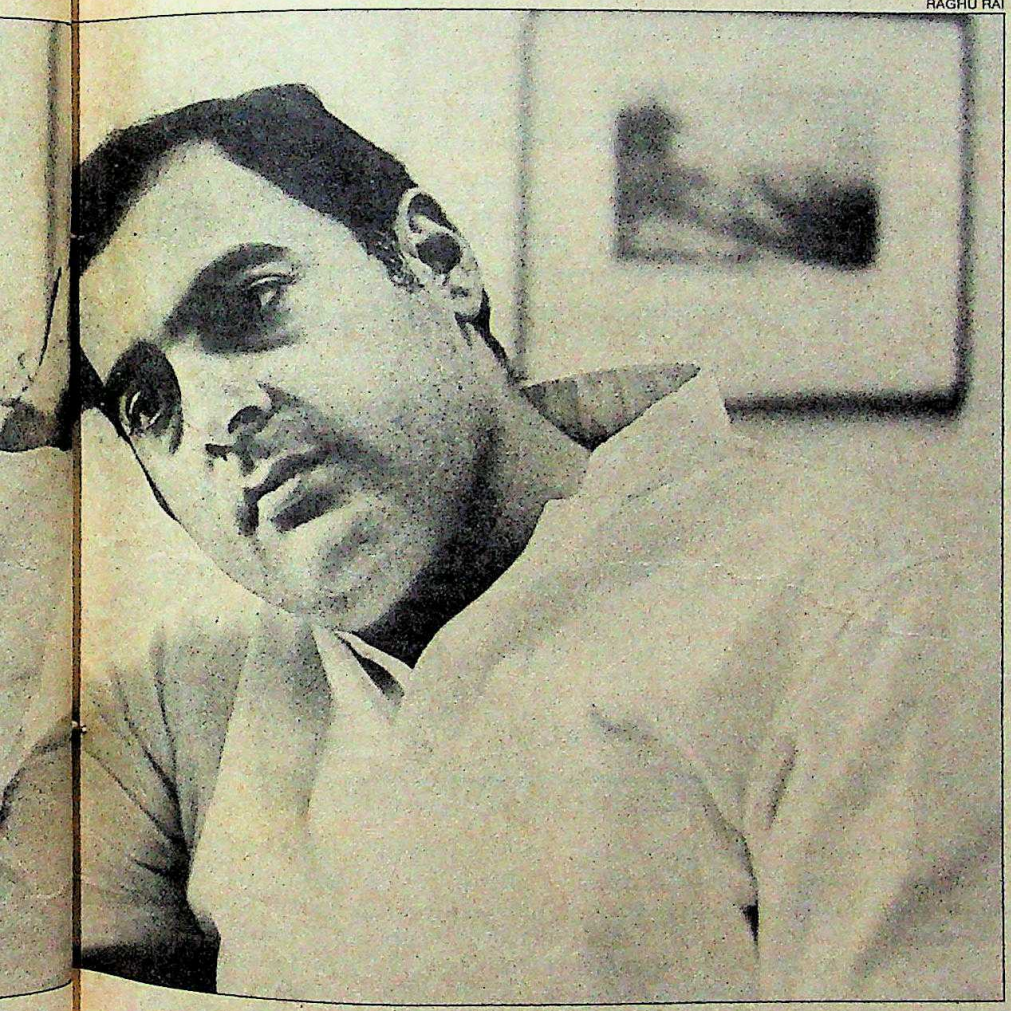
One of the causes of such a disastrous showing was the beginnings of a desertion by the Congress(I)'s two vote-banks: the Harijans and the Muslims. The formation of the Bahujan Samaj (INDIA TODAY, January 31) which in its infancy pulled votes from the Congress(I) in Punjab and then made an impact on the December by-election indicates a new desire by the Harijans to seek an independent political future.

The Muslims, on the other hand, remain dissatisfied with the Assam accord and the Supreme Court verdict in the Shah Bano—clearly indicated by the success of the United Minorities front in the Assam election and Janata leader Syed Shahabuddin's victory in the Lok Sabha by-election from Kishanganj.

If the prime minister was coming in for muted criticism on account of political maladroitness he was also being subjected to intense flak over his failure to deliver on his campaign promises. There was the oft-repeated charge that for all the earlier talk and banter he was failing to implement the "image changes" that he had so openly desired and promised an expectant nation.

Notwithstanding his pejorative party peroration at the Bombay centennial, the Congress affair turned into a grandiose tamasha, clearly out pointing anything that had gone before. Party and people began to ask: is Rajiv's party really any different?

RAGHU RAI



THEN the slow undoing of the Punjab accord, the delayed appointment of the Mathew Commission, its eleventh hour verdict on Abohar and Fazilka, Bhajan Lal's shenanigans which gave birth to the idea that the Government spoke in two voices, Rajiv Gandhi's and someone else's, the crushing disappointment when Chandigarh didn't go to Punjab on Republic Day and, most ominously of all, the renewed takeover of the Golden Temple in Amritsar by a fresh lot of terrorists. And, all too quickly it began to seem that it was business as usual, that intractable problems were threatening to remain intractable, that there were no easy solutions. Worse, there were strong indications that the prime minister's writ simply didn't seem to run. Once, twice, thrice Rajiv publicly asked that Doordarshan stop focussing its cameras and valuable broadcast time on him and his activities. Yet, Doordarshan persisted giving rise to public speculation that Rajiv's public stand was either just so much eyewash or that his command couldn't rein in his own minister.

Critics within his party say that the most recent reorganisation involving the shifting of commerce minister Arjun Singh and induction of Shiv Shankar to the post looked suspiciously like a game of musical chairs. It wasn't the first time that Arjun Singh had been shunted around at short notice: last year in March, he was sent to Punjab within hours of being sworn in as Madhya Pradesh chief minister. Now, the grand negotiator of the now-imperiled Punjab accord had only recently shifted to the key Commerce Ministry and won a prestige Congress(I) Lok Sabha seat of South Delhi. The same reorganisation also saw the eviction of

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Nawal Kishore Sharma and T. Anjiah from the council of ministers and their appointments to party posts to 'rejuvenate' the Congress(I). With party elections slated for the summer and dissidence raising its head once again, the high command was obviously clearing the deck for new action—but, for want of appropriate projection, the public appearance was confusing—and smacked of ad hoc decisions.

IN OTHER areas, where Rajiv's Government, which is supposed to 'work faster', has tried to take concrete steps to reform and streamline itself, the response has been imperceptible. Rajiv has launched drives against corrupt officials in various departments including Income Tax, the International Airport Authority, the Mazagon Docks, and Customs. He has announced massive drives to weed out files that occupy some 600 sq km of space in Central ministries and recommended the appointments of coordinators in each ministry to scrutinise work and introduce modern management techniques. And he has issued a directive to all Central ministers to eliminate waste, mismanagement and corruption. But the bureaucratic behemoth has not budged, and is unlikely to in a hurry. Obviously, these promised reforms have hardly touched the life of the common man whose humiliation, financial fleecing and degradation continues at the hands of petty bureaucrats in banks, post offices, the railways, and district and tehsil-level offices.

As a result Rajiv's pro-rich image is reinforced. Rajiv himself is concerned that this shouldn't be. He argues: "We've done more for the poor than ever before. We've given a little to the middle class and taken away some. The rich have paid more in taxes and dues than they have ever done before—and all this has been ploughed back into programmes for the poor." The Government, in fact, says that the outlay on poverty alleviation programmes has been raised this year by 35 per cent to Rs 1,165 crore.

But these programmes haven't been explained well. His government is seen by the poor as one "which has more time for long-term fiscal policies and lessening of controls and concessions for industry... but cosmetic band-aid solutions for the poor," writes Bunker Roy, a leading social activist. In a recent article, Roy said: "My one-time acquaintance who has now become the prime minister of India will always receive my support. But at the same time he must know I consider his track record for the first year for tackling the problems of the rural poor dismal and disturbing."

Rajiv himself seems to be feeling the pinch. Highly placed sources, including a former cabinet minister and a minister of state—said that of late he had become irascible and impatient at the pace of change, and with his own inability to get things moving. He is also reportedly becoming increasingly inaccessible to his own senior partymen and senior bureaucrats whose telephone calls to the Prime Minister's Secretariat go unreturned for days. There is resentment in political circles and in ministries scattered about the capital's Rajpath that minor functionaries in the Prime Minister's Secretariat carry more clout than decision-makers elsewhere, and that the subterranean forces that operated in Mrs Gandhi's time have merely been replaced by a new concentration of power in that secluded corner of South Block, cut off by its own very special security arrangement, pulling the strings from its isolated yet exalted precincts.

Resentment against Rajiv's closed-door approach came to a head in the way the recent price hikes were announced and then rescinded, There is no doubt, as government economists will never tire of preaching, that petroleum prices need to be increased to keep consumption on a leash, even more importantly to raise resources for the seventh plan which is being reoriented towards bigger spending in anti-poverty programmes and to reduce the crippling subsidies on items such as kerosene (70 paise litre) and LPG (Rs 10 per cylinder). The burden of subsidies costs the Government almost Rs 4,000 crore and with food and fertiliser subsidies cut recently there was a good case for a hike in petroleum prices (*see page* 126). The Government argued that import of petroleum products was becoming a burden. Said V.P. Singh: "If we do not cut our consumption we will remain in debt," in a reference to the Rs 7,000-crore trade gap anticipated this year. There is also the perennial problem of the adulteration of diesel with kerosene. According to one ball park figure, no less than 20 per cent of the country's kerosene output of 8 million kilolitres goes in adulterating some of the 18 million kilolitres of diesel produced. With diesel at Rs 3.20 per litre and kerosene at Rs 2.11 a litre, that meant more than Rs 150 crore into the pocket of adulterators. And the decision had been endorsed by the cabinet committees on political and economic affairs, both presided over by the prime minister.

But it was bad timing. The increase ran counter to the news that international oil prices are crashing. The day India raised its prices, the world crude price fell to $18 a barrel, its lowest this decade, leading people to wonder why India needed to raise petroleum prices when its import costs were slated to drop. The offcial press release, explaining the increase, argued that oil consumption had exceeded 7 per cent in 1985-86 against 5.5 per cent in the preceding five years. Further, the increase in transport fuel had been of the order of between 8.5 and 10 per cent. But the Government's oil companies quietly leaked out their own figures a week later showing that the

PRICING PECADILLOS

Prices of petroleum products and percentage change
(In Rupees)

	Old price	Revised price	% change	New price	net % change
Petrol per litre	7.00	7.54	7.7	7.43	**6.14**
Diesel per litre	3.39	3.58	5.60	3.50	**3.24**
Kerosene per litre	2.11	2.34	10.90	2.25	**6.60**
LPG cylinder	51.35	61.79	20.30	57.62	**12.21**

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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The opposition parties meeting on February 14 in Delhi: rallying together

What really turned the hike into a political disaster was the fact that the effect of the increase cut across all social boundaries. The middle class, which the Congress(I) had been wooing assiduously, was hit hardest by the increase in the LPG price. The poor were hit the worst by the rise in kerosene.

consumption of petroleum products had, in fact, gone up by only 4.5 per cent.

What really turned the hike into a political disaster was the fact that the effect of the increase cut across all social boundaries. The middle class, which the Congress(I) had been wooing assiduously, was hit hardest by the increase in the LPG price. The poor were hit by the rise in kerosene. Admitted the Madhya Pradesh Congress(I) chief, Digvijaysingh: "The kerosene price increase was the unkindest. A kerosene lamp is the only source of light in tribal homes."

Sensing the popular reaction, the party embarked on its clumsy retraction. The first cry of alarm was reportedly raised by a senior office-bearer of the party on Friday, January 31, the day the hike was announced. By Monday, it seems, the decision had been taken to soften the blow. West Bengal PCC(I) chief Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, met Rajiv that day and told him that the party was having a tough enough time in the state opposing the CPI(M); the latest imposts would make their task much more difficult. Rajiv then told Das Munshi not to worry, that they would be reducing the hike.

It was then that the salvage operation was mounted. The motive was down-to-earth politics, to gain some prestige for the party even if the Government were to lose face, but the approach was amateurish. Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Tourism, H.K.L. Bhagat, met Rajiv the same evening and urged him to reconsider the step, in what was later described as an exercise in "inner party democracy"

THEN, Ahmed Patel, Gujarat PCC(I) chief, reported to be among the three state party chiefs—the others being Mufti Mohammed Syed of Jammu & Kashmir and Dumar Lal Baitha of Bihar—saw Rajiv the day after with the same plea. The news that Patel was reported to be in town came as a big surprise to Patel's wife who rang up journalist friends the next day to confirm if her husband was in town without her knowledge! Kamlapati Tripathi, working president, also issued a strong statement calling the step "unpolitical" and warning that it could "destroy the Congress(I)". But clearly Tripathi did not consider it his duty to do anything more: the very next day he went off to Varanasi for a week-long sojourn.

But there was more to follow. On Wednesday, February 5, the cabinet met in the morning and decided that the prices would be pegged down but the party working committee would be asked to pass a resolution asking the Government to bring them down. Mid-morning, the nine members of the CWC in town were asked to rush to the South Block office of the prime minister and the desired resolution was passed. Absent were Tripathi and Arjun Singh. The Government announcement reducing the prices came a few hours later, with V.P. Singh calling it a case of the Government showing sensitivity to a public demand. The finance minister told INDIA TODAY that the prices were rolled back after ministers promised to neutralise the loss of revenue by cutting unnecessary administrative expenditure.

History of sorts was made that day. It was the first time that the party's highest policy making body had met in the South Block—yet another point of criticism. It was also the first time in Independent India that the CWC prevailed upon the Government to undo even partly a policy decision of this kind. The all-round embarrassment could barely be hidden. Asked if Rajiv as the party president had asked Rajiv the prime minister to take this step, AICC(I) General Secretary G.K. Moopanar said sheepishly: "You can say so if you like." Another General Secretary, Bhagwat Jha Azad, argued that this was a "welcome development in establishing the superiority of the party over the Government" but it wasn't just this known

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dissident past that made him sound less than convincing.

WHATEVER it may have done to the Government's image, the prices issue has breathed a lease of life in the Opposition which has been long dormant in the absence of a clear cut issue to focus their charge campaign. Even Rajiv had to admit that the Opposition had breathed new life. Said he: "It is good to have the Opposition come to life." Meetings addressed from the same platform, city and state-wide bandhs, even an all-India—the time-honoured manifestations of an opposition taking the issue to the streets, a spectacle so conspicuous by its absence ever since the Rajiv blitzkrieg in the last elections, were back as if summoned by a genie. H.N. Bahuguna put it aptly: "This price increase is like an atom bomb."

Seizing the hour, all opposition parties huddled under the same umbrella, with results that brought cheer. The BJP, the Lok Dal and the Janata Party called a successful Delhi bandh on February 11. The Left parties, supported by other opposition parties, staged a bandh in West Bengal and Tripura the next day. Andhra Chief Minister, N.T.Rama Rao called it "unfortunate and unprincipled" and urged Rajiv to withdraw it, and later called for an opposition conclave. On February 14, all the opposition parties, including the two main Left parties, met under the aegis of the Janata Party to chalk their future course of action. Vajpayee pointed out that this was "the first meeting after the last elections that will be attended by all the opposition parties."

The CPI and the CPI(M), too, were quick to bury their antipathy to the bourgeois parties and to each other, agreeing to join the Janata-sponsored movement and to stage joint demonstrations all over the country on February 20. The National Campaign Committee of Trade Unions, an umbrella body comprising unions across the ideological board, gave a call to the workers and trade unions to "make preparations for a sustained movement" against the Government's economic policies. Said West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu: "The petrol price hike is the logical outcome of the economic policy being pursued by the Centre. It is their policy to cause distress to as many people as possible." Echoed the BJP's L.K. Advani: "The Government seems determined to hit the common man where it hurts most, the belly."

The Opposition attack on Rajiv had hitherto lacked the sharp edge of personal animosity that they reserved for Mrs Gandhi but there were indications that they could be getting down to bare knuckles. Said Bahuguna: "The elite was taken in by the beautiful faces they saw on TV, not realising that beauty and strength come from within." Said Vajpayee: "Rajiv Gandhi is trying to be a little too smart but nothing can hide the fact that this government has no backbone." Referring to the hamhanded way the Congress(I) leadership orchestrated the intra-party protest against the price, Vajpayee quipped: "The matter is even more serious if the protest, in fact, was not orchestrated."

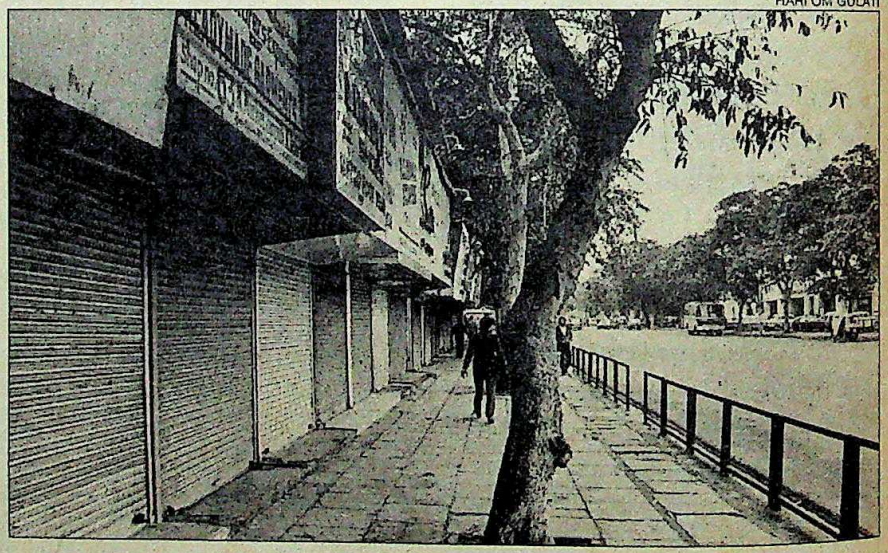
While Rajiv bore the brunt of the criticism over the price policy at the national level he is also taking heat at the state levels because his programmes—particularly critical elements of the 20-point programme—are barely inching forward. This is largely, local party men say, because of a non-responsive local level bureaucracy that pays them no heed. Grassroots politicians—many of them the 'new faces' of Congress(I), are under tremendous pressure from their constituents to perform because they were seen as the harbingers of a new regime. But they complain that many of the "bad image" politicians—some of them were the most accomplished fund raisers for Congress—who were denied tickets still remain influential within the party and are able to "commit" the bureaucracy to themselves to the detriment of the new faces who were to have become Rajiv's new grassroots cadres.

The new politicos have been unable to perform either because of inexperience or because, by the very nature of their being representatives of a new style of politics, they are unable, or unable to use the traditional patronage machines to accomplish administrative chores. They expect, therefore, that their problems will be handled directly by the Prime Minister's Secretariat or by politicians within the PCC's who will be able to wield the Rajiv "stick". But this 'stick', many of them have discovered to their chagrin, does not exist because the prime minister's office is often non-responsive, and the PCC's are too busily engaged in their own power struggles to be of any use.

And herein lies the crux of Rajiv's dilemma. He remains essentially unchanged, dedicated to change and of accomplishing his mission without politicising the process. But the country remains in the grip of old-style politics functioning to the age-old drumbeat of party bosses and political payoffs. Much of the resentment he has aroused, much of the opposition, even cynical glee that has ridden in tandem with news of the Government's fumbles, is because the system is under pressure to change—and it is resisting. Idealism, for the lack of which, nobody, not even his foes fault Rajiv, then becomes a lonely, Quixotic adventure.

"But Rajiv has got to recognise," a friendly MP says in despair, "that all democratic parties are, in essence, vehicles of patronage. Even hallowed stalwarts of the party, Gobind Ballabh Pant, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, were well-versed in this game. Not everybody is a nationalist and motivated by idealism. You have to know how to commit people to yourself so that they do the right thing."

HARI OM GULATI



Shuttered shops on the day of the bandh in Delhi: resounding success

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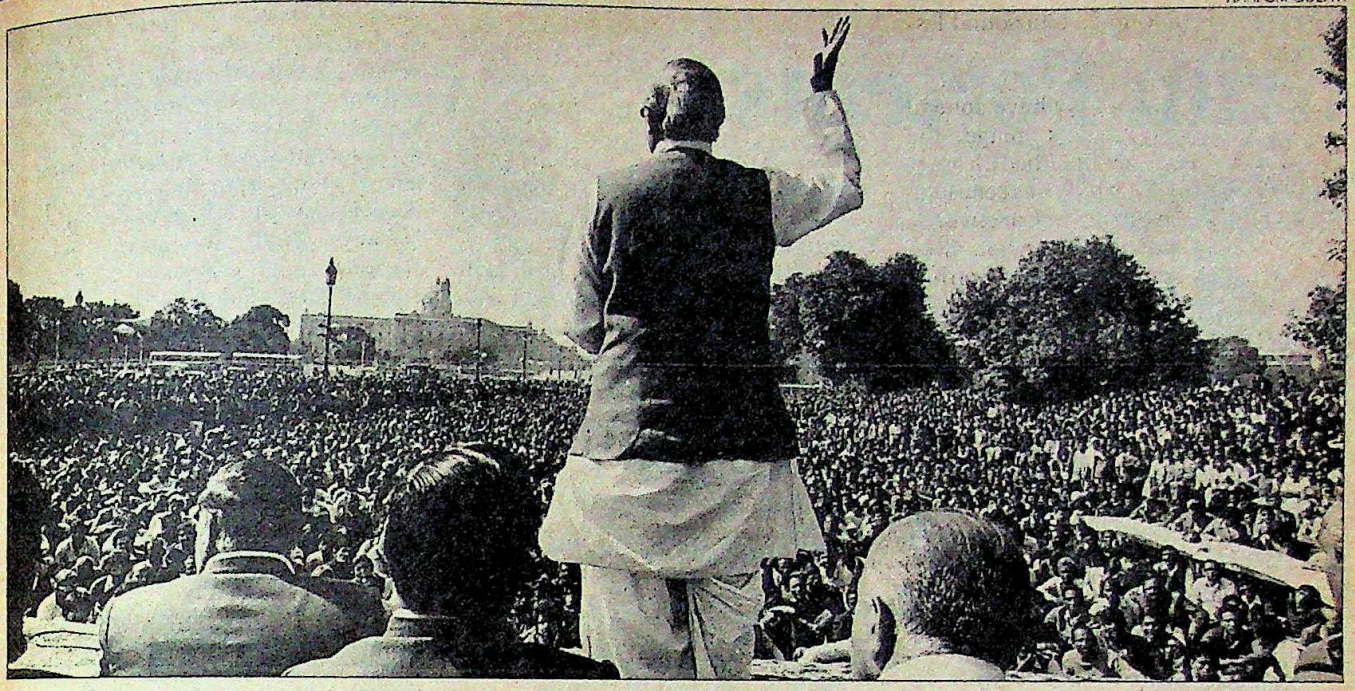
HARI OM GULATI



Vajpayee addressing the public meeting convened by the Opposition: wide support

> The prices issue has breathed a lease of life in the Opposition which has been long dormant in the absence of a clear cut issue to focus their campaign. Seizing the hour, all opposition parties are huddled under the same umbrella.

Rajiv's hatred for, and the demise of, the old-fashioned party boss—with no structure to replace him—has led to a situation, one senior Congress(I) minister believes, "where everybody is the boss and nobody is the boss. In the old days, a state level party boss was totally in command. He made decisions. He took both the praise and the flak. But today nobody is totally responsible for any one area. So every pradesh committee chief runs to the Centre for the slightest thing and the Central apparatus seems to have no machinery to deal with this situation."

Ultimately, it is the demand and tempo of the world of *realpolitik* that are Rajiv's biggest enemies. Because he refuses to let them cramp his style in which politics is still a dirty word, the world of politics comes back with a vengeance to cramp his initiatives. He has made some compromises: some of his cabinet colleagues do not enjoy the highest of public reputations yet they find a berth in his ministry because he needs hands who are used to piloting the ship. In a sense he has declared war simultaneously on all fronts: against inefficient and corrupt bureaucrats, law-breaking businessmen as well as self-serving politicians. Unfortunately, the battle takes innocent victims with it and the resentment is multiplied.

Rajiv faces a political quandary. Much as he would like to, he cannot do without the very people he wants changed. The Congress(I), for instance, which has long been dominated by self-seeking politicians, and the bureaucracy which either resists change or is determined to continue in its unresponsive, slothful way. His Cabinet is not exactly sparkling with talent. The tragedy of his speech at the centenary celebrations is not that he made it and alienated a substantial part of party and government at one stroke but that it should have had to be made at all.

Signs of party revolt are yet mere straws in the wind. But as one state Congress(I) chief warned: "There is going to be a split before the organisational elections if a couple of more disasters like the petroleum products hike are repeated. The disgruntled elements would definitely have left the party were they not unsure that their future outside the party is any better than inside; and were it not for the anti-defection bill, they will ask for their pound of flesh if they see that the overall situation is getting bad. Such people are only waiting for an opportunity to strike."

But there is support for the prime minister's new direction as well. Says political commentator Cho Ramaswamy: "Rajiv's glitter was because of the rays of his fresh approach. But now his posture is one of oscillation between these rays and the darkness of the beaten track. It will be a pity if he abandons the new path that he has been following. Rajiv Gandhi must also show that he is firm, because our people want to be ruled and not just governed."

That new approach isn't likely to be given up in a hurry. The honeymoon lasted longer than most people in government expected it to, and it was clear that if the minute hard decisions were taken there would be a reaction. Major policies have only been unveiled and it will be some time before their impact is felt and dividends collected. The engineering on the party has only just begun and it will take time for the bureaucracy to respond to the impulses being directed at it. But ultimately it is not one or two bungled decisions or a delayed accord or even a state lost in the Assembly elections that will determine whether the faded glitter has vanished for good. It will be an electorate's assessment of five years of governance that will eventually deliver the verdict on that.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR and AJAY KUMAR

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PUNJAB

Grim Portents

IN PUNJAB history seems set to repeat itself; this time as an even greater tragedy. There is no Bhindranwale but the similarities with the pre-Operation Bluestar are frightening. Terrorists strike with impunity: over the last fortnight itself they killed 10 people, including three Akali moderates, in over a dozen incidents across the state. Extremists are back in command at the Golden Temple: the demolition of the Akal Takht under the supervision of the leaders of the Damdami Taksal and the All-India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF) is complete and its rebuilding is imminent. The Akali Government tried and failed to reason with the extremists and seemed set on a collision course. Suddenly, there was talk of another Bluestar but nobody was sure it would help. There were just no ready answers: seven months after the historic Rajiv-Longowal accord Punjab was back to square one. *(Also see special feature on page 90).*

The Akalis and SGPC bent over backwards to reason with the hotheads in the Golden Temple and when they got nowhere, capitulated—changing the venue of their February 16 *sarbat khalsa* from the temple to the Gurudwara Keshgarh Sahib at Anandpur Sahib. A stream of mediators ferried to and from Amritsar: including Akali leaders like Sukhjinder Singh, Raja Narinder Singh MLA, Deputy Speaker Narinder Singh Kahlon and *Akali Patrika* editor Ratnesh Singh Sodhi.

Chief Minister S.S. Barnala rushed to Amritsar, ostensibly to bolster the morale of his partymen but clearly hoping for a fruitful meeting with Mohkam Singh, the acting chief of the Taksal. The meeting came to nought. "We know Sikhs are with us and we shall show it on *sarbat khalsa* day but we want to avoid strike and blood shed," said Finance Minister Balwant Singh who accompanied him.

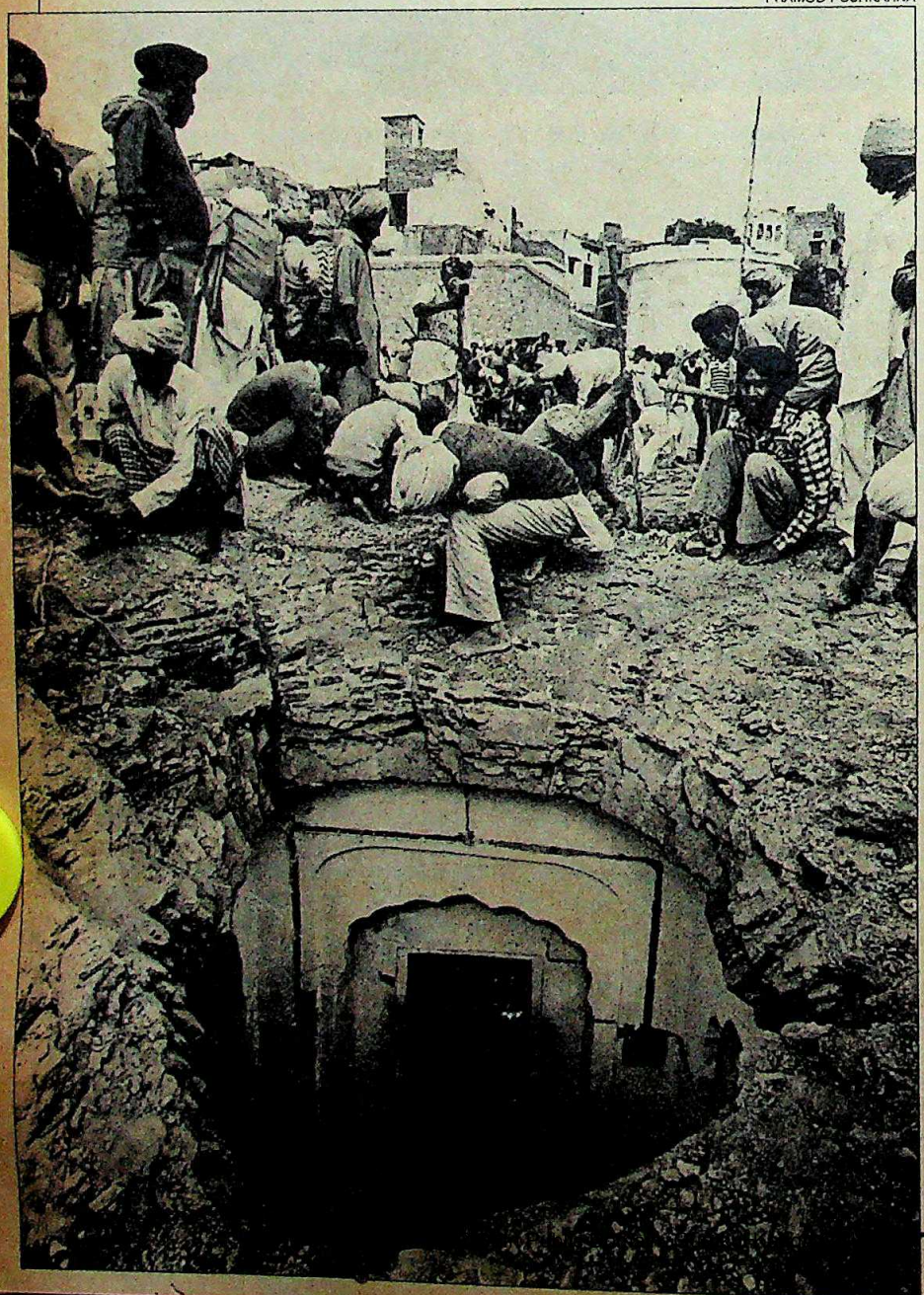
Supporters of Gurcharan Singh Tohra, president of the SGPC, including Health Minister Basant Singh Khalsa and Revenue Minister Major Singh Uboke who were opposed to the *sarbat khalsa*, also tried to bring the Taksal around. Tohra even offered to resign and hold fresh elections to the SGPC. Ironically enough, the post that he has clung on to for the last 13 years has now become the proverbial millstone around his neck.

On their part, the Akali leaders suggested that Jathedar Kirpal Singh, head priest of the Akal Takht, and the four other high priests should be reinstated but that all five head priests would quit after three months and the new SGPC would decide about the new priests. Alternatively, a committee of both sides would take charge of the temple till the elections.

But the Taksal leaders were unmoved. Argued Mohkam Singh: "All these days groups of people have been coming here to sort out the differences but we ask them, what (is there) to sort out ? We are only doing *kar seva* here and no power on earth can take that right away from us. Barnala should mind his government and fulfil the promises he made to the people instead of dabbling in the religious affairs of Sikhs."

The Taksal's followers think that the Dal's leaders have corrupted the SGPC by infesting it with their own factional infighting. The Akal Takht chief, they say, should be appointed by a *sarbat khalsa* and should present his accounts twice a year, on Baisakhi and Diwali. Said one Taksal follower: "We have made the sacrifices. Our people faced bullets. Tohra,

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Demolition of the Akal Takht (left); and removal of the foundation stone: *fait accompli*

Haridwar

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Longowal and company ran away. What business do they have in this complex ?"

It was in this backdrop that a harmless accident was fanned into a communal confrontation in Nakodar, a peaceful agricultural market town, 25 km west of Jalandhar. Five copies of the Guru Granth Sahib were partially damaged in an accidental fire on the morning of February 3 in the Guru Arjun Dev Gurudwara. When the gurudwara priest Sukhchain Singh shouted for help, Hindus joined Sikhs in dousing the fire in a brief 20 minutes.

Singh and the sub-divisional magistrate S.S. Rajput then arranged a vehicle to take the holy books to Goindwal. The plan was to consign them into the Beas river and replace them with other copies. Before the plan could be made operational, a procession was taken out by a faction of the Akalis, tension mounted and by evening came curfew.

NEXT DAY all hell broke loose. United Akali Dal leader Baba Joginder Singh and AISSF activists appeared on the scene. While the Baba was kept away, about 800 federation's activists armed with lethal weapons and firearms started moving into the curfew bound town. Over 150 police and CRPF men under the command of a superintendent of police first teargassed the militants and later opened fire, killing four, including Jalandhar district convener of the AISSF Harminder Singh.

While the police maintain that they had no option but to open fire, the federation alleges that the police had acted brutally. Said Jalandhar SP Mohammad Izhar Alam, who was later transferred: "The students were armed and had opened fire, injuring three policemen. If we had allowed them to enter the town that would have lead to communal clashes." But federation leader Kulwant Singh countered: "We only wanted to visit the gurudwara and were totally peaceful. Police began first teargassing and then indiscriminate firing."

The situation turned even messier with the Government showing amazing insensitivity in doing post-mortems and stealthily cremating the bodies instead of handing them to the families. Akali MLA's Kuldip Singh Wadala, Surinder Pal Singh and the high priest of Anandpur Sahib, Harcharan Singh Mahlon, went on a dharna seeking suspension of police officials and a judicial probe.

A rattled Barnala rushed Balwant Singh to Nakodar. A judicial probe was ordered and seven senior police officers were shifted including Jalandhar Range DIG, M.S.Bhullar, Alam and Surjit Singh. One inspector was suspended. " It was distressing and unfortunate to cremate the four youths in the absence of their kith and kin," Barnala admitted, though district police officials insisted they had acted on instructions from Chandigarh.

While the decision satisfied his irate partymen, the AISSF convenor Harinder Singh Kahlon rejected the judicial probe even as Joginder Singh began his dharna at the site of the firing. Demanded Kahlon: "The police officials responsible for the killings of these youths are criminals and should be arrested on murder charges."

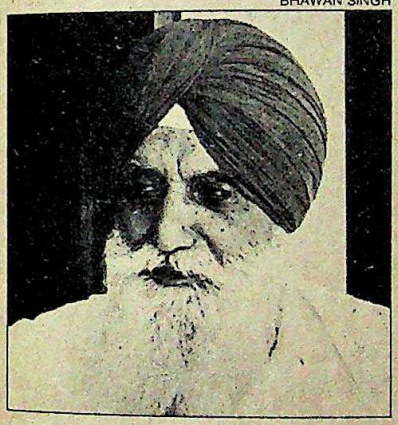
But it was soon evident that Nakodar was only the beginning. Worse followed.

► Pro-Akali student leader Jatinder Singh Ghuman was killed by two scooter-borne terrorists in his village of Ghumankalan near Dhariwal in terrorist-infested Gurdaspur. Ghuman was a moderate, aligned with the pro-Akali Dal faction of the AISSF and was active in preparations for the February 16 *sarbat khalsa*. The Dashmesh Regiment took the credit.

► A day later, Satinderpal Singh, 17, son of SGPC general secretary Onkar Singh Matenangal, was gunned down by four terrorists at his house. Matenangal was then mediating between the Akalis and the Damdami Taksal in the Golden Temple complex. "I was pleading with the Damdami Taksal leaders to avoid confrontation and bloodshed in the complex while my son was being killed by the terrorists," wailed Matenangal.

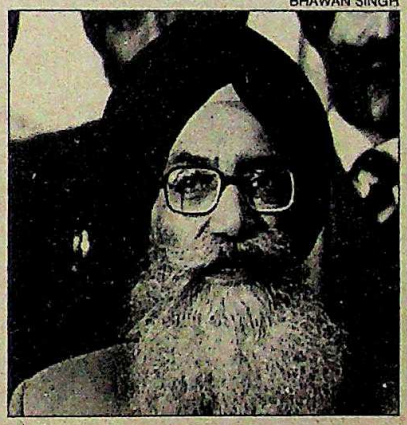
► Prominent Akali leader and SGPC member, Dalip Singh, 55, of Ferozepore was gunned down in his village Malowal

BHAWAN SINGH



G.S. Tohra

BHAWAN SINGH



S.S. Barnala

Today the wily Tohra is even more isolated than Barnala. The Taksal and AISSF have placed him in a tight spot; but he cannot risk asking Barnala to use force against the hotheads.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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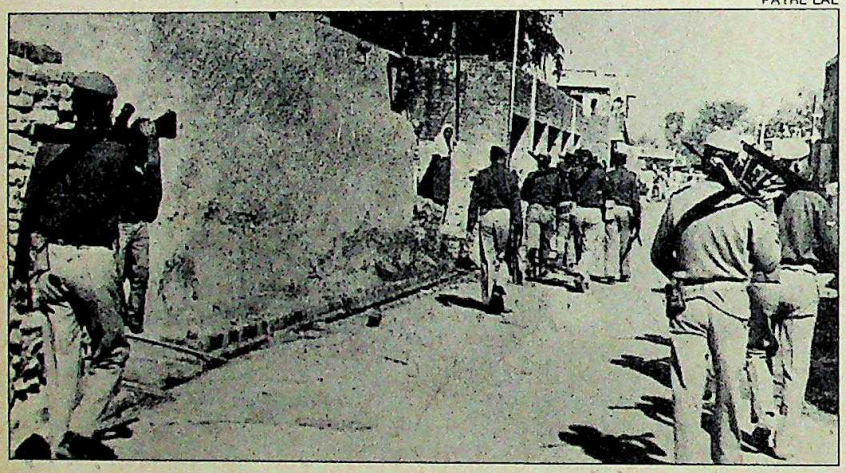
PAYRE LAL

PAYRE LAL



AISSF demonstrators in Jalandhar (above); and para-military forces in Nakodar: tense situation

Jadid when he opened the door to two terrorists who pretended they had come to seek his help in a court case.

► At least seven others were killed in acts of random, senseless violence. Two suspected terrorists on a scooter with mufflers covering their faces attacked a tea-shop near the canal bridge across Tarsikka village in Amritsar and killed a local Congress(I) leader, Hari Shah.

► The day the AISSF called for a state-level bandh, sudden violence claimed two persons, Nazar Singh and Sher Singh, at Khai Premaki village, 5 km from Ferozepore. The two were waiting for the bus when a bomb exploded. The same day a room at Gill railway station on the Ludhiana-Dhuri section was set on fire by four young men carrying swords with their faces hidden behind mufflers. In Pathankot a portion of the Kiran theatre was blown up. Luckily, no one was injured as the blast took place some time after the last show.

Clearly, Barnala must be the loneliest chief minister in the country today. On the one hand, extremists were limiting his options and on the other there was evidence that the Centre was getting somewhat restless. When Mohkam Singh wanted an assurance from Barnala that he should get all the 379 Sikhs detained in Jodhpur released, Barnala answered that this would not be possible unless the violence stopped.

However, the decision to shift the sight of the *sarbat khalsa*—taken after a four-hour meeting attended by Jathedar Kirpal Singh and the other four high priests—has been welcomed. Although the decision gave the militants a tactical victory of sorts, the more sober Sikh masses, who so far have backed the Akali Dal and the SGPC, were relieved.

But the militants were typically arrogant in their hour of victory. Said Kahlon dismissively: "In any case we do not recognise Kirpal Singh." Calling the move to shift the *sarbat khalsa* "childish", Mohkam Singh said: "We do not compromise with these traitors of the panth."

Undeniably, the fundamentalists now have a clearly discernible base. The back-bone of the Taksal and the AISSF are the sons and daughters of Punjab's middle and low-level peasantry and agriculture workers. The four students killed at Nakodar came from the lower rungs of the peasantry. The challenge to the Akali and SGPC leadership, which is dominated by leaders from the Malwa region, comes from what was once its base—the small and middle peasants. The socio-economic roots of the Taksal and AISSF leaders are totally different from that of Barnala, Badal, Balwant, Ravi Inder and Amrinder Singh, all of whom come from the landed gentry classes of the state.

Till the 1960s, the communists were the major influence on the small and middle peasants. Then came Tohra, a small peasant himself who started off as a left wing leader and then became a pro-establishment leader. And after Tohra became the SGPC chief in 1973, he has been the manipulator par excellence.

Today, the wily Tohra is even more isolated than Barnala. The Taksal and AISSF leaders have placed him in a tight spot: as the head of the SGPC, the takeover of the Golden Temple is a slap on his face but Tohra cannot even take the risk of asking Barnala to use force on the hotheads. For once, the fox of Punjab's politics seems to have been outfoxed. "The tragedy with the Akalis is that they do not have even a single acceptable senior leader who could have sobering affect," says Congress leader Darshan Singh Chaudhry.

Just as in the pre-Operation Bluestar days, there seemed to be no easy solution in sight. Warned Jaswant Singh Kanwal, a noted Punjabi writer in the leading Punjabi daily, *The Ajit:* "The rulers in Delhi must honestly assess the situation, talk to the real leaders of the Sikhs and stop interfering in our religious affairs. No monkey business with Sikhs in Punjab if the Centre wants to retain Punjab in India." There was no evidence to support the charge of Central interference in the religious affairs of Sikhs or of the Centre being up to any "monkey business"; as for the rest of the contentions, it was difficult to argue with them. But for the moment, Delhi seemed content to leave the solution to the new and dangerous developments in Punjab to its elected representatives.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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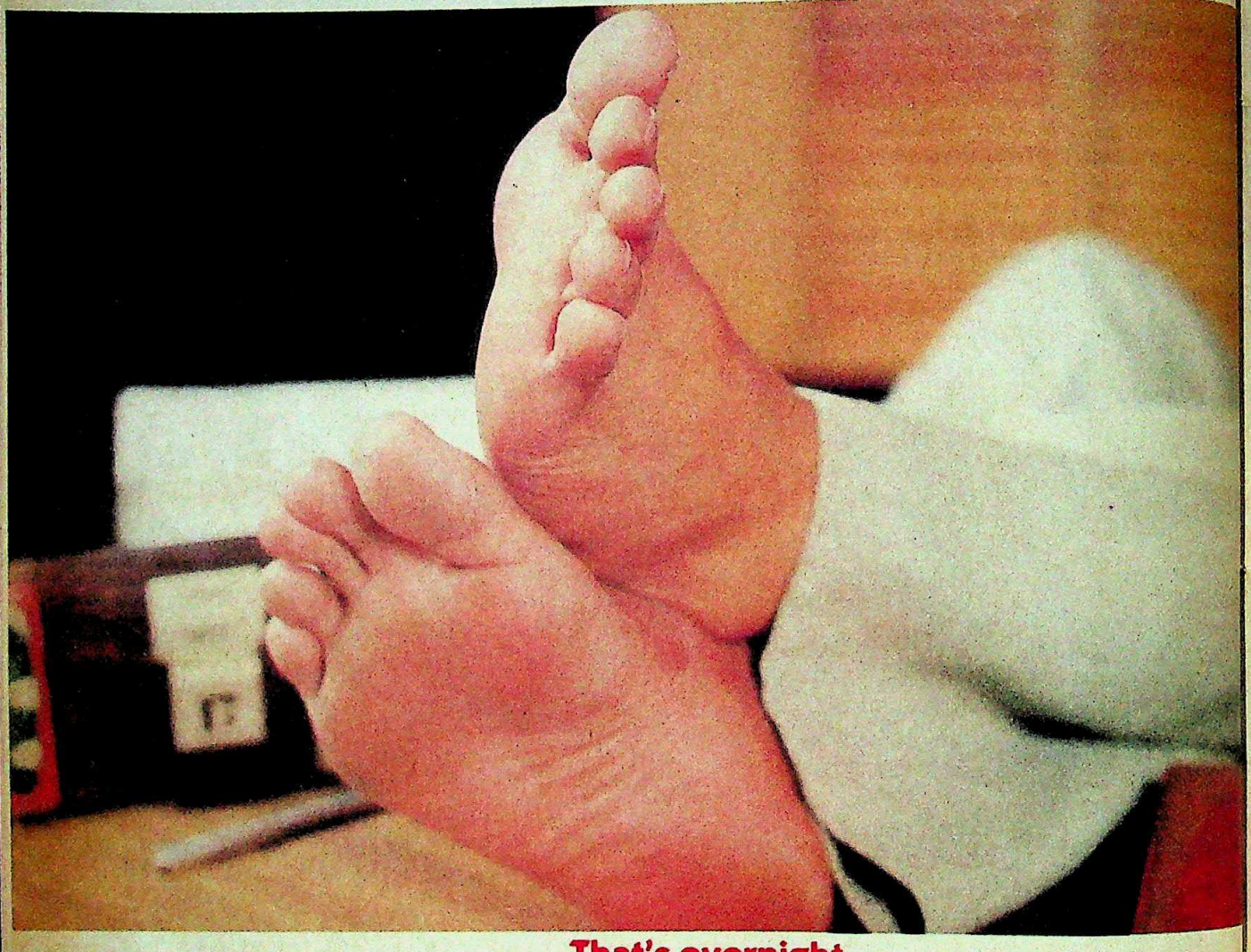

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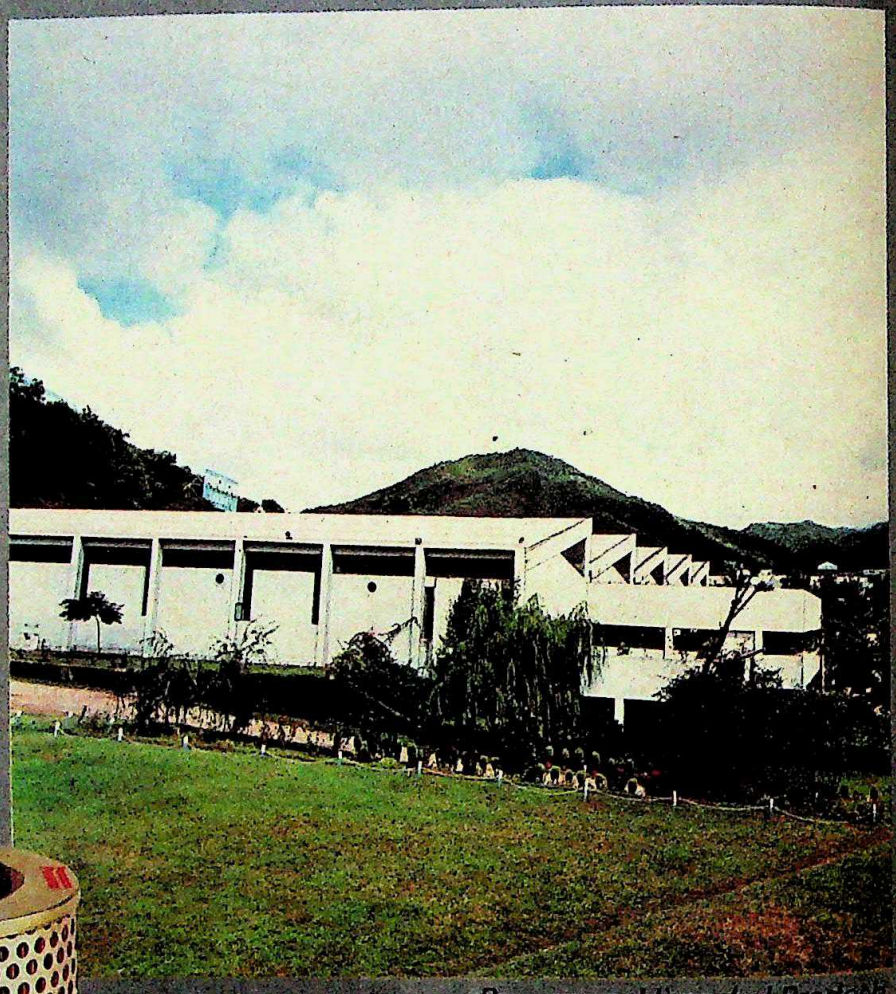

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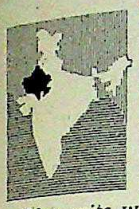
RAJASTHAN

Sudden Exits

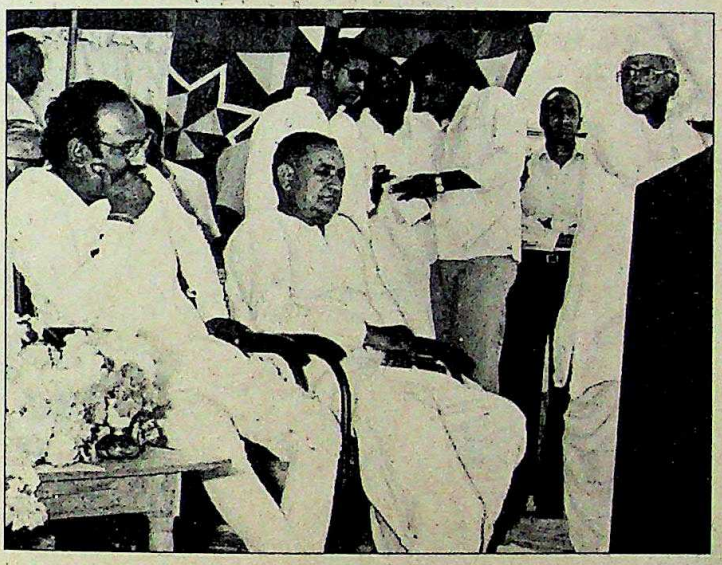


LESS THAN a year after the formation of the Harideo Joshi Ministry, Rajasthan saw its first major political upset on February 7 when two ministers made their sudden exits within hours of one another. Minister of state for Animal Husbandry Ram Singh Vishnoi, 50, after 13 years as a legislator, lost his job four months after he got it for the first time. And cabinet minister for the Indira Gandhi Canal and Tourism, Narendra Singh Bhati, 41, established the odd distinction of finding himself without his ministry twice within three years. Bhati refused to comment on the developments, laconically dismissing it as "a purely party affair," but a clearly crestfallen Vishnoi said despairingly: "How can I fight fate?"

Bhati's exit—whether resignation or dismissal—was the more sudden of the two. It was also more important since he is widely believed to be close to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Union Minister of State for Defence, Arun Singh. Proof of his right contacts comes from his rapid rise in just six years to cabinet minister, in spite of having been unseated once by former chief minister Shiv Charan Mathur in July 1983. Interestingly, Bhati and Vishnoi both hail from Jodhpur district, and are known to be in the camp that opposes Ashok Gehlot, the RPCC(I) president, who is also from Jodhpur. The chief minister and Gehlot may well have combined together to unseat Bhati.

The high-flying Bhati has long been controversial. To start with, he is radically different from the run of the mill Congressmen. His wealthy family background—he is related to Jodhpur royalty; his public school education; his connections; he spent a week with the Gandhis when they holidayed at the Ranthambhor National Park—and his effortless rise have all contributed to his opponents describing him as arrogant and overambitious. Said a senior legislator: "The Congress(I) has always been a bundle of contradictions but Bhati still has to fully accept this fact; he still has to adjust to the party culture."

It is no secret that Bhati has long had problems with Joshi himself. The first notes of discord between them were struck in July last year on the floor of the Assembly. The signing of the Punjab accord in New Delhi and Rajasthan's mention in the settlement stirred fears that the state's share in the Ravi-Beas waters would be adversely affected. The chief minister dashed off a strongly-worded telex to Rajiv expressing his fears. In an unprecedented situation, the ruling party and the Opposition came close to signing a joint memorandum of protest to the prime minister.



Bhati, Vishnoi and Joshi (standing): tense atmosphere

But Bhati stood up in the house and opposed the move, maintaining that the state's interests would not be hurt. Queried a Joshi supporter: "Where was the need for Bhati to contradict the chief minister? Did he think that a seasoned politician like Joshi did not know what he was doing? Bhati was just trying to show that he was more loyal than Joshi." It didn't help matters when Joshi did an about turn soon after and acknowledged that Rajiv would take care of Rajasthan's interests.

The tension became more apparent at an emergency cabinet meeting called on January 26 to discuss the implications of the appointment of a tribunal to decide on the sharing of the Ravi-Beas waters. When a senior engineer briefing the minister took a pessimistic view—which Bhati apparently thought amounted to dismissing Rajiv's assurances—Bhati sought Joshi's permission and stalked out of the meeting. It is also known that Bhati was unhappy over the fact that he did not have any executive control over the engineers on the Indira Gandhi Canal since they continued to be on deputation from the Irrigation Ministry. Moreover, the irrigation minister is Gulab Singh Shaktawat, known to be Joshi's right-hand man.

Bhati's choice of Bagor Haveli, in the lake city of Udaipur, as the venue for the Western Regional Cultural Centre to be inaugurated by Rajiv on February 21, also created friction between the two. Joshi's supporters charge that Bhati took this decision without consulting the chief minister on an issue that involved not just Rajasthan, but three other states as well. While a situation in which Joshi nor Bhati wanted to work with the other was clearly emerging, his exit was nonetheless sudden.

Vishnoi, on the other hand, had been embroiled in a controversy raised by the media which charged him with torturing his daughter Indra, to force her into accepting her husband from a marriage when she was seven years old (INDIA TODAY February 15). Though he appeared to be surviving the fortnight-long attack, Joshi summoned Vishnoi on February 7 on his return from Delhi and told him that the high command was not satisfied by his explanations and his resignation would be in order.

But as Joshi's critics point out, while Vishnoi was asked to go, Rampal Upadhyay, cabinet minister for rural development and panchayati raj, who had taken his second 'wife' to the US on state expense was spared. While it is too early to predict the political fallout of the exits, observers feel that the still waters of Rajasthan Congress(I) politics are bound to get stormy. Joshi may find that his partymen may not be as pliable as they have been. —SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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MAHARASHTRA

Election Upset

IT HAS long been believed that any candidate put up by Vasantrao Patil would win at a canter in Sangli. So when the Congress(I) chose his nephew, Vishwanath Shamrao Patil, for the Feburary 2 by-election, all bets laid locally were only on the margin of his victory. In the event, the defeat of Patil's nephew by the common opposition candidate, Sambhaji Pawar of the Janata Party, not only came as a shock to the people of Sangli but sent ripples of disbelief all the way to Bombay and Delhi.

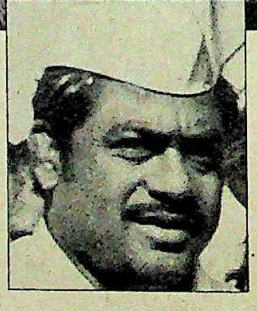
Though the humiliation for the ruling party was somewhat offset by the victory of its candidate in the other by-election held the same day at Javli in the state's Satara district, the Sangli result was enough cause for concern. This was the first election the Congress has lost in Sangli. Last year Vasantrao Patil had won by 30,000 votes; his nephew lost by 2,631 votes. Expectedly, party bigwigs lost no time in passing the buck. In a statement from Jaipur, Patil claimed that the election-eve hike in the prices of petroleum products was responsible for the shock defeat in the 'urban' constituency of Sangli.

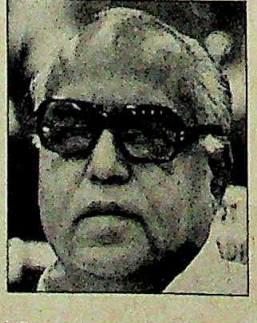
Vishwanath Patil, closetted in the sugar factory's guest-house with cousin Prakash and son Madan seemed to agree. "The reasons for the defeat have yet to be investigated, but the oil price hike a day before the poll certainly affected the result," he said.

But state party chief, Prabha Rau, a known opponent of Vasantdada Patil, reportedly told the high command that wrong choice of the candidate was responsible. Patil is the chairman of a family-controlled thriving cooperative factory, but a novice to electoral politics.

Local partymen agreed with Rau's assessment. "The people were upset at the manner a member of the family was nominated, that is why the Congress lost the elections," said Maruti Mane, 48, and former Olympic wrestler and Rajya Sabha MP.

However, Charubhai Shah, Congress(I) campaign manager for all elections in Sangli since 1952, maintained that "internal dissension" was the only reason for the party's defeat. "Two or three MP's worked against the party candidate," he said. But Mane, who admitted that he was an aspirant for the party ticket, denied the charge. Insisting that he had worked hard for the party, he complained: "People were not prepared to listen this time."





Janata victory procession and (inset right) Pawar; and Patil: shock-waves

The public support for Pawar—over 30,000 people joined his victory procession—has the Patil camp naturally worried. For Pawar has been in the forefront of the campaign started in 1983 against alleged land-grabbing by Vasantdada Patil's henchmen. Pawar claims that he had exposed 29 landgrab cases involving land worth Rs 50 crore.

Last month the Lok Ayukta ruled in favour of the first of Pawar's complaints. After Patil became chief minister in 1983, a local Congressman, Sham Gavli, was given, partly on the chief minister's recommendation, a 99-year-lease on nearly 9,000 sq ft of prime municipal land for constructing a tamasha dance theatre. The land was part of an 18,000-sq ft vacant plot next to the municipal council office in the heart of the city, and was reserved for expansion of the municipal offices. The Lok Ayukta absolved Patil of any responsibility in the deal but asked for action against the then collector and Sangli's municipal administrator.

Pawar, a former state wrestling champion and owner of one of the city's thriving gymnasiums, made the land scandals a major issue in his election campaign. None of the 10 cases before the Lok Ayukta and the courts directly implicate Patil's immediate family members but the campaign has gone on long enough to tarnish his image as a benefactor of the poor. Now a commission headed by a retired high court judge is to inquire into the land deals.

In the past also, opposition parties had come together to try and humble the unquestioned strongman of Sangli. Finally they have succeeded but as with all such victories in traditional Congress(I) strongholds not without a little bit of help from allies in the Congress(I) camp. There were even reports that the high command may not have been unhappy that Patil had been humbled. Undeniably, Sangli will mark a milestone in the history of Maharashtra politics. What it does to the future of the Patil family remains to be seen.

—M. RAHMAN in Sangli

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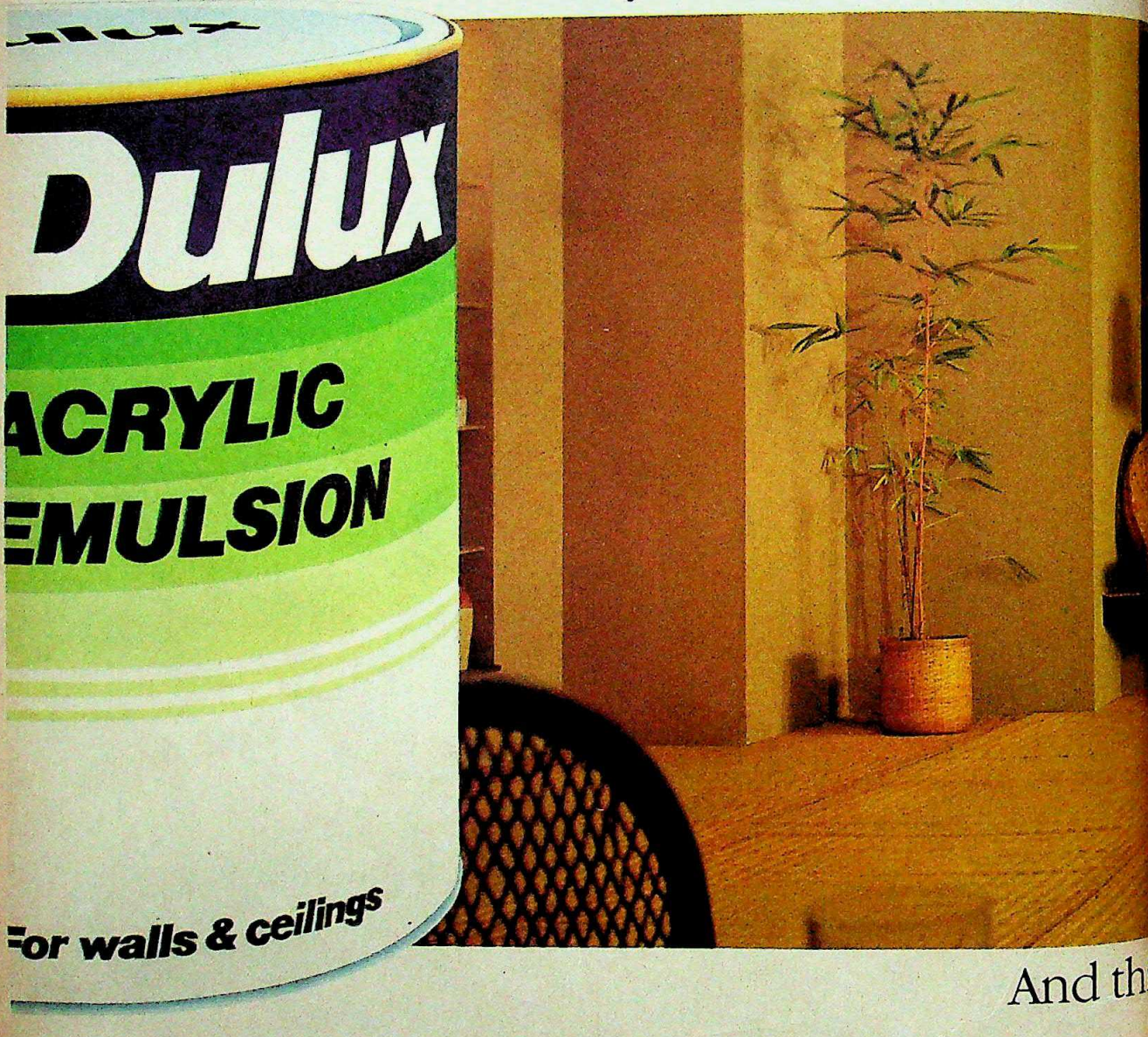

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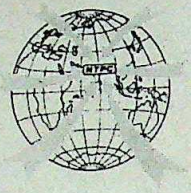

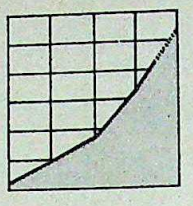

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BOMBAY

Tall Order

BOMBAY's most famous skyscraper scrap appeared to be coming to an end last month when the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) filed a First Information Report (FIR) against the promoters of the Pratibha Cooperative Housing Society Ltd., as well as the officials who are alleged to have helped them fiddle survey records so as to allow the society to build eight floors, or nearly 30,000 sq ft more than it was legally entitled to.

Side by side, the Supreme Court rejected two petitions from the society and flat owners, finally clearing the way for the first stroke of the demolition hammer on the city's tallest and most luxurious apartment building, where each 3,000 sq ft flat goes for about Rs 1.5 crore, and where, among other well-heeled people, Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosale are reported to own flats.

It's been a long hard haul for both sides, the promoters and flat-owners as well as the corporation and the Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG). Says Shyam Chainani of the BEAG: "We spent a lot of time and money on the case because we knew that winning it was crucial for our cause—saving Bombay from the builders." A municipal official, asked when the corporation would start demolition, says he wouldn't know, but added that "this will probably give us one more headache, but it's worth it".

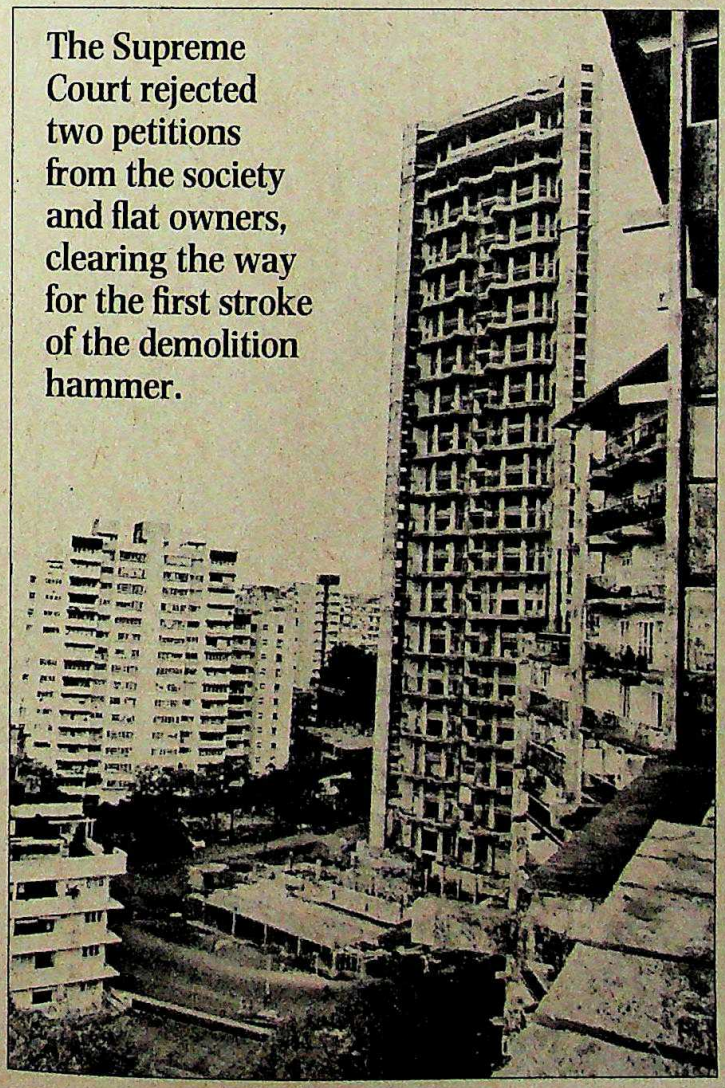
The promoters, Shrichand J.Bajaj and Amar K.Makhija insist that they did not collude with the superintendent of the city survey and land records department, P.D. Haval, record keeper R.S. Sharma and architect R.K. Gupta; the others named in the FIR, to get more Floor Space Index (FSI). But Bajaj told INDIA TODAY last fortnight: "The society acted in good faith. It was the corporation's responsibility to check that the area mentioned in the plans was the correct one. For five years they let the work continue; and why did they issue the commencement certificate if, after scrutiny they found nothing wrong?"

Makhija explains that they went by the area mentioned in the deed of sale which measured 11,102 sq yards—the plot was bought for Rs 72 lakh—and assumed that they would also receive the FSI for half the road in front which came to about 2,006 sq yards. "We were all the time moving on well-established precedents," says Makhija. "Hasn't the corporation issued the FSI for taken-over roads to adjoining buildings and isn't this being done even now?"

This defence appears to be more of an afterthought as the high court judgement on the case in October of last year clearly elucidated—the society applied on the basis of a Cadastral Survey (CS) extract which is an official map showing the number and legal area of the plot. The extract pertained to the situation prior to two sub-divisions in 1948 and 1949—and as they had also applied for extracts which showed the situation after the sub-divisions. In effect, there is no way that Bajaj and Makhija could have been ignorant of the shortened area of 8,608 sq yards instead of the 11,000-odd sq yards which was shown in the plans, checked, incidentally, by architect Gupta. To this Bajaj replies: "It was the corporation's duty to check the area. In fact, halfway through construction, they had checked the plinth area, but had said nothing then."

As for the society's increasingly desperate attempts to salvage their baby, the court ruled that they could not claim the FSI of the setback (the area between the society wall and the road which can only be used for providing public facilities) as that was already included in the FSI calculation, and secondly, they couldn't claim the FSI for the road as a notification designating it a public thoroughfare had been issued over 20 years before the society even thought of buying the land. And even if the FSI of taken-over roads is a common practice, as Makhija claims—and he is right—the road was never part of that particular plot, CS 701, but of CS 699 and CS 700. So the promoters could not in any case lay claim to it. Makhija explains that away by saying that they were given to understand the road was included in the sale of the land. However, the judgement retorts curtly: "Such public road cannot be converted into private property by a consent decree between private parties."

It is interesting to note that the promoters now seem to admit that there was fraud. In an explanatory note, they say that they resurveyed the area after the scandal broke in 1984 and found that 7,927 sq yards was in their possession, 1,063 sq yards



The Pratibha building: on the block

The Supreme Court rejected two petitions from the society and flat owners, clearing the way for the first stroke of the demolition hammer.

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made up the road set-back and 2,006 sq yards was half the area of the adjoining road. If the first two figures are added up, it comes to 8,990 sq yards or 7,554 sq metres, which is only about 357 sq metres more than what the judgement said could have been legally sold in the first place. So Bajaj and Makhija are admitting that the area of 9,232 sq metres mentioned in the consent decree was wrong.

The stage now seems to be set for the final act in the Pratibha drama—the demolition. The Government seems to be determined to make an example of the building—according to Chainani, the law says that a fraudulently erected structure should in fact be demolished in full, and not in part—despite last-minute interventions by influential politicians like Slum Improvement Minister Satish Pednekar.

But Bajaj has not given up hope and points out that demolishing eight floors would damage the entire structure which he describes as "integrated", and he has appended the reports of four civil engineers in his appeal to the Government. "It is sad that the Government is thinking of pulling down our structure when there is such a housing shortage here." The irony of that statement, made as it is about some of the most expensive square footage in the city, seems to have escaped him entirely.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

ANDHRA PRADESH

Fare Charge

POLITICIANS charged with taking bribes have rarely had to appear before an ombudsman. It is even rarer that a politician should be found guilty and pronounced "unworthy of holding any responsible position". But last month Andhra Pradesh's Lok Ayukta ruled that it had been "proved beyond a shadow of doubt" that a former Telugu Desam transport minister, Sangamraddi Satyanarayana, had pocketed Rs 1.30 lakh from private bus operators in Cuddapah District in 1983 on promise to put off the plan to nationalise 70 bus routes.

At least four of the bus owners including Khasim Saheb, then secretary of the Cuddapah District Operators' Association, and Neelkanta Reddy, a well-known operator from Proddatur, confessed that they handed over the money collected from the bus operators to Satyanarayana. Eight others said they had given sums—ranging from Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000 depending on the length of the route—to the association.

While some of them told Lok Ayukta Avula Sambasiva Rao that the plan was to scuttle the nationalisation move, others claimed it was to collect enough money to challenge the case in court. But Rao did not go by the versions given by the bribe-givers alone. Two legislators, P.Siva Reddy of the Telugu Desam and Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy of the Congress(I), independently corroborated complaints that Satyanarayana had been collecting cash.

There was circumstantial evidence as well. Pratap Reddy, Satyanarayana's confidante, cabled Khasim Saheb twice—on March 28 and April 28, 1983—asking him to "start immediately for Hyderabad". A third telegram on May 8 had an extra word—"start immediately readily for Hyderabad"—which the operators took to mean that their plan had succeeded. But as Rao noted, the Government approved the nationalisation exactly 11 days later—a bizarre and perhaps unique case where money changed hands and yet the job was not done.

In his 74-page verdict, Rao said "it would be detrimental to administration if such persons hold responsible offices," and recommended that Satyanarayana be debarred from holding any elective post till such time as the law permits. Although the Lok Ayukta Act debars those found guilty from elective office, state law officials are examining whether it can be extended to Central laws like the Representation of People's Act which would automatically prevent Satyanarayana from standing for election to the legislative Assembly or Parliament. If that happens, Satyanarayana at 61 and discredited in his native Warangal after he defected to Nadendla Bhaskara Rao's break-away Democratic Telugu Desam (DTD) in 1983, may well never contest an election again.

Predictably, Satyanarayana and Bhaskara Rao—both lawyers by training—lost no time in accusing Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao of having fabricated the case against him and others who deserted the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Bhaskar Rao charged the Lok Ayukta with "relying heavily on oral evidence in a case against a public man".

NAGENDER RAO

S. Satyanarayana

Sambasiva Rao ruled that it had been "proved beyond a shadow of doubt" that Satyanarayana had pocketed Rs 1.30 lakh from bus operators in 1983.

Janata Studio

A. Sambasiva Rao

However, Ramamuni Reddy, another former TDP minister now with Bhaskara Rao had also been charged with collecting Rs 90,000 in the same deal but since there was only one witness Rao dismissed the case against him. As Rao wrote: "In view of this uncorroborated evidence of the single witness, who was himself a bribe-giver, I cannot hold the allegation proved."

Yet the complaint of political motivation is not without substance. The charges against Satyanarayana and Ramamuni Reddy were referred to Governor Shankar Dayal Sharma by NTR shortly after his reinstatement as chief minister. And the governor in turn referred them to the Lok Ayukta. Both Satyanarayana and Reddy challenged the case in the high court but their petition was dismissed and Rao returned his verdict in January.

The indictment has come at a time when the select committee of Parliament on the Lok Pal bill is doing the rounds of various states for comments. But the crowning irony of the entire case is that the bus routes in Cuddapah are yet to be taken over. Satyanarayana's approval of the scheme in May 1983 was quashed by the high court and a second attempt in September 1984—during the short-lived tenure of Bhaskara Rao—was similarly quashed. So the plans to nationalise the routes—conceived in 1977—remain where it all began, on paper.

—AMARNATH K.MENON

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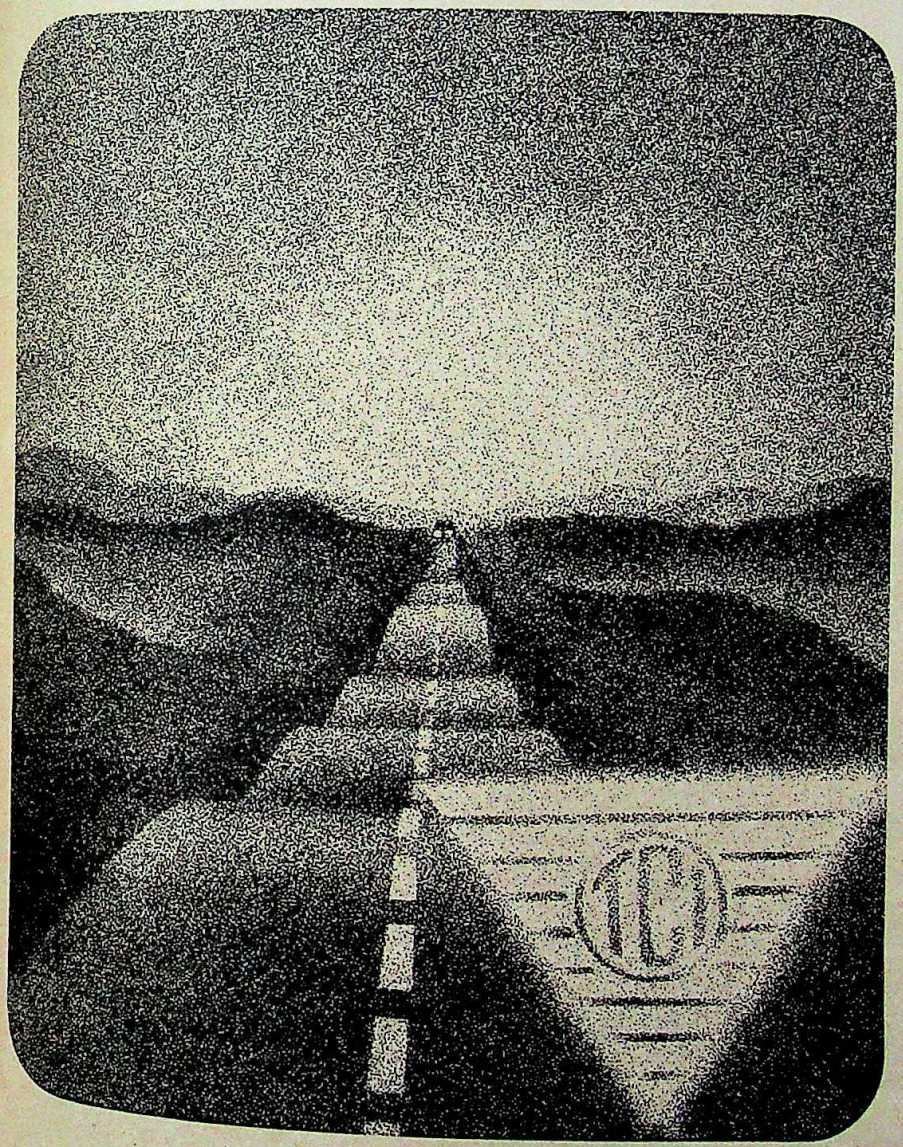

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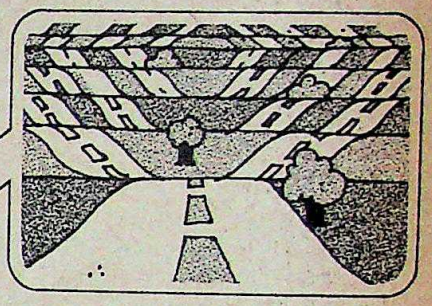

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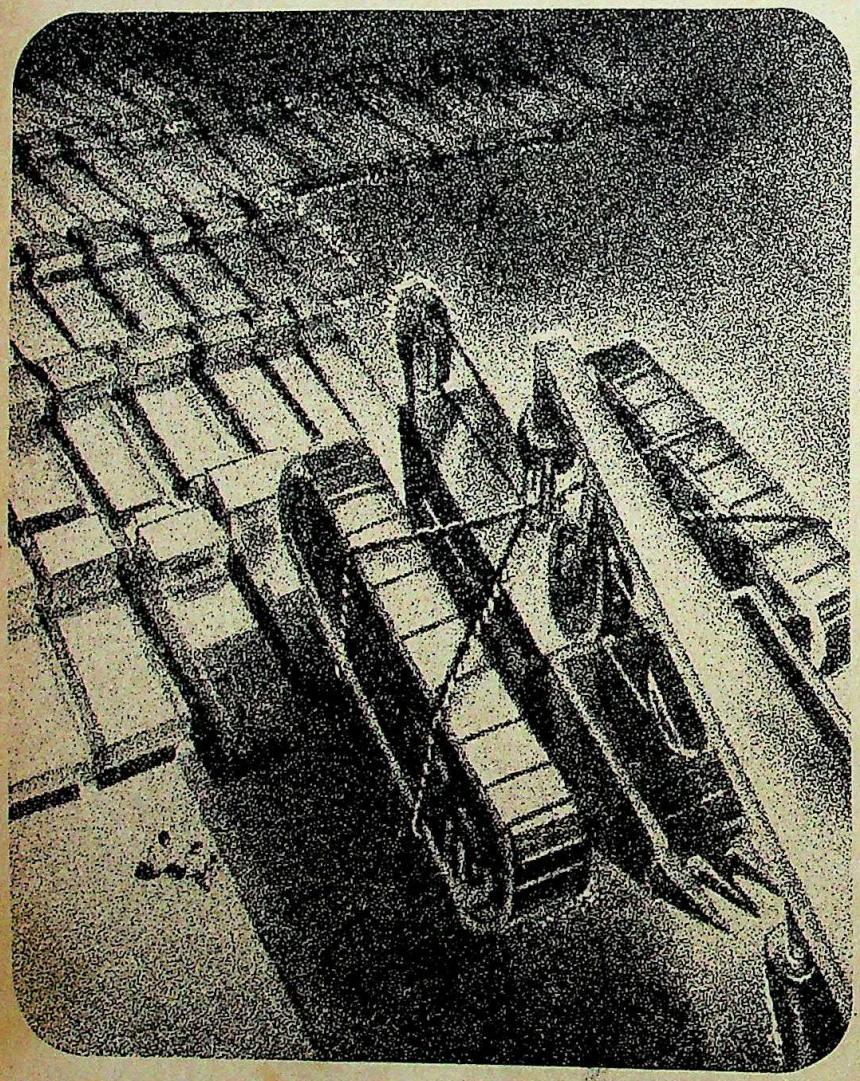

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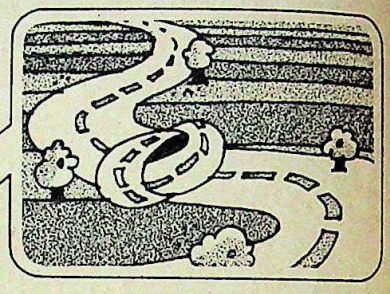

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GUJARAT

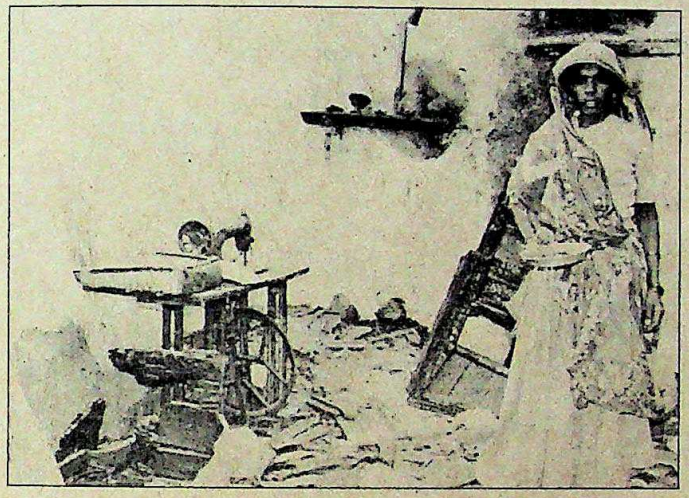
Caste Carnage

NINE YEARS ago, a group of television producers and cameramen from the Indian Space Research Organisation in Ahmedabad pitched camp in Golana village of Kheda district to shoot a film series on the exploitation of Harijans. For the Harijans of Golana had shown they were different; they had asserted their economic independence and were united in fighting exploitation. They wrote the script for the film and acted out the roles, drawing on the grim real life experience of feudal oppression by land-owning Rajputs and of the kind of killings and burnings that held an entire community in terror.

That was the script. But life overtook art last fortnight when gun-toting Rajputs descended on a Harijan *basti* in broad daylight, killing four and gravely wounding 16. To resist meant certain death, yet many of the Harijans did and paid the price. But the brutal action did not cow the spirit which had united the Harijans at the height of the anti-reservation agitation; and as the news of the killings spread, over 4,000 Harijans converged on the little *basti* to show their solidarity.

The police soon swung into action and arrested 30 Rajputs. Many Rajputs fled Golana, fearing a Harijan backlash. And Amarsinh Chaudhary, the first backward-class chief minister of the state, was confronted by an angry and militant community when he visited the *basti* on Republic Day. His assertion that "justice will be done" hardly soothed their feelings. The memorandum they presented spoke louder than words: "Are we citizens of this country? If we are, we want to be allowed to live with dignity. We want nobody's pity, we just want our rights." And that was no plea but simply a proud statement.

Till a decade ago, no Harijan in the village could cycle across any area where people from the higher castes lived; he had to carry the cycle on his shoulders. The wages for work were



The murdered Harijans (above); and destroyed home: leaders attacked

pitiful—barely Rs 2 for a day's toil in the Rajputs' fields. So these poverty-stricken labourers got together and set up their own cooperative and gave themselves at least Rs 10 a day. As a natural consequence, the Rajput landlords had to hike their rates, for all the village Harijans made a bee-line for the cooperative. To add insult to Rajput injury, the state Government took over their surplus land under the Gujarat Agricultural Land Ceiling Act and handed over 60 acres to the cooperative. When the Rajputs refused point blank to surrender the land, the undeterred Harijans sent them a legal notice.

For the feudally-inclined Rajputs, that was the straw that broke the camel's back. So when the violence erupted last month, it was perhaps inevitable that those marked for death were the pillars of the cooperative. Pocha Punja Parmar, 39, the first to die, had built up a personal rapport with each and every member of the cooperative, explaining to them the intricacies of profits and expenses and the new areas of work taken up. His wife Daniben and five children are still in a state of shock, mute witnesses to the murder. Khoda Mitha, 45, a technical supervisor with the cooperative, had made the mistake of filing cases against two Rajputs under the Untouchability Act—they had beaten him up for having "defiled them" when his hand accidentally came into contact with their smoking pipes. He and his brother, Mohan Mitha, were clubbed to death. The rampaging Rajputs failed to get their hands on Pocha Kala, another of the Harijan leaders, so they simply shot dead his son Prabhudas, 22.

The choice of targets was proof, if that were needed, that the upper castes wanted to crush the Harijans' spirit and render them leaderless. Marginal farmer Vala Fula's home was set on fire and all that his wife could salvage from the blaze was her silver jewellery gifted to her at her marriage; but it is twisted and melted beyond recognition.

Pocha Kala put his finger on the nub of the problem: "All this happened because we had started living with dignity and had stopped bowing our heads. We broke tradition and we paid a price. This is only the beginning." While their morale has taken a beating, the Harijans are determined not to give up. "In fact," says Jivan Punja, a school teacher, "we have more strength than ever before."

Predictably, politicians and bureaucrats have descended on the hamlet in droves, promises have been made, relief sanctioned and development projects launched. But the question is: does such a heavy price have to be paid by the catalysts of change?

—RAMESH MENON in Golana

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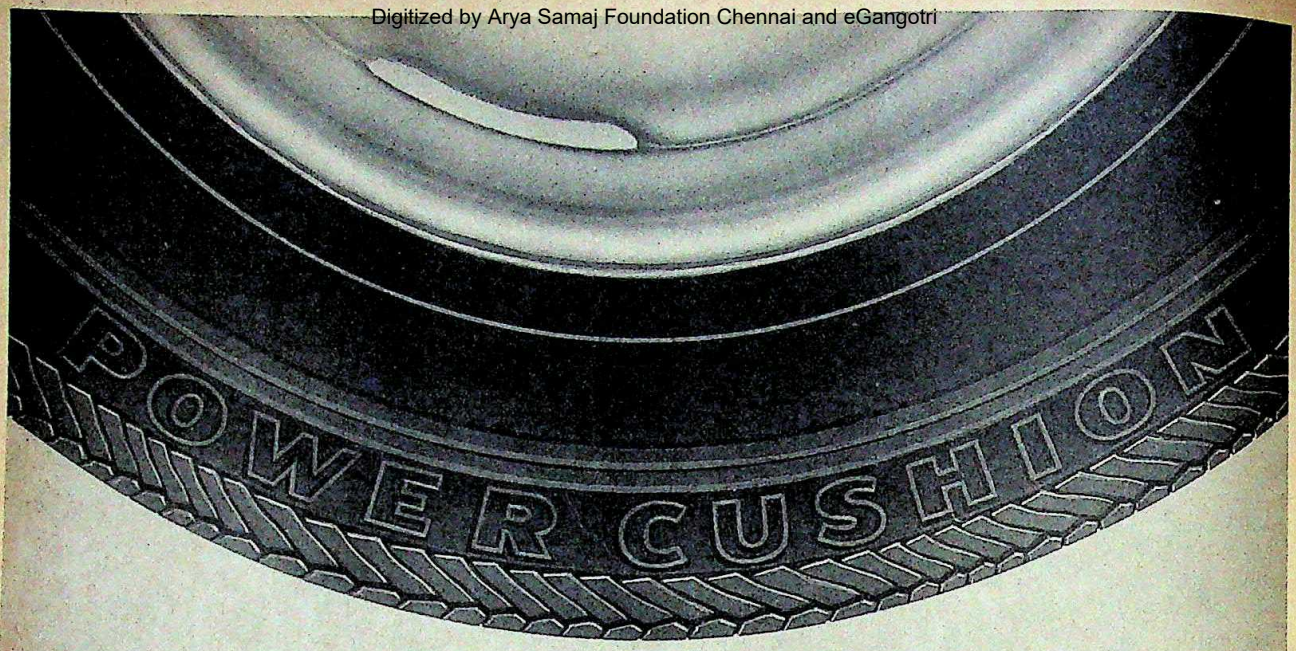

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BIHAR

Image Making

OVER the past 11 months the Bindeshwari Dubey Ministry in Bihar has earned a reputation for non-performance. Last fortnight, the 68-year-old chief minister moved on a number of fronts to shore up his administration's sagging image. He pushed through the long-delayed reshuffle and expansion of his cabinet, sacking three and taking 11 on board. And he released a mass of statistics to show that plan allocations were not lying unspent, as former chief minister Jagannath Mishra had charged. Instead, he told Rajiv Gandhi in Delhi, 60 per cent of the state's annual plan outlay of Rs 965 crore had been spent by December.

The result, however, seems to have been quite the opposite of what Dubey intended. The ministerial changes only served to bring intra-party animosity out in the open. Soon after the reshuffle, some 50 dissidents met at the house of Amarendra Mishra, one of the ministers who had been dropped, to register their protest at the reshuffle. Mishra challenged his removal as constitutionally illegal and politically unhealthy. Said he: "I am demoralised as injustice has been done to me."

That was not all. In making his pitch to the prime minister, Dubey unfortunately overlooked an inconvenient assertion that he had himself made. Shortly before his Delhi trip, Jagannath Mishra's paper, *Patliputra Times*, had come out with a report that Bihar had barely utilised one-third of its plan allocation by December-end. To counter the report, Dubey's office released a host of figures, among which was the boast that for the first time Bihar had a substantial balance with the Reserve Bank: all of Rs 520 crore. When Dubey later made his claim of having spent 60 per cent of the plan outlay by December, he forgot that the two sets of figures—the state's Reserve Bank balance and the 60 per cent expenditure of the plan allocation—were contradictory.

The embarrassment was there for all to see, and Dubey quickly turned on his ministers and officials. In meetings that stretched for over a week, he pointed out to them that they had no excuse for non-performance because projects had been sanctioned and funds released in the beginning of the year itself. Accusing Mishra's newspaper of "playing up the odd figures to create confusion", Dubey asserted that the state's economic condition had in fact changed for the better since he took over. "This is solely because of the various realistic steps taken during the past 10 months and the strict financial discipline enforced," he said.

To substantiate this, he pointed out that for the first time the administration had been able to mobilise Rs 109 crore as additional resources on its own and as a result, its total plan outlay for 1985-86 had increased to Rs 965 crore from the original outlay of Rs 851 crore. "I have personally reviewed the situation and have been monitoring all developmental activities myself," he claimed.

However, the expenditure so far has its own story to tell:

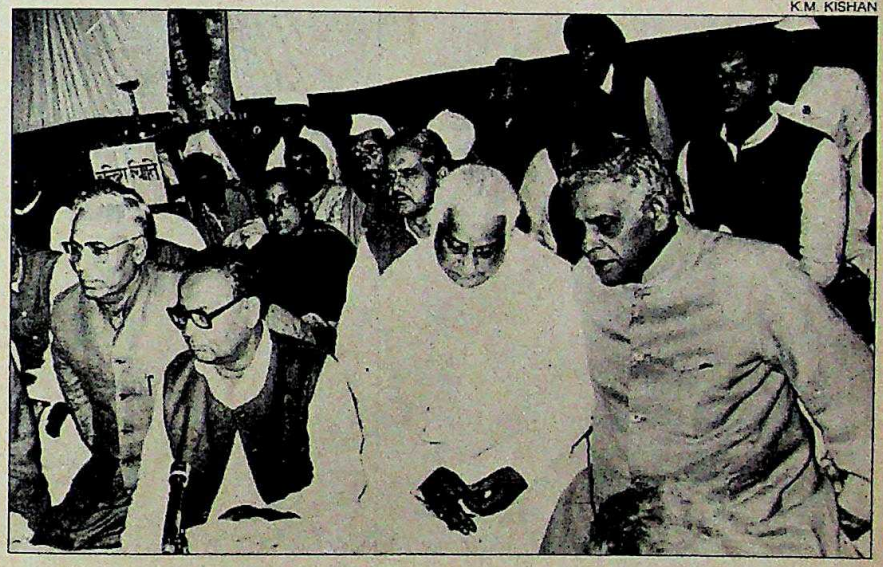
- Under the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, a sum of only Rs 20 crore had been spent from the Rs 100 crore sanctioned;
- In the Harijan Component Programme, only Rs 6 crore had been spent from the Rs 68 crore sanctioned;
- For tribal development, a paltry Rs 30 crore had been used, compared to the Rs 194 crore allotted; and
- Under the Integrated Rural Development Plan, only two lakh families had been covered as against the target of 5.17 lakh families.

The lack of planning is all too evident. A Central team which recently visited the state to assess the implementation of Harijan and tribal welfare schemes was disappointed with what it saw. A Planning Commission team found that the average expenditure on development schemes was just 33 per cent of the allocation.

According to Dubey's critics within the party, it is the frequent changes in the administration that are responsible for the stalemate. The average work-span of a field official is no more than eight months. In the last 11 months, three education commissioners, three irrigation commissioners and three public health engineering commissioners have come and gone.

The much-delayed ministry expansion seemed similarly arbitrary: loyalty, or the lack of it, had mattered more than reputation at work or public image. The three ministers sacked had all run into problems with the chief minister.

K.M. KISHAN



Dubey with Anjiah and Azad: clean chit

Indernath Bhagat was known to have opposed some appointments in the Excise Ministry that he used to head. Mahabir Choudhury (urban development) is close to Union External Affairs Minister Bali Ram Bhagat, supposedly an aspirant for the chief ministership of the state. Amarendra Mishra, a relative of Jagannath Mishra, had openly opposed the appointment of three chief engineers and had in fact submitted his resignation twice. Dubey himself explained the changes with the cryptic comment: "I inducted only those whom I considered fit." A government spokesman, however, clarified: "The main criterion for sacking was the loss of integrity and disobedience."

However, double standards had clearly been used. Many ministers charged with corruption were not merely retained but rewarded with an enlarged portfolio. Lahtan Choudhury, agriculture minister, accused of protect-

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ing an official involved in a Rs 1.50-crore fertiliser scandal, has been given additional charge of overseeing the implementation of the 20-Point Programme. Similarly, Saryu Upadhyaya, who has allegedly been interfering in transfers and postings of government officials, has been given the Cooperative Department, and Saryu Mishra, who isn't known to be a model of efficiency, has been given the portfolios of minor irrigation, special agricultural programmes and religious trusts. Remarked Jagannath Mishra: "It seems the team chosen by Dubey will not be effective, nor will it improve the image of the Government in any way." His followers, snickering at Dubey's attempt to reduce Mishra's influence, gleefully pointed out that the 34-strong ministry still had half a dozen followers of the ex-chief minister.

However, what Dubey does not lack is support from the top. Two AICC(I) general secretaries, T. Anjiah and Bhagwat Jha Azad, who visited the state recently, gave the ministry a clean chit. But with Dubey floundering despite major initiatives, his hold on the state's administration seemed decidedly shaky.

—FARZAND AHMED

JHARKHAND

Renewed Call

THE WAR cry was impassioned and strident: *Jharkhand rajya alag karenge, ham Bihar mein nahin rahenge*—we will have a separate Jharkhand state, we will not remain in Bihar any more. The slogan was raised at rallies last fortnight in Dumka and Dhanbad, in the heartland of the Adivasi belt in south Bihar, as over 70,000 tribal men, women and children, armed with bows and arrows, gathered to observe the 'Jharkhand Mukti Divas'. It wasn't the first such event—the Divas has been observed since 1980—but the zeal and the fervour was unprecedented. Exulted Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) MLA Suraj Mandal: "Every young man here is now ready to become Sidho and Kano (legendary Santhal brothers who raised the banner of revolt against the British and the *mahajans* 133 years ago)."

The rallies were organised by Mandal and the charismatic Shibu Soren under the JMM banner and, till recently, the movement rarely drew support from non-tribals or from the major political parties. Now, this seems to be changing. Claims a confident Mandal: "Everybody, irrespective of party colour, has begun to understand the meaning of the demand." Echoing this feeling, Jai Prakash Narayan Vichar Manch Convenor Saryu Roy, who was a special invitee at the Dumka rally, said: "The tribals who attended the rally seemed determined to fight for survival."

This determination had first come in evidence six months ago when tribal legislators, including those of the Congress(I), bitterly complained of neglect at a meeting in which the Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan and Bihar Chief Minister Bindeshwari

K.M. KISHAN

Soren leading tribals: wide support

Dubey were present. Led by Devender Champia, for the first time Congress(I) legislators joined the others in demanding that the Jharkhand area comprising the Chhotanagpur plateau and the Santhal Parganas district be made into a Union territory. A shaken Dubey then went on a 'Jharkhand darshan' during which he discovered, not surprisingly, that the complaints of neglect had susbstance. In Santhal Pargana, he touched many areas where no chief minister had ever set foot before and found that 75 per cent of the Paharias were suffering from tuberculosis, that there were no drinking water facilities, no schools and no medical centres.

Admitted Minister of State for Welfare and Jails Thomas Hansda: "Whatever funds were allotted used to go into the pockets of officials and engineers." Concern for tribals was further accentuated last fortnight with the publication of a study by Biseshwar Prasad Kesari, reader in the department of tribal and regional languages of Ranchi University, which argued that the very survival of the distinct subculture of the region was in danger. Argued Kesari: "Without caring for its (the Adivasi culture's) identity, the rulers are forcing it into the domain of the exploitative mainstream."

Sensing the mood, Dubey announced last fortnight that 40 per cent of the state's annual plan next year was going to be spent on the region. "I belong to the region and can realise its pain," he asserted. Simultaneously, 42 Congress(I) MLA's, mostly non-tribals, submitted a memorandum to the Bihar governor opposing the demand for a separate Union territory but demanding that the whole region be declared a hill area.

If Congressmen speak with several voices, so do the other political groups. Buoyed by the success of the rallies, JMM leaders started unity moves with other Jharkhand leaders like N.E. Horo, but the efforts were in vain. Horo has now called a public meeting in Purulia. Infighting has long been the bane of the Jharkhand leaders and it seemed the malaise would again eat into the vitals of an undoubtedly popular movement.

—FARZAND AHMED

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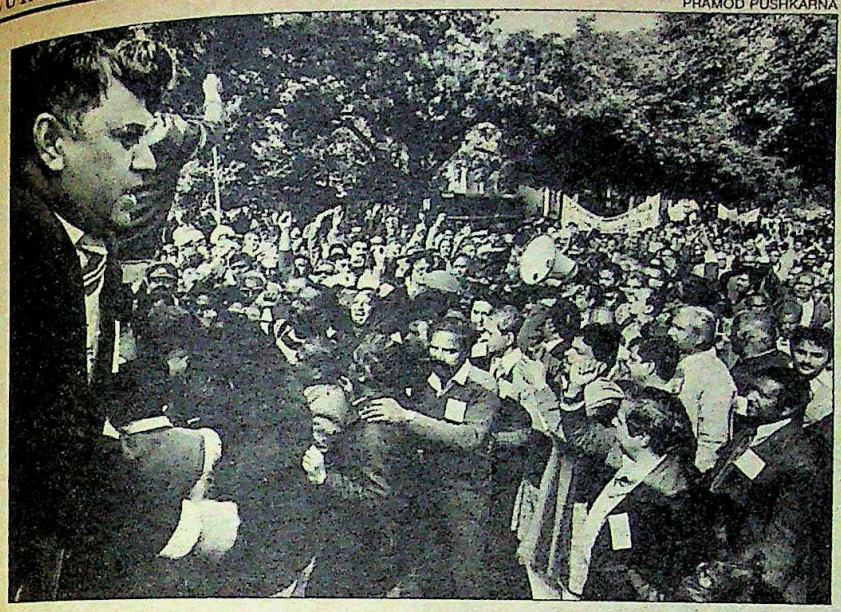

The agitating teachers: isolated

DELHI UNIVERSITY

Striking Lesson

CONTROVERSY and bitterness have dogged the two-month-long strike by 6,000 members of the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) for better pay and service conditions. The strike in one of the country's largest and most prestigious universities started on December 10 with a fair measure of popular support. But with some of the demands being conceded, the authorities mounting an unprecedented media campaign and 150,000 students beginning to fear that they might lose a whole academic year, the DUTA was by late last fortnight beginning to find itself increasingly isolated. But when it seemed that the strike might be called off, another controversy erupted and attitudes hardened.

Involved in the latest snafu were DUTA and the Lt-Governor of Delhi, H.L.Kapur: the DUTA charging him with backing off on a mediation attempt that he himself had initiated and Kapur retorting that the DUTA had misinterpreted him. DUTA president Murli Manohar Prasad Singh maintained that DUTA and Kapur had worked out a formula which Kapur was to take up with the ministry. According to the formula, DUTA would have called off the strike if the University Grants Commission (UGC) conceded the demand in principle. But Kapur maintained that in his discussions he had merely reiterated the UGC's agreement to the principle of "vertical mobility". Said Singh: "We think that there is a very strong anti-settlement lobby working which wants to teach DUTA a lesson. Kapur has fallen a victim to the machinations of this lobby."

Shah, Singh and Raza: controversy and bitter debate

The strike had its roots in a similar agitation which lasted 109 days starting January 1983. It ended after the UGC and DUTA signed an accord whereby teachers who had put in over 10 years of service would be considered for promotion to a higher grade. It also provided for the introduction of the professor's grade at the college level and a housing scheme for university and college employees. The teachers claim that the UGC went back on the agreement.

In a letter to Human Resources Development Minister P.V.Narasimha Rao, Singh pointed out that only the promotion scheme in the agreement had been implemented but was discontinued by the UGC. Nothing had been done to introduce the professor's grade in colleges and of the three housing schemes envisaged in the agreement, only a beggarly sum of Rs 3 crore had been sanctioned for implementation. But UGC Chairperson Madhuri Shah (whose contract with the UGC ran out last fortnight and was not immediately renewed) was categorical that the commission had abided by the 1983 agreement.

Except, of course, for the professor's grade demand which the UGC had committed itself to this three years ago. Shah was unyielding on the point: "This simply cannot be done. Becoming a professor is a high academic distinction and not something you can be promoted to. Also, it has implications for the rest of the country." To this Inder Kapahy, member of the University Executive Council, pointed out: "We do not envisage that everybody will become a professor. We just feel that an opportunity should exist in order to allow people to strive for some kind of academic excellence. This is being opposed because it might alter the fact that political considerations and not academic excellence apply in the selection."

The Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, Professor Moonis Raza, went on the national TV hookup to appeal for an end to the strike and argued that DUTA should have called off the stir on January 22, when most of their demands were conceded. "What they are doing is wrong. You cannot hold the students to ransom. It is like hijacking a plane with 30 innocent passengers on it because you want to get back at Gaddafi."

Indeed, the worst sufferers were the university's 150,000 students. Ironically, the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) had initially backed the teachers' agitation. But now, argued Ajay Maken, the DUSU president: "Since most of the demands have been conceded, they are just being bloody-minded." However, Singh maintained: "We want a settlement that will crush the seeds of this recurring turmoil." Unfortunately, there was no breakthrough in sight. —TAVLEEN SINGH

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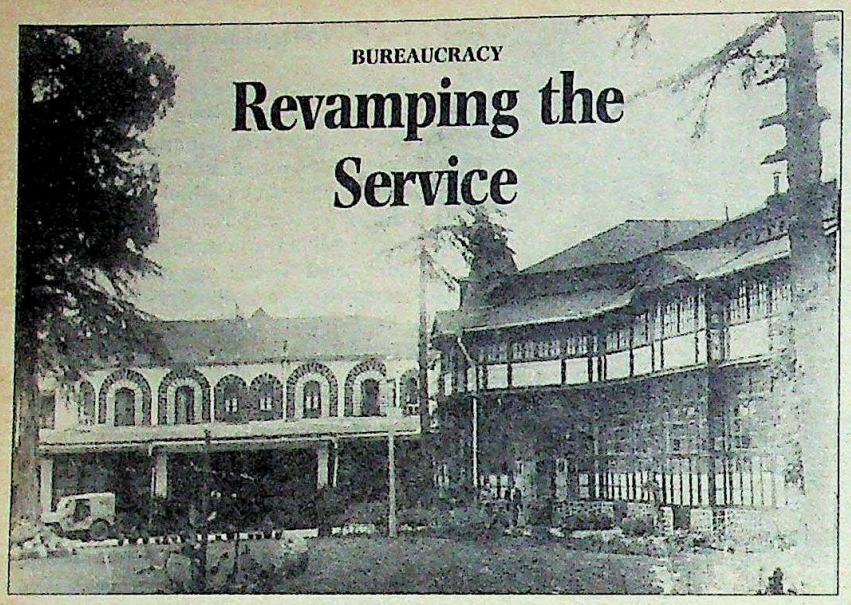


BUREAUCRACY

Revamping the Service

IT IS a churning the like of which the 4,119-strong, 38-year-old Indian Administrative Service (IAS) has not seen before. Where mid-career training was virtually unknown, all the 3,800-odd confirmed IAS officers will have attended one-week refresher courses in 41 institutes across the country between last October and next May. And in three years' time, all IAS officers will have attended an intensive four-week training course. That's only for starters. Nearly a dozen changes in the structure and format of the IAS are being proposed. Some decisions have already been implemented.

When these are through, the service will change from the flabby, often insensitive, frequently self-centred and monopolistic hegemony which the late professor Raj Krishna once described as "knowledge-proof". Or so hopes Palaniappan Chidambaram, the 40-year-old minister of state for personnel, public grievances and pensions, who is piloting the changes. Says he: "We are not doing cosmetic surgery. We are attempting a total revamping of the service." But many senior ex-bureaucrats have their doubts. Warned P.K. Dave, former ambassador to the European Economic Community: "Considering the amount of information available on the ills of the service there is no scope for tinkering with the service."

Some 20 committees have gone into ways and means to reform the administrative system in the past. What had been lacking, till Rajiv Gandhi took over, was the desire and the design to do something about it. As early as January last year, Rajiv took away the Department of Personnel and Training from the Home Ministry and upgraded it into a new ministry with a minister of state reporting directly to him. In his very first policy statement he promised that civil servants would be given training. By August the schedule for the one-week refresher courses had been drawn up. But the revamping really got into stride after Chidambaram, an MBA from Harvard, took over from K.P. Singh Deo in October. And the prime minister's intentions became clearer at a meeting of the consultative committee where several on-the-spot decisions were taken.

Proposals, the first few of which have already been implemented while the others are in an advanced stage of decision-making, have since emanated from the ministry like so many rabbits out of a magician's hat. To wit:

► The composition of the one-week course was changed to have 'vertical integration'—that is, from secretary-level officers to subdivisional officers—and 'horizontal' spread. Typically, a batch of 30 now has officers ranging from the 1960 batch to the 1982 batch with at least one representative from all 22 states;

► Automatic promotions to the director level will be discontinued. Currently, the IAS is the only service with automatic promotions up to such a senior level;

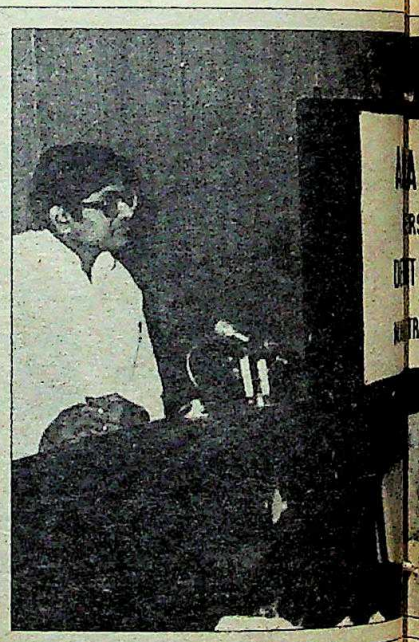
► After the joint secretary level, only 60 per cent of the officers will be empanelled. Further, only this 60 per cent will assume positions of responsibility at the Centre and in the states, unlike now when those who do not get empanelled at the Centre still go on to rise to the top in the states;

► The rule requiring non-confirmation of those who fail in the end-probation examination, now observed more in the breach, will be strictly enforced;

► The service is being made leaner, and intake into the service will be lower in the coming years. Specialist jobs will be left to specialists; IAS officers will only fill up the essential cadre posts;

► The promotee IAS officers, who currently constitute one-third of the service and who do not need to work outside their state, may be posted to states in their zone. (There is no proposal to replace the existing system of state cadres with five zonal cadres, as has been wrongly reported.);

► Postings in the first 11 years will be regularised. State governments will be told that district magistrates should have tenures of three years and in the remaining six years (two are spent on probation) they should have a maximum of three postings by rotation in regulatory departments and development departments;



The Mussoorie Academy of Administration; and (right) Chidambaram addressing a refresher course: basic changes

► Officers are to go in for specialisation between their 11th and 16th years;

► With the service records of all IAS officers having been put on a computer, arbitrariness in prestige postings to the Centre has been reduced to a minimum. "Nobody's case goes by default," explained Chidambaram;

► Deputations to training institutions, hitherto considered punishment postings, have been made more attractive with a special allowance of 30 per cent of salary so that the best officers go;

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▶ The format of confidential reports will change. From April they will also have an objective section where officers will be quantitatively assessed; and

▶ An integrated management pool is to be drawn up comprising officers from other Class I services.

SAYS Chidambaram: "What we are doing is nothing new; many of these things have been thought of in the past. But we intend to show that we mean business and it is my job to see this thing through." The minister's we-mean-business style has been infectious. Cabinet Secretary P.K. Kaul, who himself attended a course at the Tata Management Training Centre, Pune, between February 3 and 8, personally drew up the training schedule of the 94 officers in the top-level secretary to the government grade. The 40-strong training wing of the ministry, whose work has doubled, has been working 12 hours a day for several months slotting officers in over 400 courses.

However, not all the 1,500-odd officers who had gone through the course in 41 institutes across the country till the middle of this month were quite as excited. "This one-week refresher course is all rubbish," snorted a joint secretary who had attended a course at the Administrative Staff College, Hyderabad. "It is a brainless exercise which will have a disastrous effect. The worst fears of the 75 per cent IAS officers who have never believed in training will be confirmed, the 20 per cent who were equivocal about it will join the 75 per cent and the confidence of the 5 per cent who believe in training, like I do, will be shaken."

Criticism of the courses has centred on two points: that they have been too hurried and haphazard. The programme format has been left to the institutes, so the bad and the irrelevant courses have jostled with the good. Officers have been packed off at short notice to courses in which they had little interest or experience. "What is their point?" asked the joint secretary. "If the point was to recharge your batteries then that purpose will be served if people are just given the leave they are due." Chidambaram concedes the criticism but argues: "We were trying to run before we could walk. But the crucial thing was to get started. And, more importantly, we have learnt as we have progressed, and from the next year there will be nothing hurried about it." Argued Mukesh Nandan Prasad, deputy secretary in the Ministry of Power, who came back thoroughly refreshed from the Tata Institute in Pune: "Even if this year's refresher programmes are seen as a pilot project, the Rs 40-45 lakh spent on them will have been worthwhile."

Not everybody, however, is so unequivocal in welcoming the changes. Many wonder if the reforms are well thought out. Others feel the Government is skirting basic problems. Asked T.C.A. Srinivas Vardhan, of the 1948 batch who retired as home secretary: "Why can't we have a public debate on the proposed changes like the one on the education policy?" Dave pointed out that the reforms do not address the major problem that the service suffers from—undue interference by the state governments.

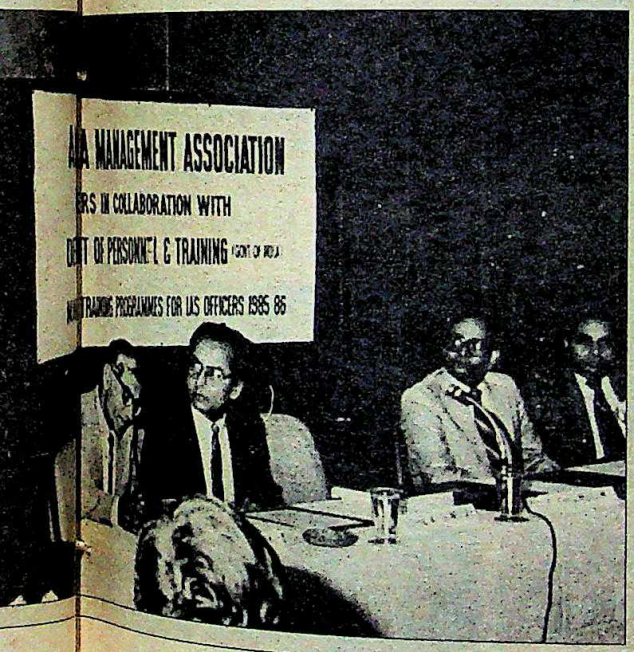
V.A. Pai Panandiker, director of the Centre for Policy Research and a long-time bureaucracy watcher, concedes that the proposed changes might go some way in improving the service but feels that nothing much will change till the basic dilemma facing the service is addressed: "How does a *mai-baap* service like the IAS, modelled on the colonial Indian Civil Service and only cosmetically changed since, function in a political environment where we swear by participatory democracy? In operational terms—who decides how the district's outlay is going to be spent, the IAS officer or the zila parishad chief? How is the IAS officer going to accept a position inferior to that of the elected representative right down the line?" Panandiker argues that things will not improve unless fundamental changes are introduced into the whole administrative set-up: "The machinery of the Government is an outdated institution. If it is to help the country move into the 21st century, it will be necessary to re-invent it."

Chidambaram has his counter to these questions. He says he will have a short, time-bound debate on the changes proposed, that he is in fact trying to make development work the primary task of the service and insulate it from political pressures, and that all the required changes will be introduced in stages.

In fact, the process of change has only just been initiated. Chidambaram is expected to formulate the proposals in a policy paper that he will be putting up to the prime minister. Nor has he closed his mind to fresh initiatives. "I am looking for ideas," he reiterates. But the overall design and purpose is clear. "Our army is as good as any in the world because it keeps training its officers. We need to do the same. And once we've trained them, what we will be looking for are the leaders among the IAS officers. If you ask me what I am looking for, the answer is that I am looking for generals in the bureaucracy."

It is obvious that Rajiv thinks well of the work Chidambaram has put in: of the three deputy ministers he appointed in September, only Chidambaram was singled out for promotion to minister of state in last month's ministerial shake-up. But now that he is firmly in the driving seat, the 4,119 officers of the IAS will not be the only ones who will be watching his progress with great care.

—AJAY KUMAR



"We are not doing cosmetic surgery. We are attempting a total revamping of the Indian Administrative Service."

P. CHIDAMBARAM
minister of state for personnel, public grievances and pensions

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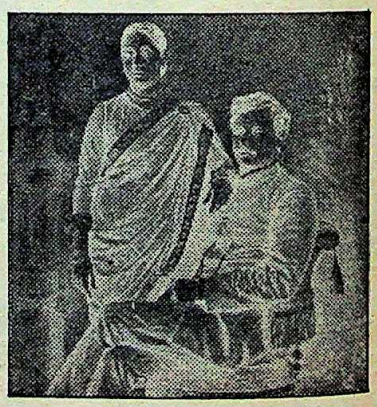
The day your great grandparents got married and posed for this prim and proper picture eightysix years ago.

Dr and Mrs P K Ray photographed in 1900 at Bourne & Shepherd, Calcutta.

The memory still lives on vividly. Thanks to B&W photography.

Thumb through your family photo album.
There are those glorious old photographs that bring fond memories.
In black and white. Sharp and clear even after sixty, seventy or eighty years and more.
The choice is quite clear.
When you shoot pictures for keeps, shoot them on Black and White film.
You'd be glad you did.

Memories may fade with time. Not Black & White pictures.



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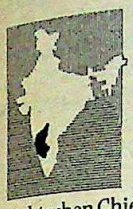
KARNATAKA

Vote Banks



IN OUR first-past-the-post electoral system, politics can never be anything but a game of numbers. This truism was proved once again in Karnataka last fortnight when Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde ordered the suspension of a probe into the explosion in the population of Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka—from 2.31 lakh in 1971 to 18.25 lakh in 1981, an incredible eightfold jump. Hegde is yet to give his reasons for suspending the probe just when a clear picture was going to emerge, but his decision has already created a controversy which irate Congress(I) men are taking to court.

The initial findings had been eye-opening: lured obviously by benefits constitutionally guaranteed to the Scheduled Tribes, many people of other tribes had got fake certificates to prove that they belonged to some Scheduled Tribe or the other. The bizarre phenomenon had occurred because of confusing similarities between Scheduled Tribes' surnames and non-scheduled ones. The Naiks (who are classified as a backward tribe), with a little jugglery of spelling and some money under the table, became Nayaks, who are a Scheduled Tribe. Similarly Kurubas became Kadu Kurubas or Jenu Kurubas, Medars became Medas, Kolis became Tokre Kolis or Koli Dhars and so on.

The Centre, suspecting precisely this, had told the state Government to separate the wheat from the chaff and the probe had duly been entrusted to the Civil Rights Enforcement Wing (CREW) of the Karnataka police. But Hegde, with his edict last fortnight, brought it all to an abrupt stop. The chief minister suspended all proceedings against the three categories of non-Scheduled Tribes—the Naiks, the Malerus and the Kurubas—which had accounted for more than half of the false certificates detected in 1985. Not only this, he extended all benefits to them meant for the Scheduled Tribes.

The chief minister, in his order, explained that the state Government had referred the case of the Naiks to the Centre in 1984, asking it to include them in the schedule and pending the Centre's decision, it was only right that proceedings against the Naiks should be suspended. As for the other two tribes, the Malerus and the Kurubas, he said that a committee would be set up headed by Social Welfare Minister V.L. Patil to "go into the issue".

Soon after Hegde issued his fiat, Social Welfare Secretary P.S.S. Thomas, anticipating the opposition, wrote to the chief minister advising him to withdraw it. And sure enough, many people were up in arms over the decision. Said an enraged B. Basavalingappa, a Scheduled Caste Congress(I) MLA: "The state Government is trying to snatch the privileges of the Scheduled Tribes." Basavalingappa, who is planning to take the issue to court, pointed out that according to the constitutional order of 1950 on Scheduled Castes and Tribes, a state government is not empowered to include other communities in the schedule.

Hegde, however, refused to comment on this, saying that he would speak in the Assembly where the matter would shortly come up for discussion. Social Welfare Minister Patil, himself a Kuruba tribal, merely said the Government had taken note of the increase in the Scheduled Tribes' population. But he added that there were only 834 complaints in 1985, while the Government had actually issued 13,000 certificates that year.

The confusion actually began in 1977 when the Centre changed the criterion by which a certain tribe was treated as a Scheduled Tribe only in some particular areas while at other places it was not. In the districts of Belgaum, Dharwar, Bijapur and Uttara Kannada, Naiks were a Scheduled Tribe, but in other districts they were not. But due to the nomadic life-style of some of the tribes, the Centre stopped this areawise break-up and declared that a Scheduled Tribe was a Scheduled Tribe everywhere.

It was largely this change, apart from the similar surnames, that the unscrupulous took advantage of to secure fake certificates. The decentralisation of the authority for issuing certificates also left the field open to corruption and irregularities. Says K. Srinivasa Alva, deputy inspector general of CREW: "After 1977, everybody started claiming to be everybody else."

CREW officials, who admit that they had managed to detect only a few cases, are understandably furious over the government order, since their months of toil has come to naught. They are now banking on Basavalingappa's threat to move the court. Officials of both CREW and the Social Welfare Department privately say that the government order has no legal validity and has been issued only to appease the concerned tribes and secure loyal vote banks for the ruling party.

What remains now is the proposed discussion in the Assembly over the issue. Considering the opinion building up in all quarters against the decision, the debate promises to be lively. But whether it will succeed in getting a shrewd politician like Hegde to reconsider his decision is another matter.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD

G. DEEPAK PAWAR

"The state Government is trying to snatch the privileges of the Scheduled Tribes."

B. BASAVALINGAPPA
Congress(I) MLA

G. DEEPAK PAWAR

"After 1977 (when the Centre stopped the areawise break-up), everybody started claiming to be everybody else."

K. SRINIVASA ALVA
DIG Civil Rights Enforcement Wing

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MARUTI DEALERS

Rewarding Links

DEALERSHIPS for a product like the Maruti, which virtually sells itself, have been among the most surefire business propositions of recent years. Inevitably, there was a huge rush for the dealerships when Maruti Udyog invited applications in two lots in 1983 and 1984. Eventually, the company violated its own guidelines on selecting dealers, took contradictory decisions, and in the process helped members of the Congress(I), or people close to the party, to walk away with quite a few of the dealerships. Assistant Editor PRABHU CHAWLA*'s report:*

IF EVERYONE with a will and a wallet has jumped on to the Maruti bandwagon, so has the Congress(I), some of whose leading lights have bagged the prized dealerships for the country's hottest property on wheels. Indeed, being a member of the country's biggest political party seems almost to have become something of an asset in being appointed Maruti Udyog's dealer—almost one-third of the company's 38 dealers appointed in two rounds, in 1983 and 1984, across the country belong to the ruling party, or are linked to it through relatives or friends. Another half a dozen are friends of people in high places in either the Government or Maruti Udyog itself.

Consider some examples.

► Ansari Brothers are well-known in Srinagar as civil contractors and politicians. One of the brothers is none other than Maulvi Iftiquar Ansari, leader of the 26-member Congress(I) Jammu and Kashmir legislature party. His brother's newly floated company, Ansari Motors, was allotted a Maruti dealership last year.

► Then there is Pasco Motors Automobile in Chandigarh, owned by B.L. Passi, 47, a prominent TELCO dealer and Congressman in the city who was once appointed on to the board of a nationalised bank at a time when numerous prominent Congressmen were thus honoured. He denies any links with a political party and claims that he got the agency on merit.

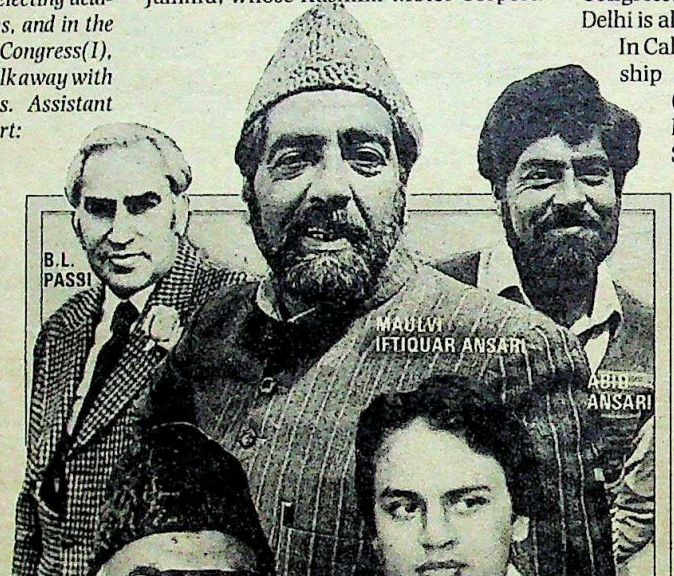
► A third case is that of Amla, a Congress(I) member of Parliament from Jammu, whose Kashmir Motor Corporation has got the nod from the Maruti Udyog Board.

Even close friends and associates of the Congress(I) have benefited. One of Maruti's Delhi dealerships has gone to Ganga Automobiles, owned by Ashwani Suri, the 25-year-old son of businessman Sagar Suri, who had very close relations with both Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi. Another dealership in the capital has gone to Competent Motors, floated by Raj Chopra, who deals in furniture and civil construction and who is known to be close to the Congress(I)'s new elite. Aganall Motors of Delhi is also close to the Maruti's big wigs.

In Calcutta, the car company's dealership has gone to Machino-Techno (Sales) Pvt Ltd, owned by M.D.Jindal, brother-in-law of Swraj Paul, the London-based businessman who is a well-known friend and admirer of the late prime minister. Last year, Maruti favoured Jindal with a second dealership in Asansol.

To add to this long list, there is the case of Suresh Kalmadi, the Congress(S) MP who last year made a concerted pitch to get his party to merge with the Congress(I). Kalmadi's Sai Services has been given the Maruti dealership for Pune.

Sometimes, the dealerships have been contested even among those in the charmed circle of the politically well connected. In J & K, Maruti initially decided to grant a dealership in Srinagar to Rafiq Sadiq, son of Mohammed Sadiq, the former chief minister of Jammu & Kashmir. Rafiq represents a major liquor manufacturer in the Kashmir valley, and was selected as a Maruti dealer after the company rejected seven other contenders. He was issued a letter of intent and he sought a piece of land in the state's summer capital. But once he started construction, Maruti suddenly changed its mind, and objections were raised about Rafiq's financial capability and about the design of his show-room. Before he could complete work on the workshop and the show-room, Ansari Brothers appeared on



Examples abound of dealerships having been given to people close to the Congress(I). Some of them have been doubly lucky in that they have been given dealerships in more than one town.

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the scene. Rafiq soon went to court when Maruti Udyog started releasing cars booked in Srinagar through Kashmir Motor Corporation, and later appointed Ansari as the dealer.

Others who fell out of favour were the original dealers of the Maruti company that Sanjay Gandhi originally floated as a private enterprise. But there have been two exceptions—Mandovi Motors of Bangalore and Mahalaxmi Motors of Hyderabad.

OTHER examples abound of dealerships having been given to people close to the Congress(I) in Lucknow, Guwahati, Patna, Bombay, Jaipur and Ahmedabad. And some of the dealers have been doubly lucky in that they have been given dealerships in more than one town. This has happened in West Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka and Kerala. But R.C.Bhargava, managing director of Maruti Udyog, justifies this by arguing that it was done in those cases where a single dealership in one town did not generate enough revenue for the business to be worthwhile for the dealer. "Our original estimate was that each unit should be able to sell 350 to 400 cars every month to stay in business. Wherever we find that in one city the sale is less than the bare minimum, we try to allot another city so that it becomes a viable proposition."

It is, of course, no disqualification to belong to the Congress(I) if someone wants a Maruti dealership. And, in any case, the company had left matters vague when it advertised for dealers, merely saying: "The main criteria for appointing dealers shall be the ability of the dealer to provide a standard of customer service which is comparable to that available in developed countries, to maximise the market for Maruti and to project and develop the highest possible image of the company." While no precise yardsticks for making judgements on these points may have been possible, the company's board of directors decided that anyone dealing in a competing product would not be eligible for a Maruti dealership. The guidelines also stipulated that prospective dealers should possess some automobile expertise and financial strength.

But these guidelines have been observed more in the breach while handing out dealerships to members of the Congress(I) and others. Thus, Ansari Brothers in Srinagar were essentially civil contractors with no previous experience in the automobile business. Raj Chopra in Delhi was equally innocent of any automobile background, having been a businessman dealing in furniture and civil construction. Rafiq Sadiq had been a liquor distributor in Kashmir, while M.D. Jindal in Calcutta was known as a shrewd commodity trader.

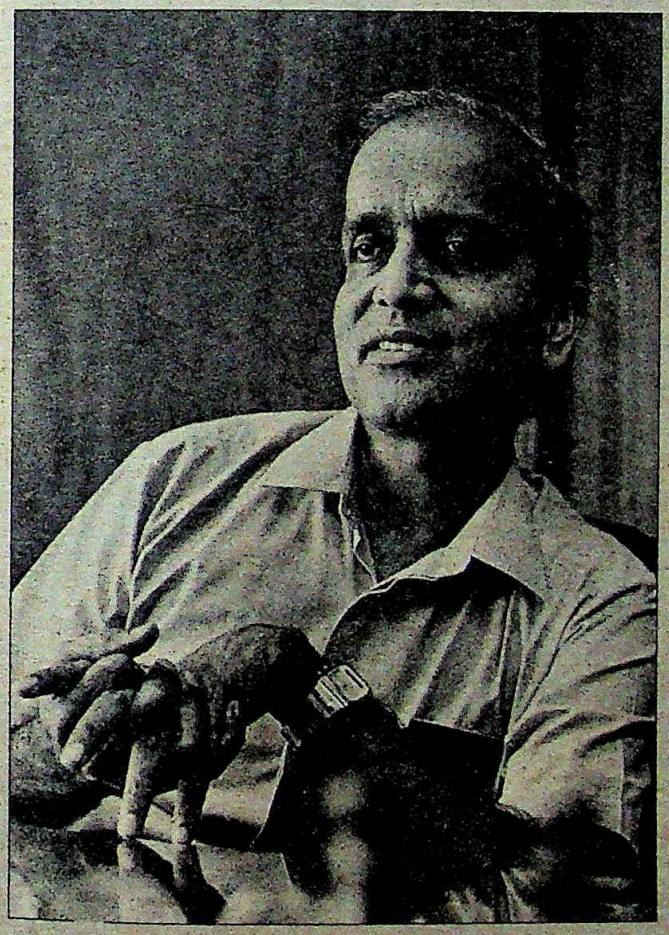
Suresh Kalmadi of the Congress(S) fell into a different category here, because he had been running a motor garage earlier. Nevertheless, Maruti Udyog is clearly not fully happy so far with his record as a dealer, and a defensive Bhargava said: "It is a new dealership and he will be able to come up to our expectations soon."

Some of the other favoured dealers were appointed in violation of the second major guideline decided on by Maruti Udyog—that the dealer should not be dealing in products of rival companies. Thus, Amla was a prominent dealer for cars manufactured by the rival Premier Automobiles of Bombay. Indeed, the Maruti Board had rejected his 1983 application for a Srinagar dealership on this ground. Now, the company's officials justify their appointing him as a dealer on the ground that the Maruti dealership is for Jammu, while his Premier dealership is in Srinagar. But the fact is that Amla and his relatives managing his business are selling both Premier and Maruti cars in the same city, and have not even been able to build a show-room so far.

The case of Ashwani Suri in Delhi is not so clear-cut. The Suri family's Delhi Automobiles is a prominent Premier dealership in the city. But a spokesman of Ashwani Suri's Ganga Automobiles argued last fortnight that "we have absolutely no connection with other companies, and none of the directors of Delhi Automobiles is a member of our board of directors. If any one of the family's relatives is a dealer for another car company, that doesn't disqualify us from doing an independent business if we deserve it." Added Bhargava: "They were perhaps the best firm among the applicants available at that time from Delhi."

The "exclusively for Maruti" condition seems to have been relaxed in other cases also. Established automobile agencies in Delhi, like Sikand Motors and Pearey Lal and Sons, were initially rejected by Maruti Udyog since they dealt in rival products. But this factor was ignored last year when the company appointed them dealers in

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"We have selected dealers purely on their merit. It so happened that some of them had political connections."

R.C. BHARGAVA
managing director, Maruti Udyog

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Delhi and Meerut.

On some occasions, new considerations have dictated the appointment of dealers. For instance, nowhere in the advertisements or application forms for the second round of dealerships in 1984 was it stated that sportsmen or sportswomen would get preferential treatment. Nevertheless, Deepak Bhargawa, national junior tennis champion and son of a millionaire in Allahabad, was appointed a dealer because of his record in sport, though the company took the precaution of getting a letter from the State Bank of India in Allahabad that Bhargawa was capable of investing Rs 25 lakh in the dealership.

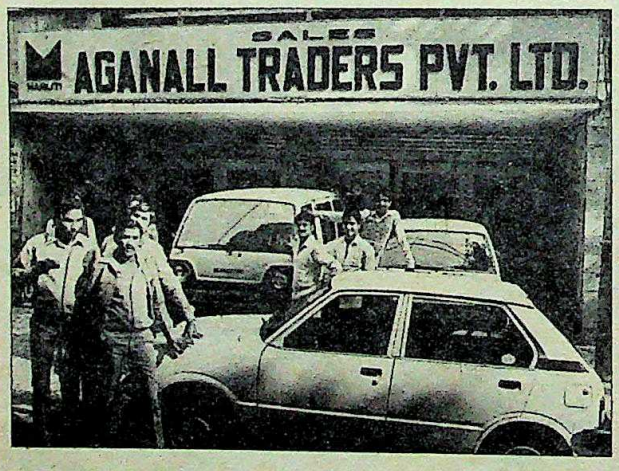
The second person appointed in the sportsmen category was Rajiv Bhale of Aurangabad, who has considerable expertise in horse-racing. Asked how dealerships had been awarded on the basis of a previously unspecified criterion, Maruti's Bhargava explained: "There are only two dealerships given on the basis of performance in sport. But at the same time, there were no better applicants either."

SUCH vagaries in choosing 38 dealers out of over 400 applicants have meant that while many were rejected on grounds of having no previous experience in the automobile business, others were appointed after ignoring this point. And while some dealers of rival cars were rejected on this ground, others haven't. But Bhargava justified the selections on the ground that "we might have been subjective in our selection to the extent that we had to make a choice from among many claimants. But we put up all the applications to the Board, which took decisions on merit."

Ordinarily, all this might not have mattered very much one way or the other, but in Maruti's case, with over two lakh customers having put money down for the company's vehicles, and with the dealers getting Rs 2,000 per vehicle sold, a dealership can be a passport to small fortunes. In Calcutta, for instance, the dealer is estimated to have invested Rs 20 lakh, and earned a commission of Rs 70 lakh in the first two years. Total dealership commissions across the country already total Rs 12 crore on 60,000 vehicles sold.

Yet the quality of service offered to vehicle-owners has fallen far short of the international standards that the initial advertisement for dealers had talked about. There have been cases, like that of a Delhi-based journalist, who was given a new Maruti by a dealer, without the original keys. These were claimed to

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Maruti show-rooms in Delhi: passports to small fortunes

have been lost, and crude, locally-made duplicates were offered instead. Those who had accidents in their cars were grossly overcharged, no price lists were on display so that the customers could check that they were not being taken for a ride, and there were some indications of an insurance racket in operation. Maruti users have in the past had to wait as long as 20 to 30 days after making a booking to get their vehicles serviced: as many as 25 cars were offered for servicing every day, while some dealers could handle no more than 10. Spare parts have on occasion not been available for 40 days. Some users had to drive to the Maruti factory in Gurgaon, accompanied by a dealer's representative, to get the required spare part.

Yet another problem has been caused by delays in the refund of money and repayment of interest to those wanting to cancel their bookings, though these have been few and far between. Dealers do not forward the refund claims to Maruti Udyog because this involves labour without payment. And those who want to cancel their bookings are not allowed to approach the company directly.

Maruti officials admit readily that their customer service has fallen short of expectations, but argue that this has nothing to do with the selection of dealers or their political connections. Said Bhargava: "We are aware of the problems. The dealers are not able to cope because of the overbooking in some places like Delhi. But none of the established people applied for dealerships earlier. We had to pick the best. We have selected dealers purely on their merits. It so happened that some of them had political connections."

He however, said that since the dealers were not delivering as expected, the company was thinking of appointing more than 50 authorised service stations in the capital in order to create some competition in the market and thereby give some relief to hard-pressed owners of Marutis. But he insisted that the problems being faced were as a rule because of the "massive response that Maruti vehicles have got from the people. Which other public sector organisation in this country has been able to build such a professional commercial network?"

But that, of course, is the wrong question to ask. The right question would be whether the dealers were appointed on an impartial basis, or whether political connections played an all-important role in their appointment and whether these and other dealers have delivered in the manner that had been promised.

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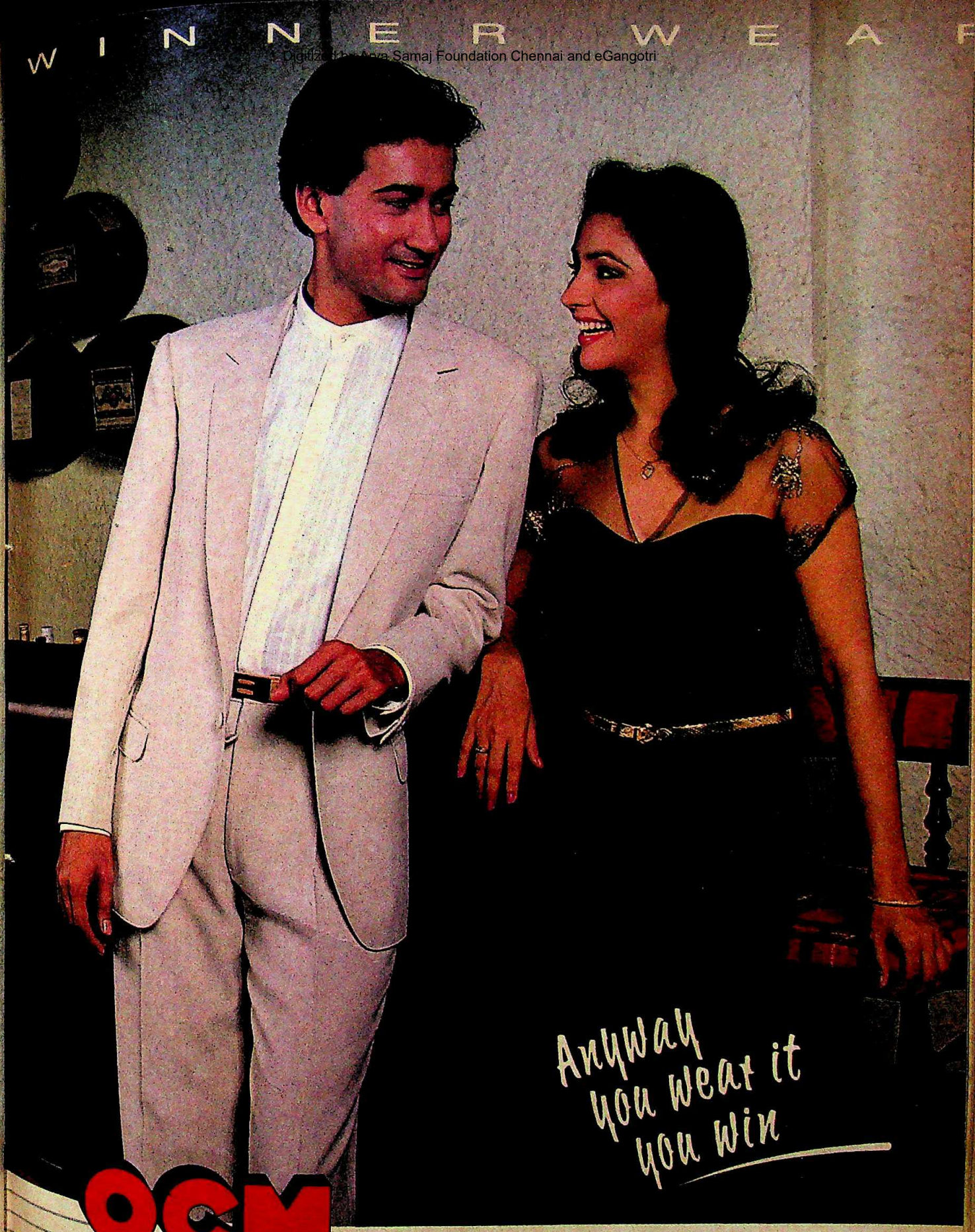

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A Pope's Pilgrimage

BENEDICTION at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Delhi. A visit to Mother Teresa's Nirmal Hriday in Calcutta. Sacrament amidst the coconut groves in Kerala. Communion in the portals of the grand 390-year-old Basilica of Bom Jesus in north Goa.

From a crisp morning in February, when Pope John Paul II, dressed in a resplendent white cassock and sash, stepped down from an Alitalia aircraft at Delhi airport, kneeling to kiss the earth, till his sombre departure from Bombay after a 10-day tour that is the longest ever undertaken by a Pope, it was an event as much for the faithful, the 13-million-strong community of Indian Catholics, as the curious. The multitudes thronged the roads, airports and public grounds as the Polish-born Pontiff zipped around 13 Indian cities, borne by Indian Air Force planes and the ubiquitous bullet-proof Popemobile.

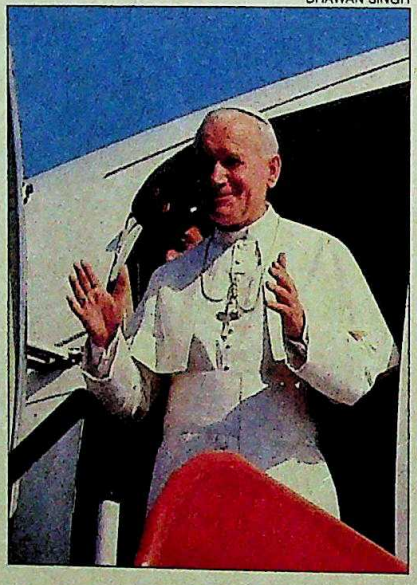
The Vicar of Christ and the 264th successor to St Peter came to India at the joint invitation of the President, Giani Zail Singh, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI). But the fact that no other Pope had visited India on an official invitation (Paul VI had come in 1964 to attend the World Eucharist meet), imbued the Indian Catholic church with a new sense of fulfilment and pride.

Though the crowds were not as overwhelming as the Pope is used to around the world, and despite the attempts at protest by some Hindu organisations, the papal visit was more than just ceremonial, thanks to the electrifying personality of 65-year-old Karol Josef Wojtyla (pronounced *voytila*), artist, musician, theatre actor, mystic and the most politically aware Pope of recent times. And the faithful did come from great distances—the Delhi mass was attended by people who had come from as far as Rajasthan, Bihar, and Nepal.

During his stay, he greeted his Indian audiences in Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Khasi, Tamil, Konkani and Malayalam. "I come in friendship with deep desire to pay honour to all your people and to your different cultures," he said at the mass to a gathering of 25,000 people at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi Stadium. At the Rajghat *samadhi* of Mahatma Gandhi, he broke protocol to flop down on his knees and remained in trance-like meditation for over five minutes until his fellow-bishops had to nudge him into wakefulness.

At least three million people turned out in the scorching sun in Trichur, Cochin, Kottayam and Trivandrum to see and listen to the Pope. He conducted holy mass at all the stops, and was entertained to dances, hymns and little welcoming playlets in typical Kerala art forms like Kathakali, Mohiniyattam and Oppana. The highlight of his visit was, of course, the beatification of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871), a Carmelite monk, and Sister Alphonsa (1910-1946), a Clarist nun. The function at Kottayam's Nehru Stadium was witnessed by about 8 lakh people. Said Annamma Joseph, an 80-year-old woman from Palai, who knew Sister Alphonsa: "This is one of the greatest moments for Christianity in India." The unique aspect of the beatification ceremony was that, for the first time in the history of the Roman Catholic church, it took place according to the Syro-Malabar rites.

BHAWAN SINGH



Pope John Paul II arriving in Delhi

In Goa, with a Catholic population of 350,000, the corner-stone of the Pope's visit was his address to the clergy in the Basilica of Bom Jesus. He arrived at the Basilica directly from Mangalore, was given a tumultuous welcome by the 200,000 Brothers and Sisters—men in the Basilica, the nuns outside—venerated the relics of St Francis Xavier, and left with the parting words to the nuns: "Today I have a message for you...(long pause)...the message is that next time you will sit inside the church and your brother priests outside." People travelled to Panaji, the capital, in the early hours of the morning in buses, trucks and ferries, dressed in their Sunday best. Roberto Mascarenhas of Bambolin watched the Popemobile vanish in a dusty haze and said: "This mass is the most memorable I have ever taken part in." The signs at the grounds in Panaji expressed the collective feelings brilliantly. *Totus tuus*, they proclaimed, meaning: entirely yours.

In Bombay, the Pontiff attended a youth rally at Shivaji Park where an audience of 1 lakh, carrying festoons and papal flags, had turned up. Even the Shiv Sena dropped its guard and Bal Thackeray himself attended the youth rally. In Calcutta, about 500 securitymen formed an impregnable arc outside as the smiling Pope went round Nirmal Hriday, the home of the destitutes and the dying, run by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. Its 86 inmates touched his robe, kissed his ring, and many broke down, calling him *Baba*. On his drive to the Delhi airport, he could not even look up and wave back at the crowd—his eyes were rivetted to the Romanised Bengali text of his next address, in Calcutta.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia spent some time with him at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The Reverend Angelo Fernandez, Archbishop of Delhi, spoke of the "electric waves" of his hands as they touched the head of every ordinary man at his temporary residence. Lawrence, a 45-year-old electrician, convulsed with uncontrollable sobs when the papal hands were planted on his head.

John Paul II's visit is a sure entry in India's episcopal history and a benchmark in Catholic annals. For the country as a whole, and its tapestry of composite culture, the ten days in February provided a rare glimpse of the man at the helm of the Holy See.

—SUMIT MITRA with bureau reports

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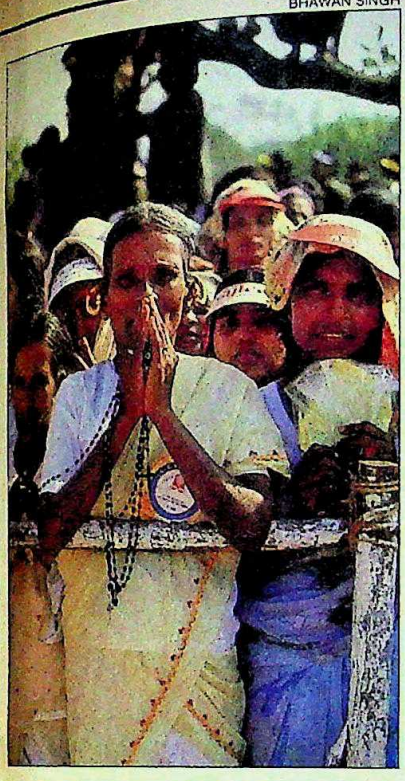
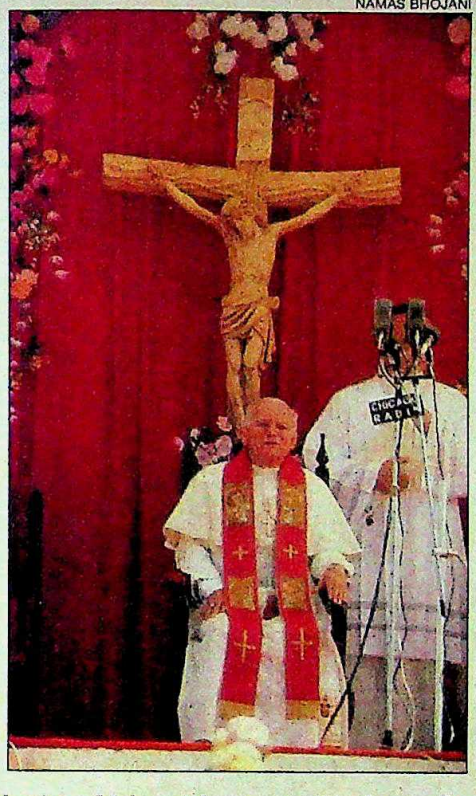


NAMAS BHOJANI



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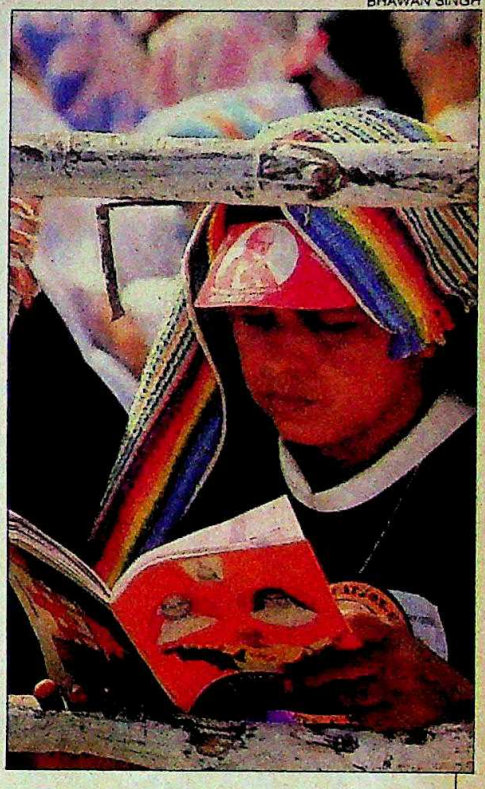

Being greeted at Delhi airport (below); and (above) devotees in Kerala; at a function in Goa; and a nun in Kerala

RAGHU RAI

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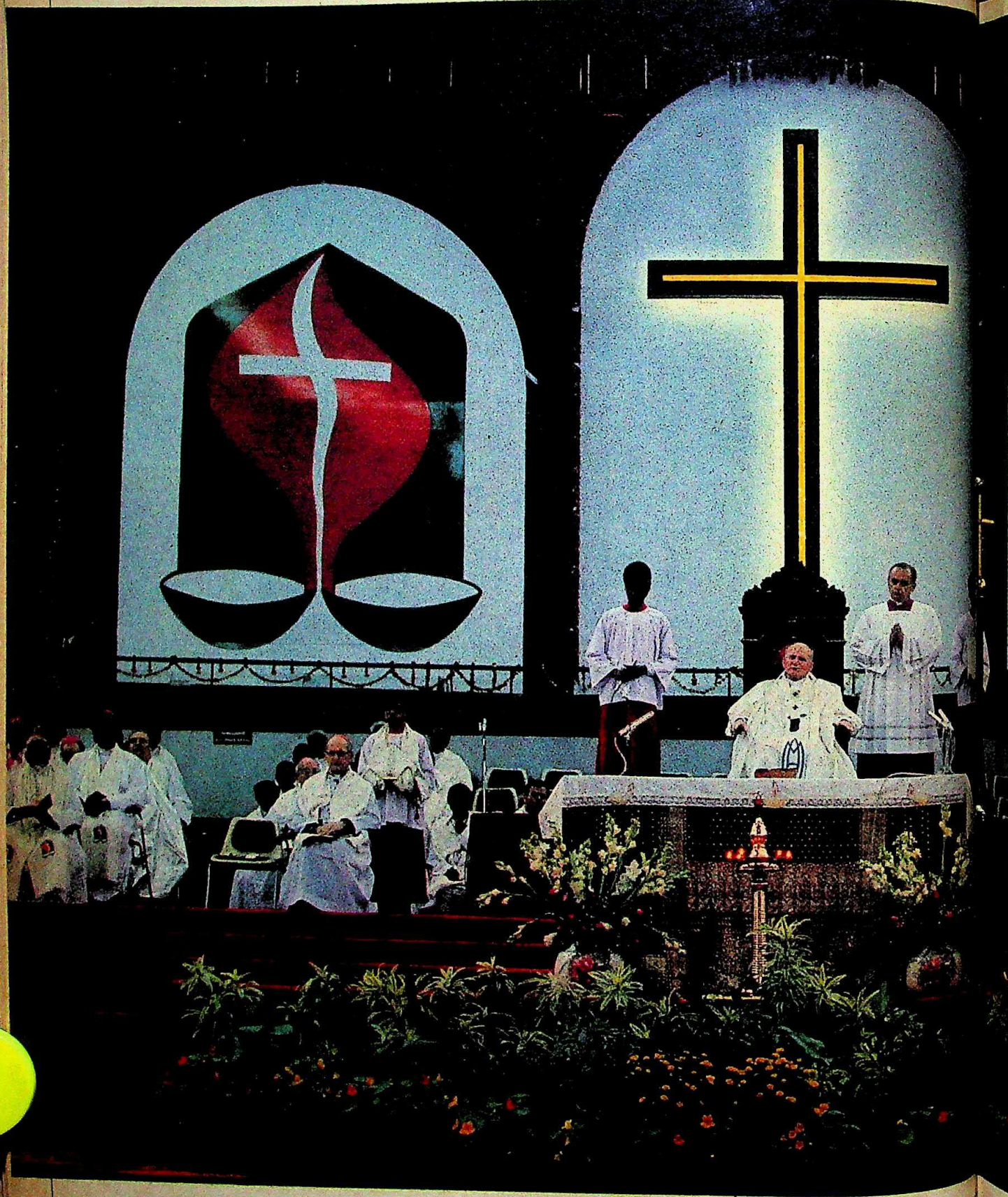

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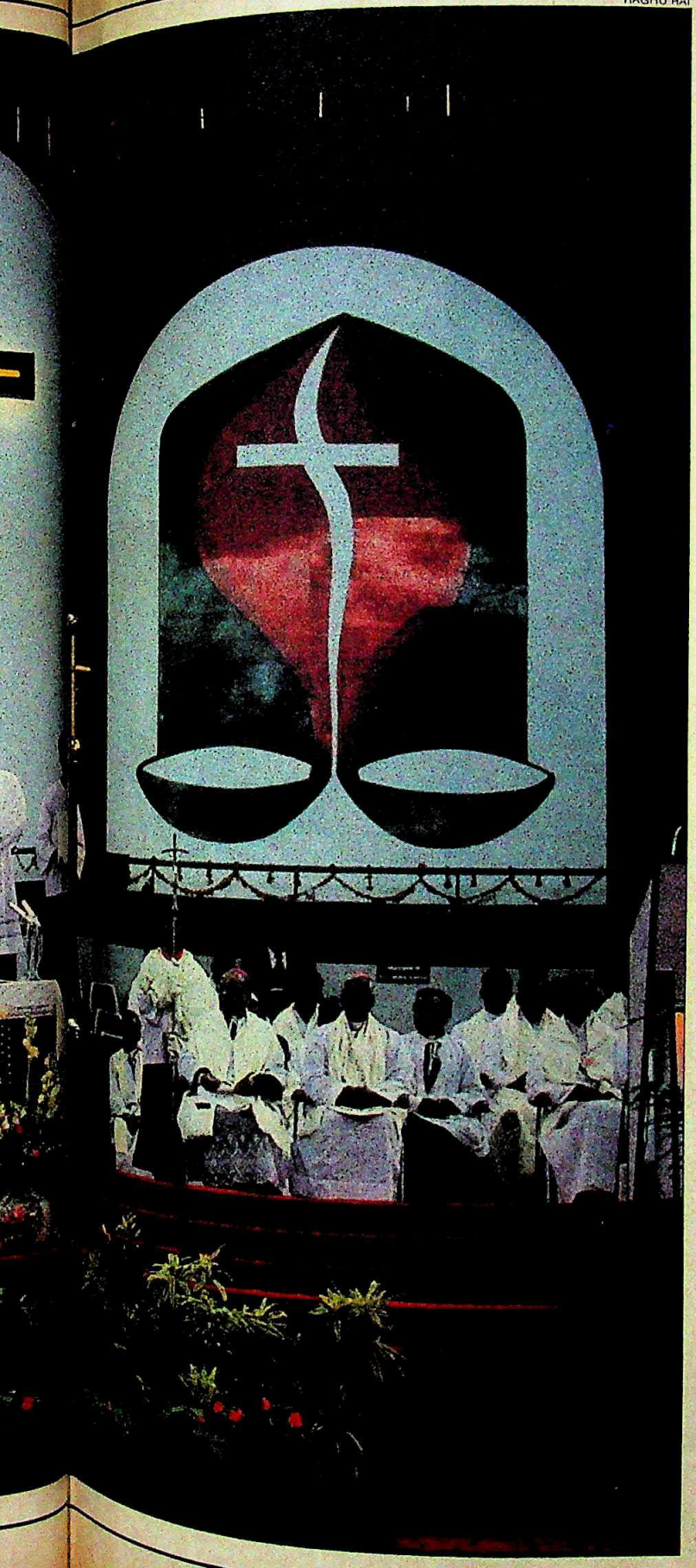

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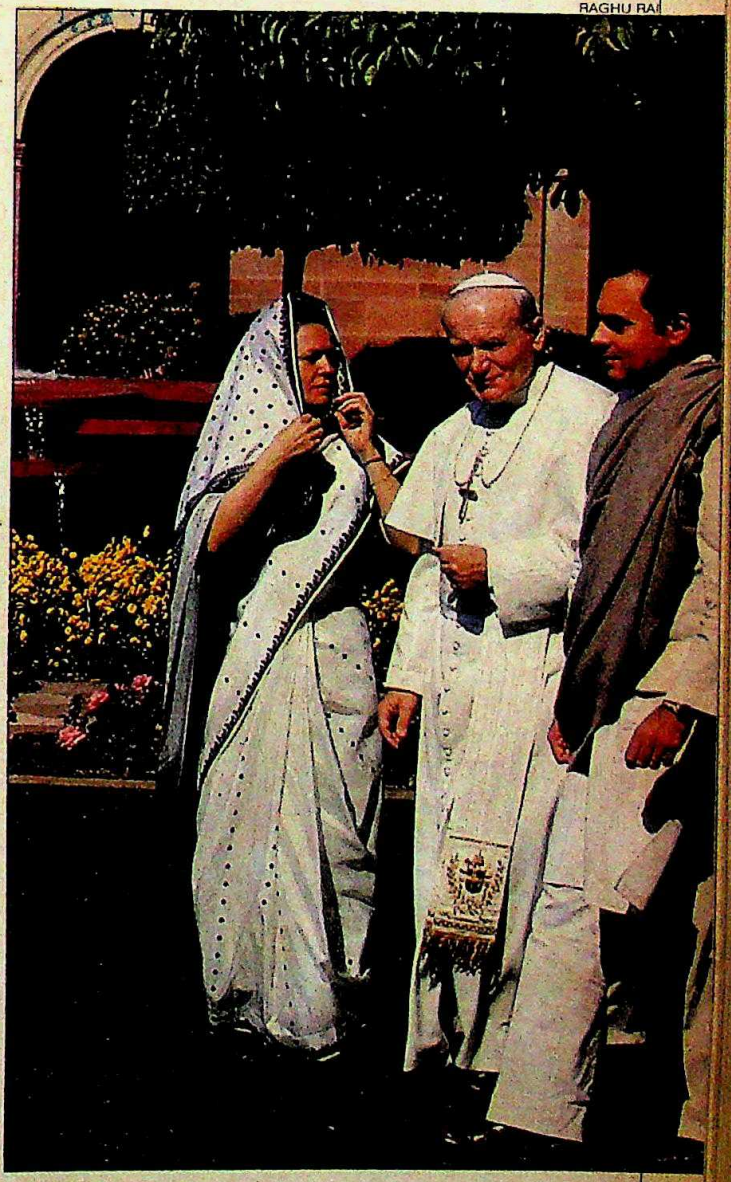

Celebrating mass at Indira Gandhi Stadium, Delhi, (left); waiting crowds (top); and with the Gandhis

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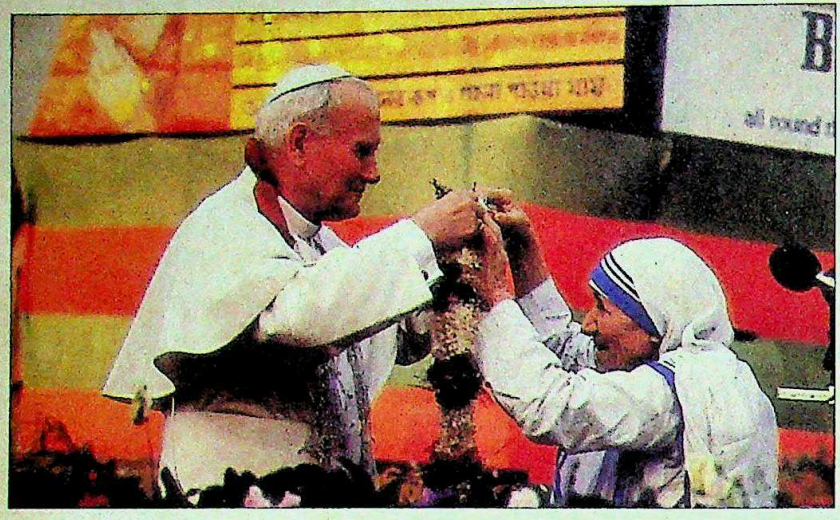

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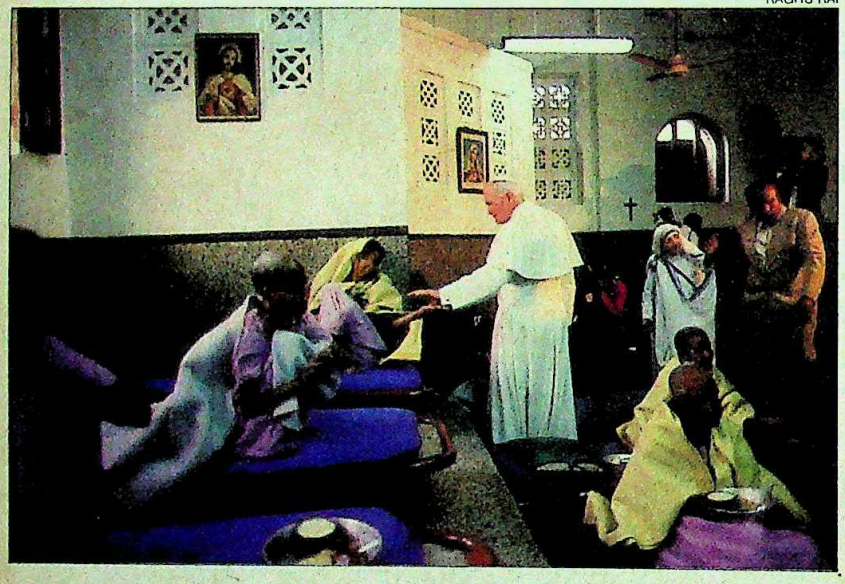

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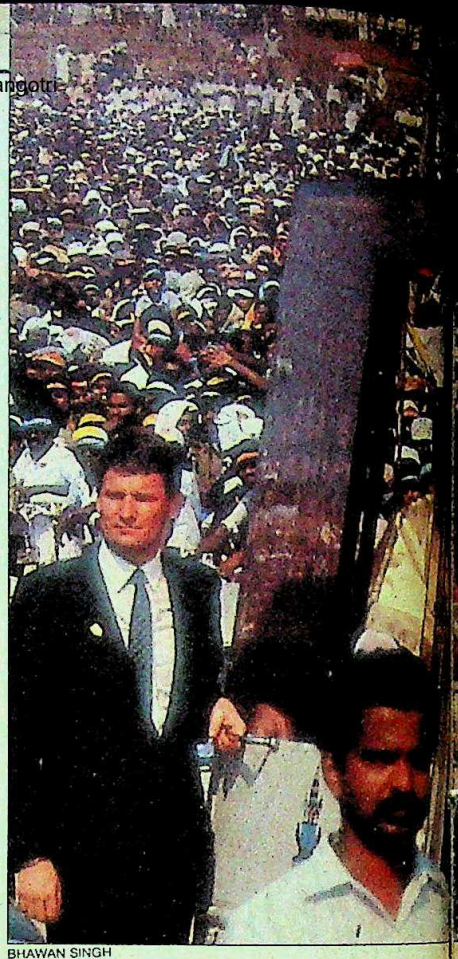

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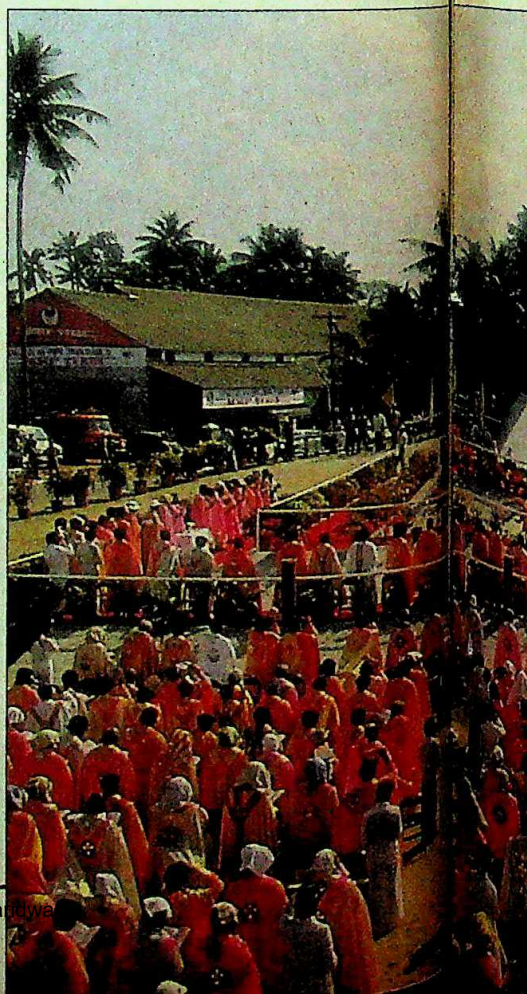

With Mother Teresa (top); in Nirmal Hriday (centre); and Missionaries of Charity (above); in the Popemobile (top right); and beatification in Kottayam

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BHAWAN SINGH

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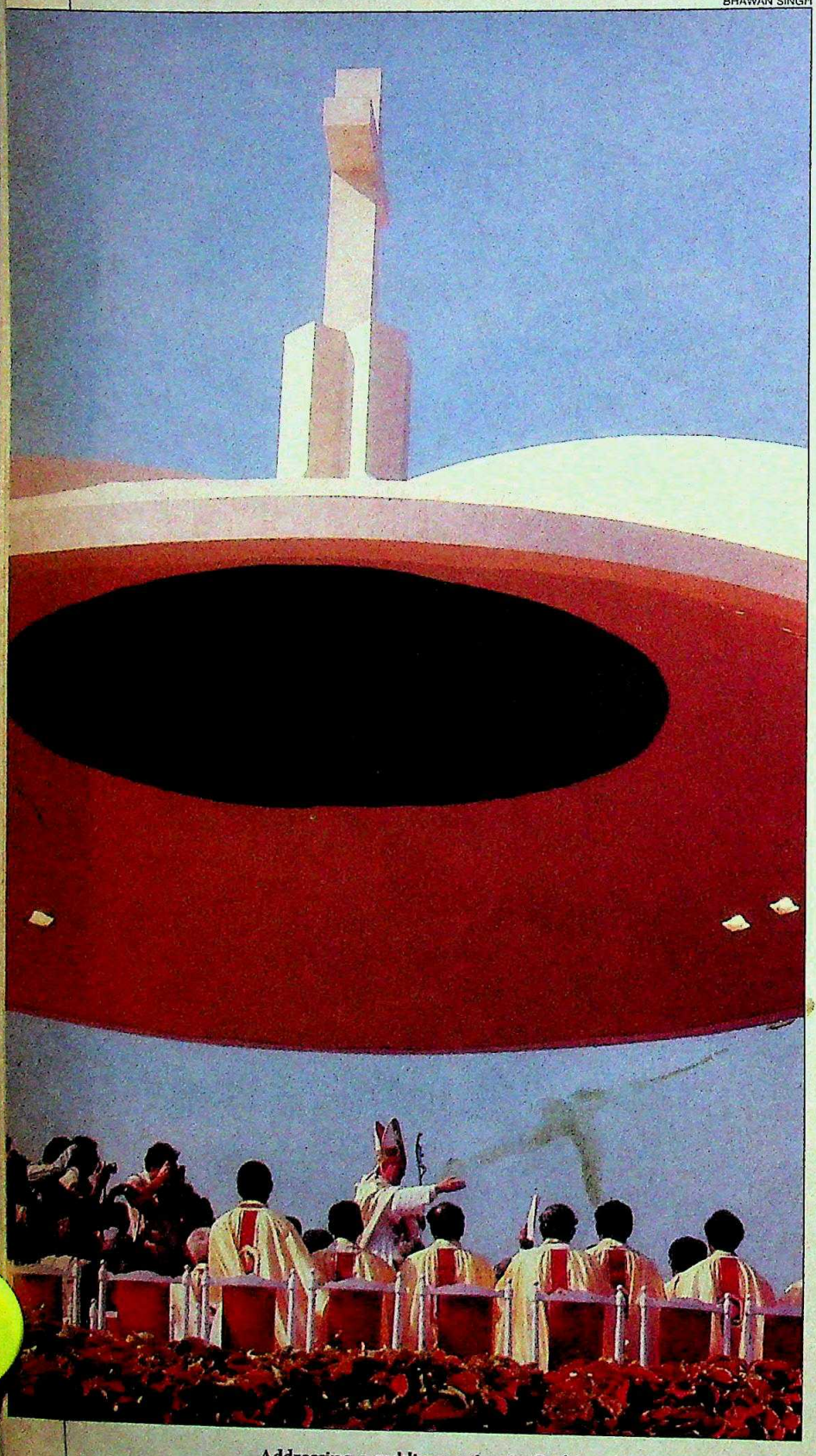
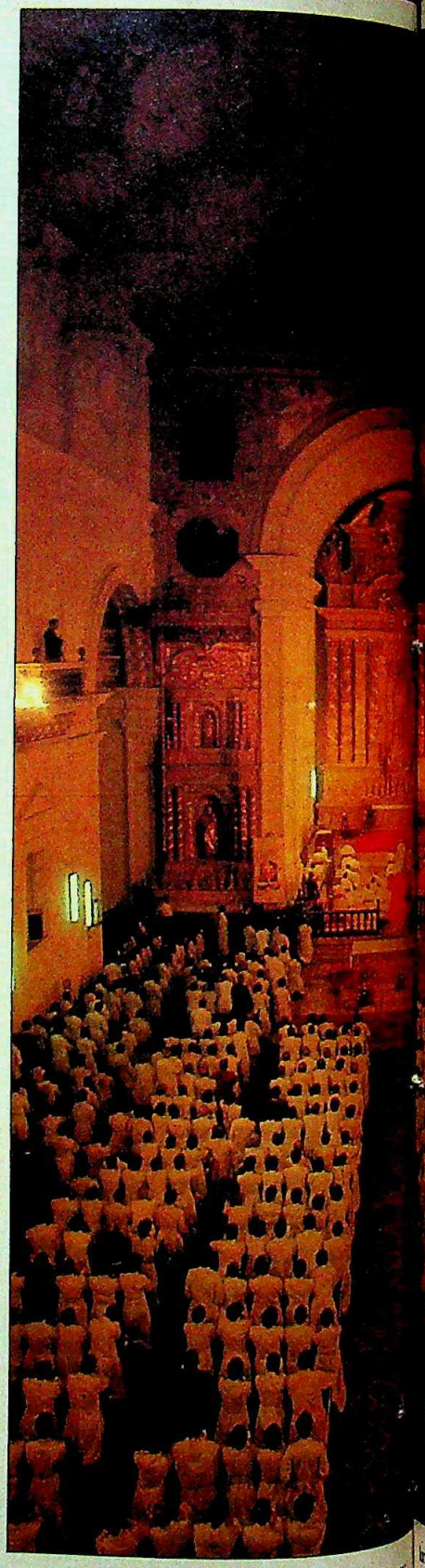


Addressing a public meeting in Cochin



Meeting the clergy

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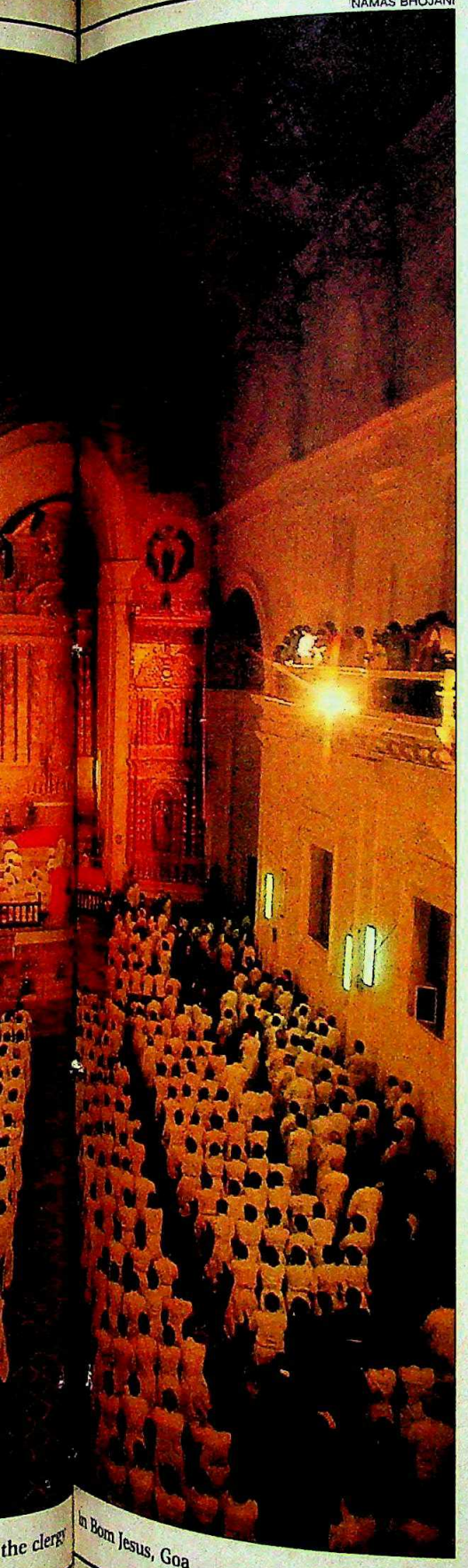

the clergy

in Born Jesus, Goa

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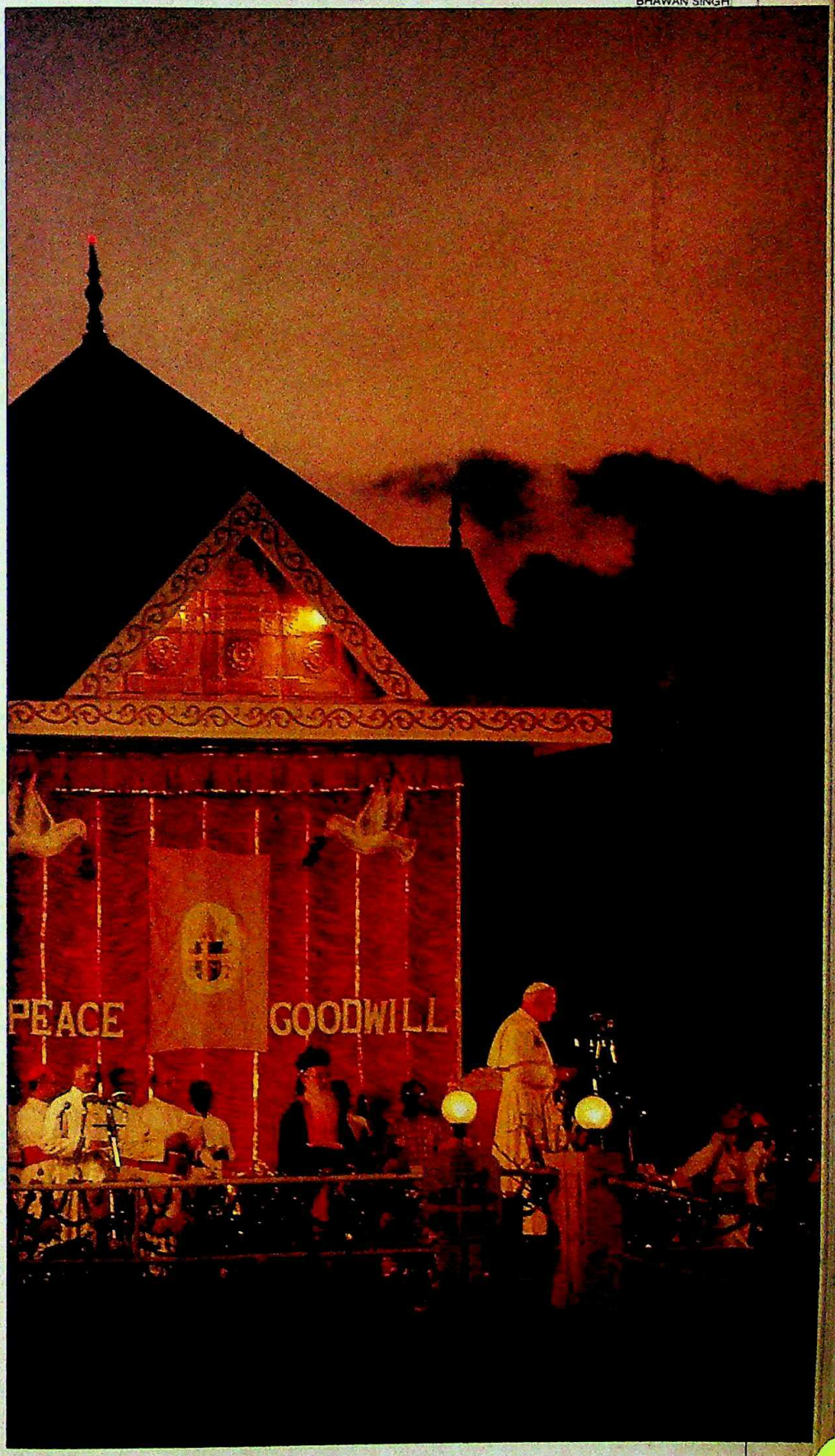

Celebrating mass in Trivandrum

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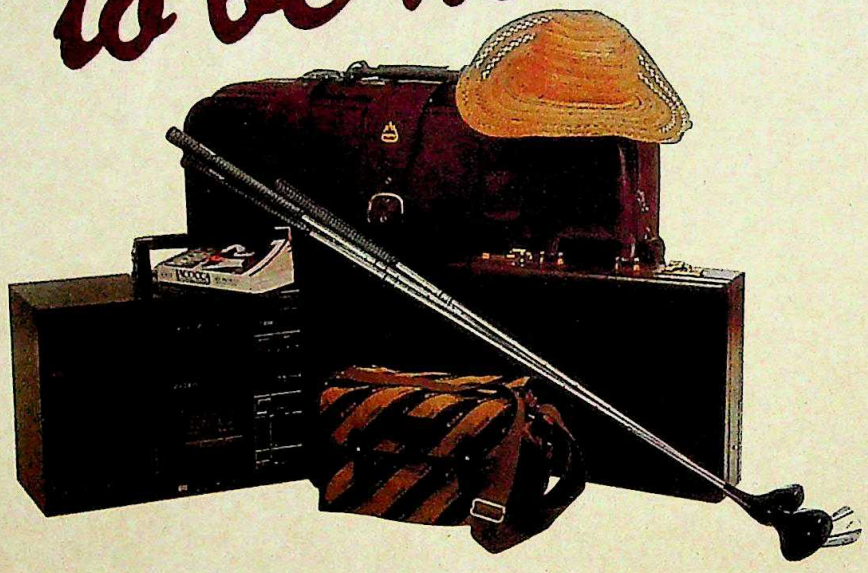
It's good to be home!



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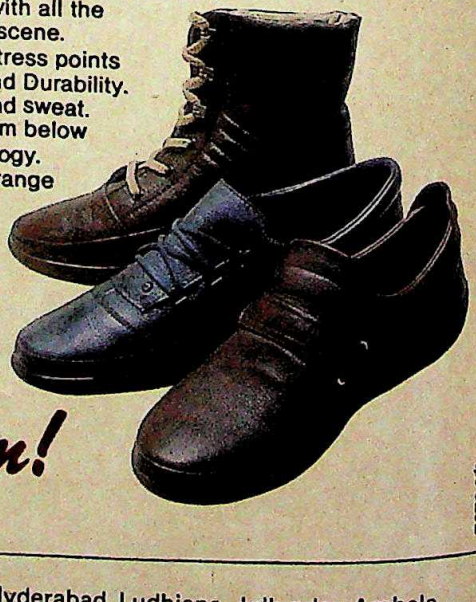

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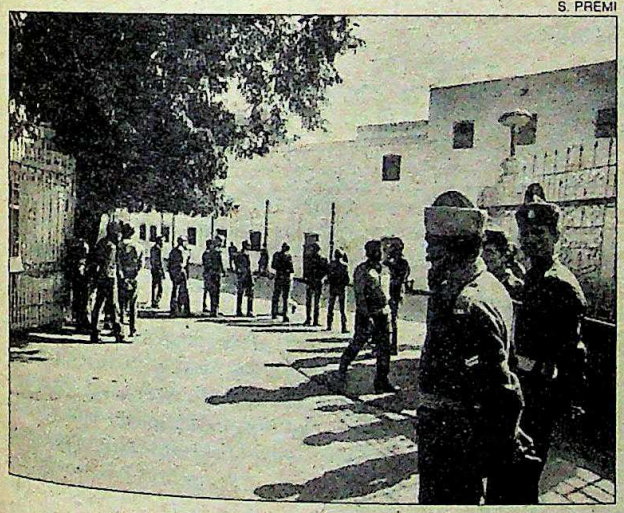
Aids to Scandal

DESPITE the media blitz long before his visit, the hottest news in Kerala last fortnight was not the Pope. Not the Rama Swarup spy scandal, either. And certainly not the sudden petroleum price hike and price cut. Guess what made the front page? AIDS—that's right, that ungodly scourge called Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Splashed across some feet of newsprint in the leading Malayalam daily *Mathrubhumi* was the woeful tale of what was touted as the first AIDS case in India—a Malayalee called George Varghese, 23, fresh from the Gulf and lying ill in Trivandrum Medical College. Varghese, the newspaper said, had lost all hope and was now contemplating suicide. Naturally, what followed was a babble of voices—shocked, scared and sniggering. But before the din could grow any louder, a rival newspaper came out with a contradiction, from the state's Medical Education Director C.V. Kora, no less, supported by expert diagnosis that it was not AIDS at all. Varghese is now planning to sue *Mathrubhumi*.

Grand Rehearsal

FOR FOUR days, the dazed citizens of Lucknow watched in awe and wonderment and the Uttar Pradesh police went through the most puzzling paces. For four days, 18 companies of the Provincial Armed Constabulary—each consisting of 135 men—flanked by all the station house officers of Lucknow city leading their own motley band of cops,

S. PREMI



Road from Raj Bhavan: security drill

paraded the length of the road from Raj Bhavan to Vidhan Bhavan last fortnight. A fleet of fire-engines stood at the ready near the Assembly as snaking ranks of silent home guards lined both sides of the barricaded road. And lurking stealthily around were the sinister figures of 500 CID sleuths who lent the scene an eerie overtone. The exercise, as disillusioned Lucknowites discovered, was a security rehearsal for Governor Mohammed Usman Arif. The opposition MLA's had threatened to gherao the governor on the opening day of the budget session on his way to the Assembly, in protest against his refusal to meet them in December last year. But alas, right on the eve of the planned gherao, the opposition leaders dropped in at Raj Bhavan and, over casual cups of *chai*, decided to drop the gherao plan. And the disappointed cops filed back to their barracks—with nary a *lathi* to wield nor a head to break.

Past and Present

THE KARNATAKA Assembly must be the only place where one hears the home minister waxing eloquent on horticulture and the law minister shouting himself hoarse on family welfare. The reason is not an all-sweeping interest in the general state of affairs. It is simply because the ministers are nowhere near the Vidhan Soudha when their own subjects are being discussed. So to make themselves heard in the Assembly, they have to make do with other subjects. This legislative absenteeism had grown so bad of late that Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde had to take note of it last fortnight, even as clouds hung over his own political future. Opening the budget session, a stern chief minister gave the truant MLA's the length of his tongue and told his ministers that they'd be better off spending more time in their offices than outside them. But Hegde could have bitten off his tongue as soon as he said that. For, soon after this, two BJP members rose in the legislative council to ask exactly how many trips Hegde himself had made to Delhi since he assumed office. "Forty-eight," replied a sheepish Hegde. Though he hastily tried to justify his jaunts, the point, alas, had been made.

Hegde: muster roll

Road to Posterity

THERE was a time, not too long ago, when neon signs flashed his name—all bathed in blue and tinsel and larger than life—on cinema halls all over Andhra Pradesh. Then he gave it all up and moved on to bigger, better things. Now, his name is splashed across regional and national dailies, government handouts and press releases and advertisements proclaiming the state's march to progress and development. But for Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, all this is not enough. The chief minister, like Oliver Twist, wants more. So when Hyderabad was busy electioneering for the 100-seat municipal corporation last fortnight, the chief minister issued an edict for renaming 20 roads in the city. And one of them—Road Number 1 in the swank Banjara Hills—was to be named after himself. The signs are to be repainted after the elections, for obvious reasons. But even then, people, being people, might still keep using the old name for Tarakarama Marg for quite some time. Old habits, after all, die hard. And who would know this better than the star-turned-chief minister himself?

Rama Rao: path-finder

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Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Baba Gurdev Singh with AISSF activists: the inheritors

PUNJAB EXTREMISTS

Calling the Shots

LESS than two years after the troops and tanks trudged out wearily after clearing the Golden Temple complex of its contentious armed occupants, the threat they had momentarily eliminated at such a terrible human and political cost is back in the hallowed precincts of the Sikhs' Vatican. The spectre of extremism stalks Punjab yet again, threatening to bring to nought the normalisation process the Rajiv-Longowal accord had initiated in July last year. Once again the Government watches the scene through the binoculars of the policemen perched atop the tall buildings around the Golden Temple complex as political and extreme moves are planned and executed without fear or interference.

The sudden rise of yet another extremist leadership within months of an accord and an election that was hailed as a massive rejection of violence has surprised most people. The new conglomerate of dogmatic followers of the Damdami Taksal, the seminary Bhindranwale headed, survivors of Operation Bluestar and the young storm-troopers of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) may not have inherited his popular appeal but the motivation is not lacking. To take stock of the situation Principal Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA, who frequently visited the Golden Temple during the Bhindranwale era and interviewed him and his lieutenants, toured the state again last fortnight. His report:

THE CONTRASTS are obvious and so are the similarities. Even for someone inured to walking past scores of gun-toting shadows in the 1983-84 Bhindranwale phase, it is hard to miss the total absence of firearms. Absent also is the striking visage—aquiline nose, and persistent, nonchalant smile that literally launched a thousand guns—of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the 36-year-old jathedar of Damdami Taksal who converted the Golden Temple complex into a kind of fortress that the army could overrun only with the help of tanks and howitzers. There are other tell-tale contrasts. There are no blue turbans, the ones that the Akalis traditionally wear in the temple complex any more. The old custodians of the Golden Temple complex are no longer around and the evidence of their ignominious retreat from their most significant bastion flutters humiliatingly atop the party's headquarters, in one corner of the row of buildings along the temple: a black banner put up right alongside the party's saffron flag by the young inheritors of the Bhindranwale mantle who occupy the complex now.

In more ways than one it is these young inheritors who provide a striking parallel with the past. There is Jathedar Gurdev Singh, the new, acting head priest of the Akal Takht, the highest seat of the Sikh religious and temporal power, considered a Bhindranwale look-alike. The resemblance does not stop at the facial features or height. He even has a similar gait and strides up and down the *parikrama* with a dozen followers straining to keep pace much in the way Bhindranwale did. He uses the same jargon and the litany of Sikh grievances that Bhindranwale did but speaks, more often than not, through an interpreter.

But at least in one sense Bhindranwale's current crop of followers does even better than his old storm-troopers. And that is in the art of propaganda which they have perfected into a science. The evidence of this strikes a visitor as soon as he reaches the front courtyard of where the

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Akal Takht building once stood. Right in front of the hollow that remains in place of that magnificent building are displayed large banners inviting pilgrims to see marks of "bullets fired by *narakdhari* (hell's angel) Barnala's drunken goondas". The pellet marks have been circled in deep blue and barely do the pilgrims finish seeing these when their attention is caught by the large, framed colour picture of the Akal Takht as it looked immediately after Operation Bluestar. "Is Kotha Sahib all right?" reads the large inscription over the picture, obviously referring with some sarcasm to the statement made on Doordarshan by Giani Kirpal Singh, the Akal Takht head priest. But in terms of propaganda value, the *piece de resistance* is yet to come.

On the edge of the compound sit a small group of Taksal followers surrounded by hundreds of curious onlookers. The objects of curiosity all lie there on a white sheet and horrified exclamations abound as the Taksal men recite a quick commentary. "This is the skull of a Sikh child killed by the army. These are the meat bones thrown by the troops into the Akal Takht," they say, holding up the bones to people, claiming that these were found in the Akal Takht debris. The commentary continues and includes more hair-raising items: pieces of earthen *chillums*, razor-blades which a Taksal man holds up on a string and soldiers' rusted medals, all ostensibly thrown by the troops sacrilegiously into the building. There is also a pair of baby's mittens.

The reaction to all this is instantaneous and intense. Women, in particular go away distraught and the youngsters clench their teeth in vengeful anger, their minds already conditioned by the wide array of picture-postcards depicting gory scenes of the battle during Operation Bluestar and the portraits of Bhindranwale, Amrik Singh and the new heroes, Beant Singh and Satwant Singh. These youngsters form the fodder that keeps extremism going. And the Akal Takht compound has now become the new nursery for their initiation into the murky world. These new recruits then join hands with the basic core of the new extremist groups, the youths who have been arrested earlier but released for want of evidence.

THERE is no going back for them because extremism in Punjab is a life-long trap. Once a young man comes on the list of men wanted by the police he has no choice but to continue on the same violent path, a predicament exemplified by many currently seen in the Golden Temple. Some of them, who talk candidly about themselves, include:

► Mahesh Inder Singh, a 26-year-old from Gulabgarh village in district Bhatinda. He was arrested in the case of Kot Shamir killings and then let off on bail. But soon enough, the police were looking for him in connection with a bank dacoity in Bhuchho Mandi. "My parents have had to disown me under police pressure but then we people always make sacrifices," he says adding, righteously, "If I go out the police will arrest and torture me and put false cases against me. So why not put on the *kesari* (saffron) headgear and prepare for sacrifice anyway."

► Amarjeet Singh, who was arrested along with Mahesh Inder Singh and now stays in the Golden Temple complex. "Who ever gets rehabilitated?" he asks, alleging that on his release he was put under intense pressure to give it in writing that not only would he support the Barnala Government, he would also not be particularly fanatical in his loyalty to the Sikh faith. "We'd much rather be here than sign all that," he says angrily.

► Kuldip Singh Kahlon, the finance secretary of the AISSF. The former student of Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jalandhar has, under his belt a master's degree in mathematics with a university gold medal to boot. He says he was just another M. Phil. student in the mathematics department of Panjab University at Chandigarh when the police "tried to implicate me" in the Chhina bus murder case. "They let me off after beating me up and I came here instead of being just an ordinary member of the AISSF," he says.

Taksal follower describing objects recovered from Takht rubble: intense reaction

Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Besides them, there are others who do not tally with the stereotype though they happen to occupy key positions in the current hierarchy. Harinder Singh Kahlon, the convenor of the AISSF and widely regarded as the most powerful man inside the temple is one such. His name was never significant in the Bhindranwale phase but today he calls the shots as if his position was pre-ordained. A student of Lyallpur Khalsa College, he has had a long academic career and a string of degrees including a bachelor's each in science and law and teaching, and a master's each in arts and education. He was a schoolteacher when his name suddenly appeared as an AISSF leader, much to the surprise of the intelligence agencies.

Much more than him, however, the name that surprises observers the most is that of Mohkam Singh, the articulate official spokesman of Damdami Taksal who dominates the entire group and is perhaps the busiest man in the complex today, leading the *kar seva* effort.

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organising logistics and dealing with Indian and foreign journalists who stream into the temple. Most newsmen who saw Bhindranwale frequently do not remember having ever noticed him on Bhindranwale's last abode.

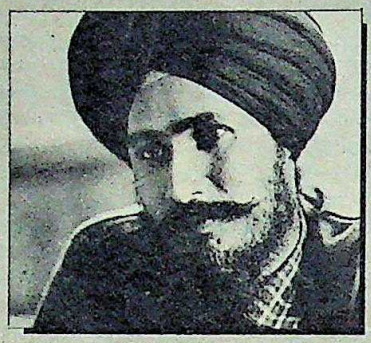
Even intelligence sources say they had never taken notice of him during that tumultuous phase. But today he hardly sounds like someone suddenly thrown into the thick of it all. Says he, orchestrating the Taksal's claim over the *seva*: "Traditionally, since *shaheed* Baba Deep Singh freed the Golden Temple from the blasphemous Turks, the Taksal has acted to maintain the sanctity of Sikh shrines according to the needs of the hour." He firmly denies any involvement in extremist activity and even shuns the Khalistan talk that many of the youngsters are less bashful about. "We want the fulfilment of the promise made to us at the time of Independence that the Sikhs will be given a region within India where they will enjoy the glow of freedom. If the Kashmiris can be given Article 370 we can also be given something to our satisfaction," he argues.

Irrespective of the absence of a Bhindranwale the group that controls the Golden Temple complex now presents a formidable challenge for the Government. Barnala has no choice but to lock horns with them and he also realises that they will out-talk him religiously. No matter how disparate it is, the group has been able to make the complex completely out of bounds for the Akali Dal which is utterly confused and demoralised.

As a matter of fact whether it is the unrelenting wave of murders or bank dacoities, the scenario is frighteningly similar to the frenetic first half of 1984. The insecurity and fear of the Bhindranwale era is back at the level of both the Government and the people. This is the examination time for the students and in any other normal year they would have been busy poring over books and notes. But it is not a normal year any more and is reminiscent of the winter of 1983-84 when the extremists brought the whole education system to a standstill. The examinations have not been put off this year but, for several weeks now, educational institutions have functioned fitfully. "At a time when our boys should have been worrying about examinations they are busy shouting slogans and, in many cases, dodging the police," says Tarsem Singh, a landlord from Dharowali, a prosperous and politically conscious village near Amritsar. "Our youth is totally confused," he says. "They think people like us are weak and ineffective and their pride is hurt easily particularly when the police or paramilitary forces question them or search them repeatedly on their way to the Golden Temple. They hate us because we seem to have become immune to these little bits of humiliation."

A painful blast of that ire was felt last fortnight by Nirmal Singh Kahlon, the deputy speaker and a legislator from Fatehgarh Churian constituency, just 20 km from Amritsar. On the evening of February 4, a bunch of youngsters surrounded his house and began to fire at it from three directions with no apparent intention to cause any harm to his aging mother who was then the only one present in the house. But the chilly, mafia-like message was not lost on Kahlon, who wistfully surveys the damage now: over a dozen bullet holes in the strong steel gate, shattered window-panes and the eerie sight of a bullet-hole in the wall right on top of his bed-stead. "They shouted filthy abuses and Khalistan slogans. But basically, all they wanted to tell me was: do not do anything against us; do not do anything for peace," he says and rues the increasing alienation of the Sikh youth from the mainstream of national life as well as the Akali politics. "The youth says what has the Akali Government given them when the Centre did not even keep to the promise on Chandigarh," he says and adds: "We have a long battle ahead of us." But last fortnight, as they went through the familiar motions of thrust and parry, the Akali politicians hardly appeared to be winning that battle.

KULDEEP SINGH KAHLON
25 years
Gurdaspur district
finance secretary of the AISSF



"They let me off after beating me up and I came here instead of being just an ordinary member of the AISSF."

AMARJEET SINGH
25 years
Bhatinda district

"The Barnala Government rehabilitates only those who promise to support it. We would much rather be here than sign all that."

MAHESH INDER SINGH
26 years
Bhatinda district

"If I go out the police will arrest and torture me. So why not put on the *kesari* (saffron) headgear and prepare for sacrifice."

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Nor were the extremists, fortunately. While politically they have succeeded in pushing the Akalis to relative irrelevance the extremists were also causing some long-term damage to their own cause by losing out on a bit of the popular sympathy by taking the killings too far, scaring and upsetting even the Sikh population making many Sikhs realise increasingly that the threat had to be fought from within. "It is like this," explains Onkar Singh with a fierce vengeance. "A mad dog comes to your street and bites one person and everyone runs away. Then he bites another and yet another. At one point everyone realises that the threat is there to stay and people collect with *lathis* and beat it to death. That is what will happen to these damn extremists now."

HE HAS an extremely genuine justification for his bitterness. The general secretary of the SGPC and one of the main pillars of the Akali Dal in the border belt along Dera Baba Nanak, Mattenangal is still mourning the death of his third son, Satinderpal Singh, who fell to an extremist's Sten gun burst on February 7. "They knocked at my door and asked for my elder son who wasn't there. So the younger one, this 16-year-old gursikh went forward to open the door and they fired straight into his face," Mattenangal describes the incident, pointing at the big blotches of blood high up on the wall where the Sten gun burst flung fragments of his son's head. "They are doing it to us because they are afraid we will be able to bring lasting peace to the state," he says and displays determination which many other recent victims of extremism show in some measure. He says: "The time has now come for us all to ready the ranks and fight these people who are masquerading as Sikhs and destroying the community. Let me tell you, if they think they can get people to follow them out of fear they are heading for disappointment."

Members of his family also point out the other serious mistake the extremists made. "They are now doing things that never happened in Bhindranwale's times," said a family member. "In those days, extremists never fired at women, barring Indira Gandhi's case. But now they fired at Satinderpal's nine-year-old sister Sarbjit, ransacked the house and shouted the filthiest Punjabi abuses while hundreds of villagers watched. Is that how *gursikhs* behave?" The new breed of extremists do not have the religious aura that Bhindranwale's bands had somehow acquired.

The same desperate haste in rushing off to kill somebody, without weighing the long-term political consequences has been evident elsewhere as well. For example, two extremists riding a scooter waylaid Jatindar Pal Singh Ghuman, a leader of the AISSF faction loyal to the Akali Dal, in his village near the textile township of Dhariwal, and shot him in daylight in the presence of scores of people. Ghuman, intelligence men point out, was no ordinary quarry. The crime that brought him the summary death sentence was breaking away from extremists with whom he had operated for over two years. Says an intelligence official: "He was himself such a bad victim of police torture he could barely walk straight. Two of his brothers are among the 370-odd men arrested from the complex during Operation Bluestar who are still in Jodhpur jail and his assassination really smacks of internecine bloodshed in the extremist ranks. It will make many Sikhs change their opinion of the current crop of extremists."

"If they think they can make people follow them out of fear they are mistaken."

ONKAR SINGH MATTENANGAL
SGPC general secretary, whose son was killed by extremists

Not surprisingly, the prospect worries even the new custodians of the Golden Temple who squarely blame the "Government" for both these murders. "We have no enmity with Mattenangal or Ghuman. Two of Ghuman's brothers are in Jodhpur jail and they are good Sikhs. The Government has got him assassinated to give us a bad name," says Jathedar Gurdev Singh, the officiating head priest of the Akal Takht and a member of the Damdami Taksal. But why would the Akalis go to the extent of killing the young son of one of their own key leaders as part of the alleged charade? He has a ready answer to even that: "What do they think of sacrificing just one life to achieve their political objectives?"

The latest spate of killings has mostly consumed the leaders of the Akali Dal and its supporters and has, to that extent, served to drive home the lesson that it does not pay to oppose the extremist leadership politically or administratively. But from a long-term point of view it can also be counter-productive as already shown by the changing popular perceptions towards extremists. It has also harmed the extremists' own cause in the sense that it has backed the argument in the Union Home Ministry in favour of going slow over the question of the release of alleged Sikh extremists detained in the Jodhpur jail and elsewhere.

Yet the killings go on relentlessly making many intelligence officials feel that the leadership within the Golden Temple complex does not any longer have a firm control over the killer squads. "Most of them operate on their own now, in small bands, making our jobs even more difficult," says an official. In the Bhindranwale phase at least the securitymen were aware of the central authority from where it all originated and thus, ultimately, Operation Bluestar was able to neutralise much of that threat. But this has changed now. Said an official: "It is virtually impossible to keep tabs on all the small groups. You think you've begun to get information on one and suddenly a new one comes up."

This is a potentially more dangerous situation than even 1984. There was at least a face then in the nucleus of it all. More important, Bhindranwale had consciously built up an image and thus, in those days, it was possible to trace a firm trend in extremist activity. It is no longer so and thus makes for a greater element of surprise in extremist activity, a prospect that will, in the months to come increasingly bother the Centre and the Akali state Government which, after virtually losing the battle to the extremist lung-power and muscle-power would now be fighting the final battle against the muzzle-power.

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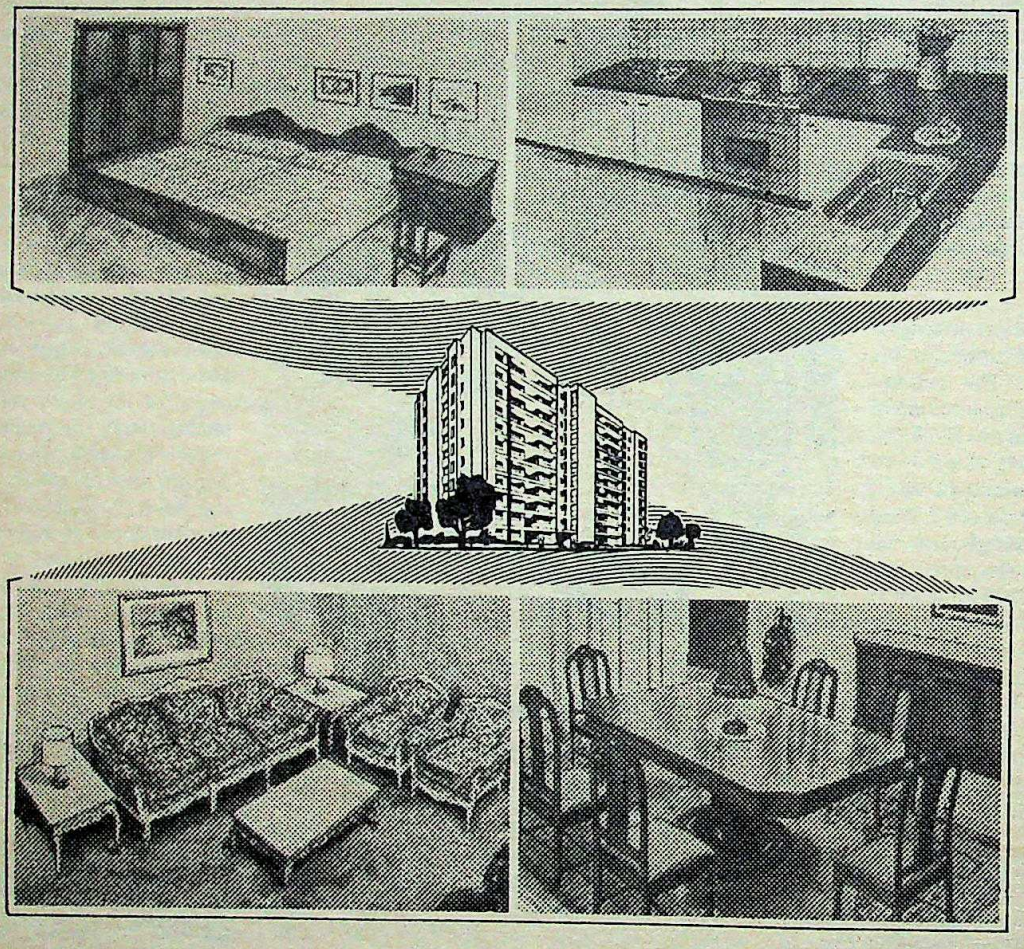

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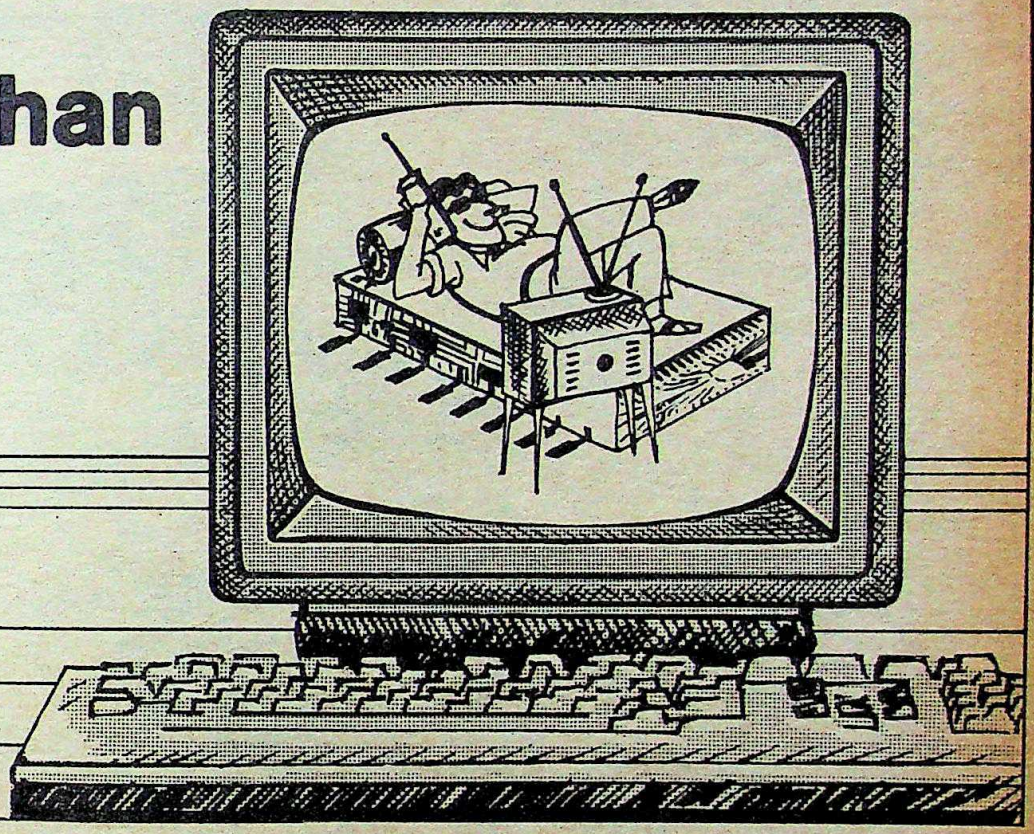

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UNITED KINGDOM

Growing Anger

LIKE AN overheated market-place, weekdays in Southall hum with frenetic activity. Throngs of people swarm in and out of shops selling condiments and spices, poultry and meat, sarees and Hindi film videos. But last Wednesday, an eerie shroud of silence prevailed over Southall. Except in front of the off-licence liquor shop, where a vast sea of mourners—almost 2,000—waited silently to pay their last respects to assassinated Sikh moderate leader Tarsem Singh Toor. The periphery of Southall and its environs—all the way to Hanworth crematorium in Hounslow 3 km away—were ringed by hundreds of policemen.

Besides the Indian High Commissioner Dr P.C. Alexander and the Deputy High Commissioner R.C. Arora, the callers at the Hanworth crematorium included the controversial Home Office Minister David Waddington, the Labour MP for Ealing-Southall, Sydney Bidwell, Max Madden from Bradford and Toor's friends and colleagues.

The media attention and the flood of criticism against the British Government and Scotland Yard for not being able to either protect the Indian community or apprehend the assassins of Toor forced the British Government to issue its toughest warning yet. Speaking on TV, David Waddington—whose occasional uncordial pronouncements have rankled race relations lobbies—emphatically stated: "We want to reassure people no effort is being spared to catch the perpetrators of this outrage. We cannot allow a spilling over into our streets of violence between Sikh factions." Twenty-four hours later Scotland Yard made a terse announcement stating that "two Asians" were being questioned in South London in connection with Toor's murder and police were seeking a third suspected of being the "hitman". After having made an initial statement that a white gunman had shot Toor, Scotland Yard later amended it saying it could have been a "very fair Indian". However, Toor's shop assistant, Ranjit Singh, could play a key role should there be an identification line-up of suspects.

In the meanwhile, a large section of the Indian community seem to be besieged by both mounting anger and a gnawing fear at the spate of shootings. Scotland Yard spokesmen have blandly complained of "lack of cooperation from the Sikhs" in their investigations. J.S. Randhawa, an elderly sweet-shop owner said: "After all we are not the white constituency. We are neither the vote bank nor do we have the political clout." Randhawa was referring to the speed with which other crimes appear to get solved by Scotland Yard but in cases of attacks on Sikh moderates, even though there is a well-known extremist faction operating in the UK who publicly swear to be the moderates implacable foes, breakthroughs are rarely made.

Photographs by MADAN ARORA

Crowds at Hanworth crematorium (above); and Toor's wife: grim portents

Adding to the general dread, there have been other more ominous developments. Following Toor's killing, *The Daily Mail* published a letter from a hitherto unheard of organisation, The Sikh Liberation Front, which threatened to assassinate a senior Indian diplomat in the UK. The front had apparently other intentions too of assassinating members of the Indian Cabinet, the President and prime minister. The letter drafted in a bizarre style, displayed a macabre sense of humour. It stated that having assassinated Mrs Gandhi, "daughter of the infamous Brahmin, Pandit Nehru, we now have grandiose plans". Then it added with a touch of spooky reassurance: "The destruction of an Air-India plane is nothing compared to what we have in mind." Besides marking out the nation's leaders as targets, the letter threatened to kill "35 spindly-legged Hindu politicians" and added, almost deferentially, "after that a nice, sophisticated bomb will finish Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the prime minister".

Under pressure from the high commissioner, many moderate Sikh leaders have been offered police protection. If past experiences are anything to go by, this will not exactly make their opponents quake in their boots. Moderates provide several examples of extremists feeling "safe" in Britain. The most glaring one is of Jaswant Singh Bharj (alias Thekedar), erstwhile leader of the outlawed Dal Khalsa and wanted in India for a variety of charges. Bharj who fled India in 1982 after the Government offered a huge reward for his capture, sought political asylum in Britain and soon gave himself the colourful title of "defence minister of Khalistan". Adding salt to the wounds, Bharj was given a council house in Fleming Road. The decision led to a fierce row. With typical British understatement, Dormers Wells Labour Councillor Fred Hopkins, termed the decision: "A bit frightening."

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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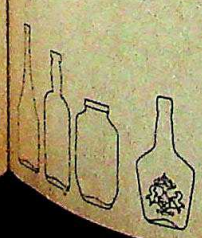

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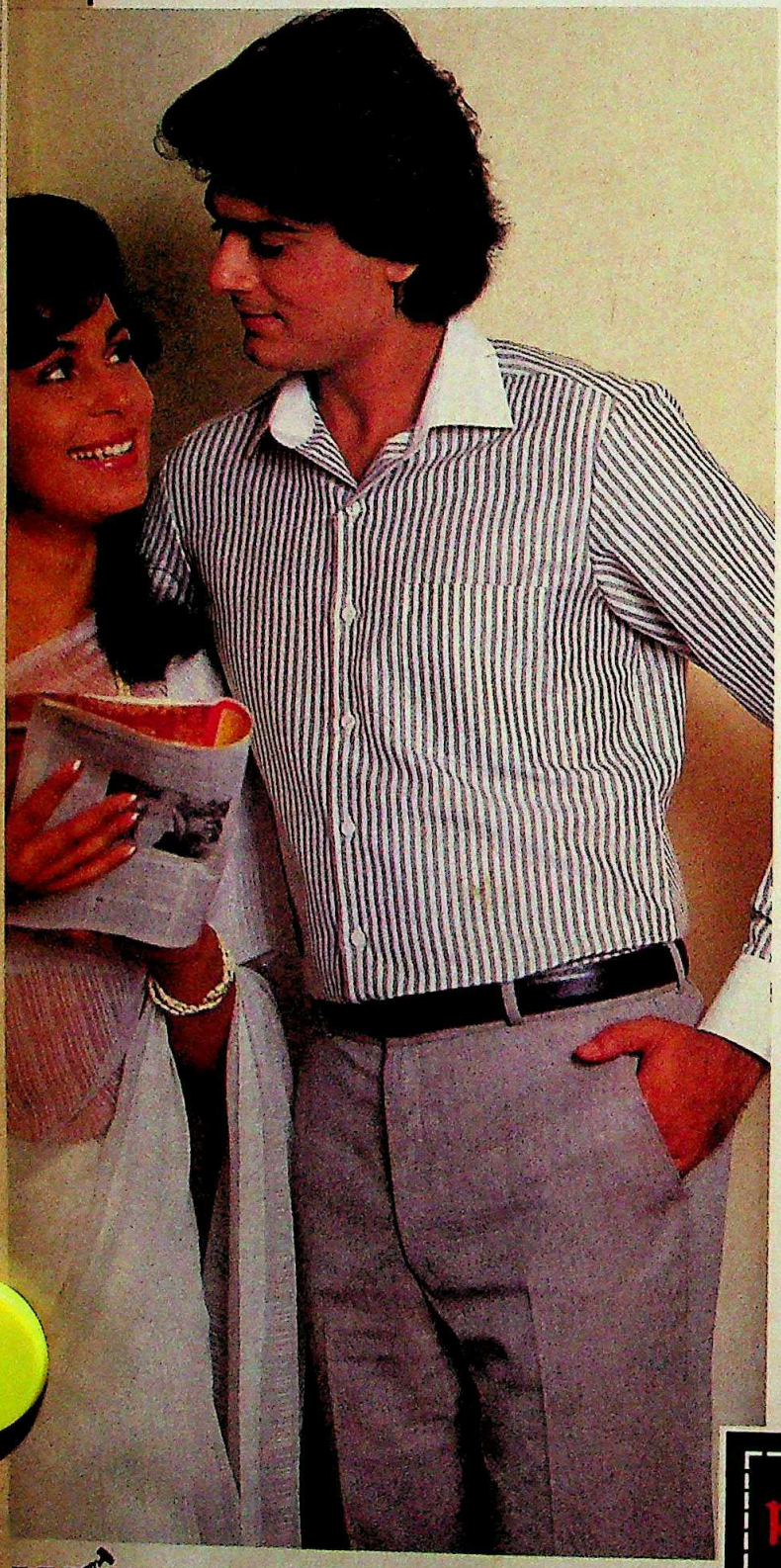

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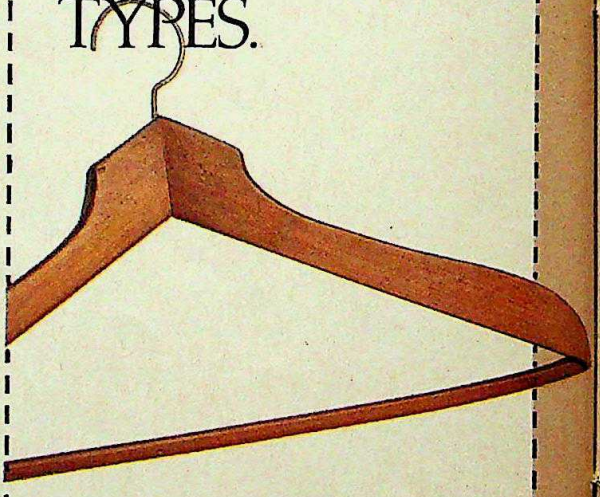

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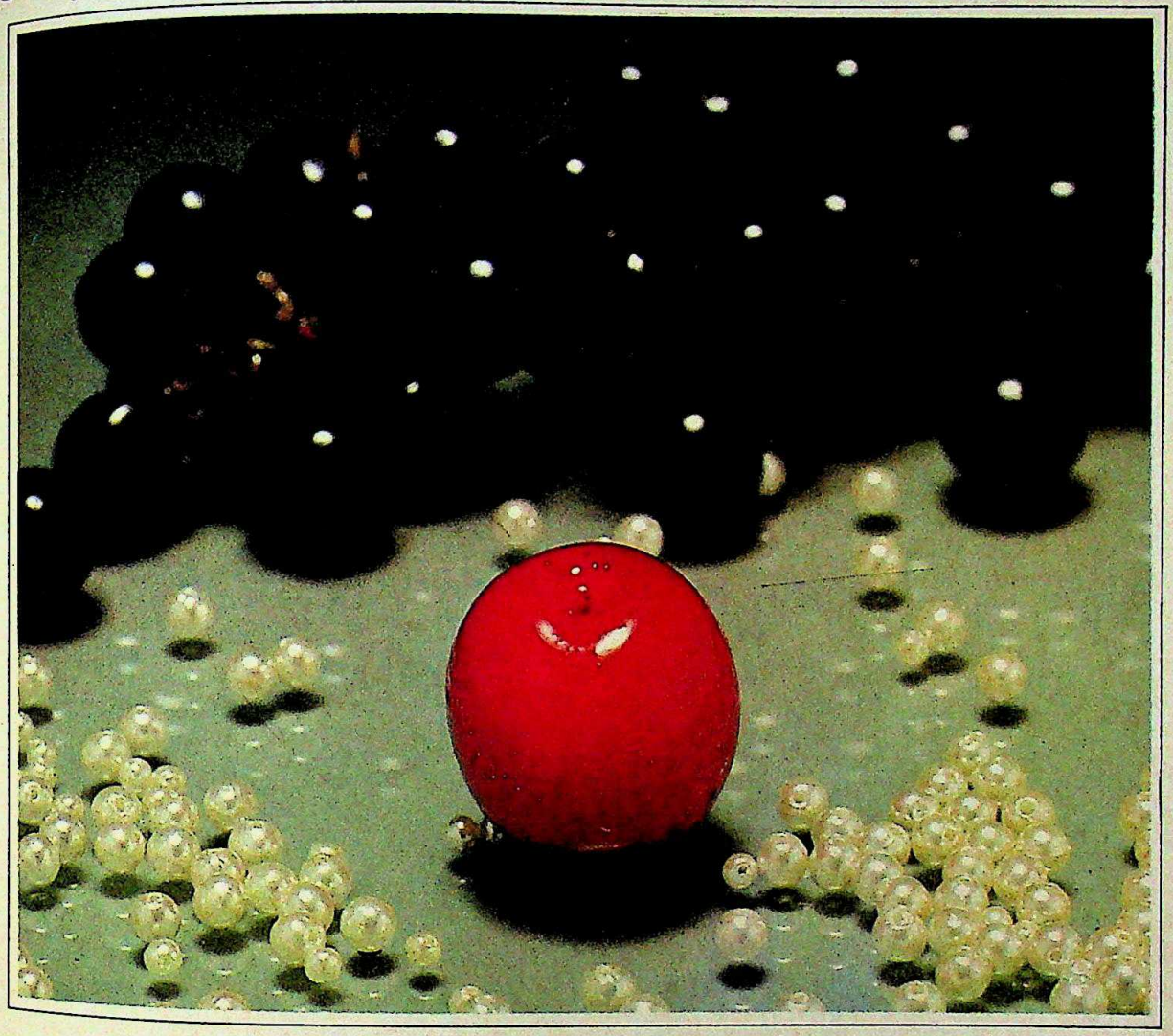

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HONG KONG INDIANS

In the Cold

MONEY doesn't buy security after all, as 6,000 Indians in Hong Kong are discovering belatedly. Come 1997, all of them face the prospect of becoming stateless citizens; and the fact that most of them are barons and tycoons of real estate, financing, manufacturing, hoteliering and trading doesn't seem to help any. Eleven years from now, they may have nowhere to go, no place to call home.

Officially, they have the status today of British Nationals Overseas (BNO). But that means less than it sounds, for it gives them no right to settle in Britain. They have been politely but firmly told by the representatives of China that "you must forge your links with Britain since you have always held British passports". And for its part, the Thatcher Government in London has said: "We cannot help. Any decision to grant you the right of abode would lead to a flood of claims by the Chinese in Hong Kong."

While roughly 4,000 of these BNO's are Sindhis, they also include 500 Parsis and an equal number of Sikhs, besides Gujaratis, south Indians and Dawoodi Bohras. The community is dominated by such internationally credit-worthy names of the business fraternity as Harilela, Murjani, Ratanji and Kishanchand Chellaram among others. If further proof of their wealth was needed, a tally of Hong Kong's 668 Rolls Royces would show a majority of the owners from amongst the 6,000.

It was to persuade a seemingly unflinching British Government that two of the most influential Indians from Hong Kong, representing the Council of Hong Kong Indian Associations—property magnate Lachman Narain and association vice-president K.Sital— arrived in London last month to lobby for support amongst sympathetic members of Parliament and influential public figures before the House of Commons debate on the subject. Said Narain: "We are the orphans of the Sino-British agreement," Narain told INDIA TODAY. "Any form of nationality which has such serious shortcomings would leave its holder in a position of great disadvantage. The BNO status carries no notion of citizenship and is a little better than a travel document facility."

Asked whether any representations were made to the Indian Government, the suave Narain emphasised that most of these 6,000 Indians were highly "anglicised" and were used to a way of life which was alien to India. Both made it clear that the ethnic Indians came to Hong Kong "because" it was a part of the British Empire. Even those who migrated from India after Independence in 1947 renounced Indian citizenship in the expectation that they would spend the rest of their lives under British rule. Said Narain: "We severed our ties with India when we swore allegiance to the Crown." Added Sital, who came after 1947: "India has no special obligation toward us."

Narain pointed out that "we are a victim of circumstances and like everybody else, we need to have a sense of belonging. Many of us may never come to Britain since our home and our work is in Hong Kong. What we need is an insurance and the right of abode in this country."

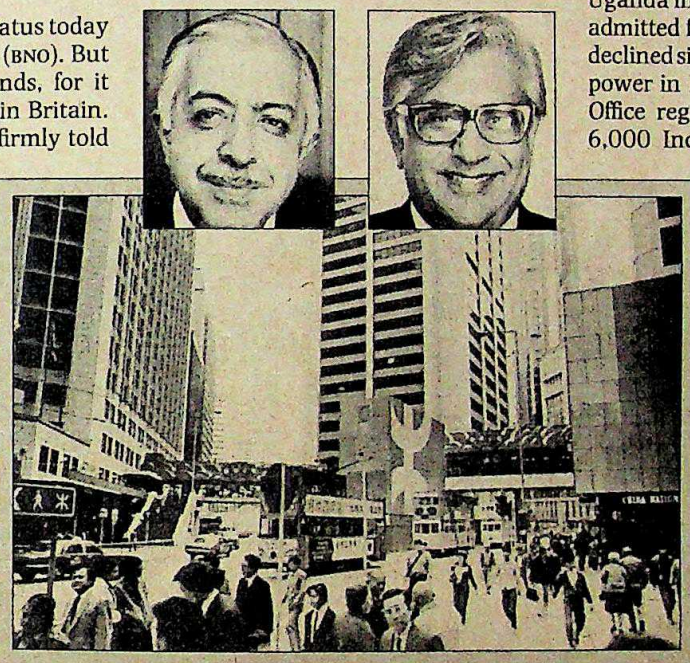
Narain and Sital lobbied across a wide range of the British political spectrum including Labour, SDP and Conservative MP's and some influential UK Indians. Perceptive observers of immigration issues feel that the main reason for the British Government's refusal to grant full citizenship appears to be the memory of the influx of Asians from Uganda in 1972—the number of Asians admitted for settlement into Britain has declined since the Conservatives came to power in 1979, a fact which the Home Office regards with gleeful pride. The 6,000 Indians, despite their financial clout, custom-built Rolls Royces and Eton- and Balliol-educated sons, might simply be considered the wrong colour.

The Commons debate got unexpected support from Hong Kong's powerful Legislative Council. Unofficial member Lydia Dunn said she and her colleagues were "profoundly disappointed at the British Government's attitude because it had failed to discharge its moral responsibility." And the pro-Beijing daily *Wen Wei Pao* commented that in dealing with the Indians "one cannot cut adrift history, one should not depart from reality. These people have always held British passports."

The delegates have returned without any firm commitment from the British Government. As 1997 looms large, they have more than their future with Britain to consider. For they must also contemplate their co-existence with China and ponder whether China would meddle with Hong Kong's thriving but complex capitalist chemistry. As a group which accounts for 10 to 15 per cent of the world's third largest financial centre's external trade, the financial health of the island colony is of paramount importance to them. But for the moment the odds seem to be stacked against the 6,000.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

Narain (right) and Sital; and a view of downtown Hong Kong



Come 1997, 6,000 Indians face the prospect of becoming stateless citizens; and the fact that most of them are business tycoons doesn't seem to help.

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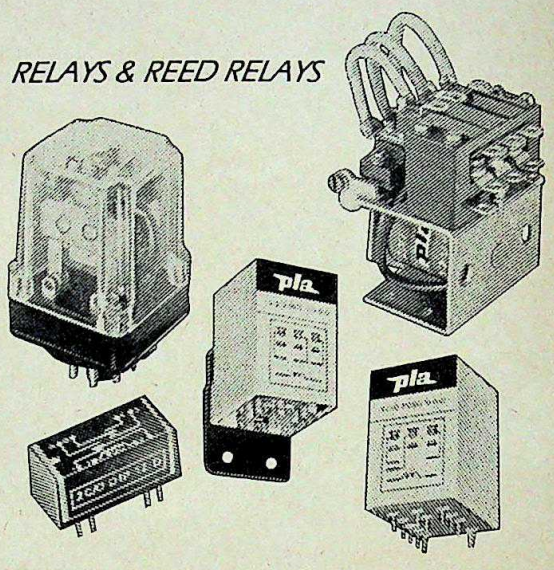

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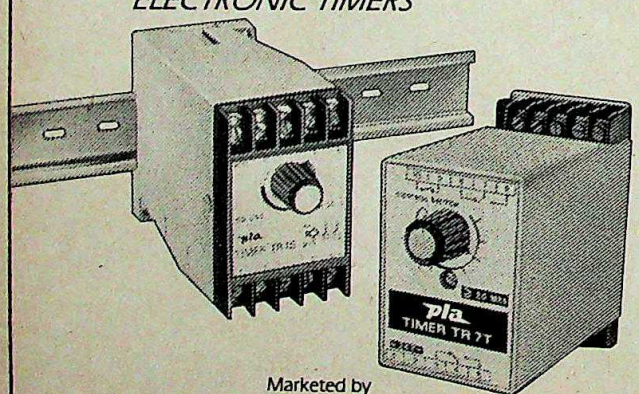

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MUGHAL MINIATURES

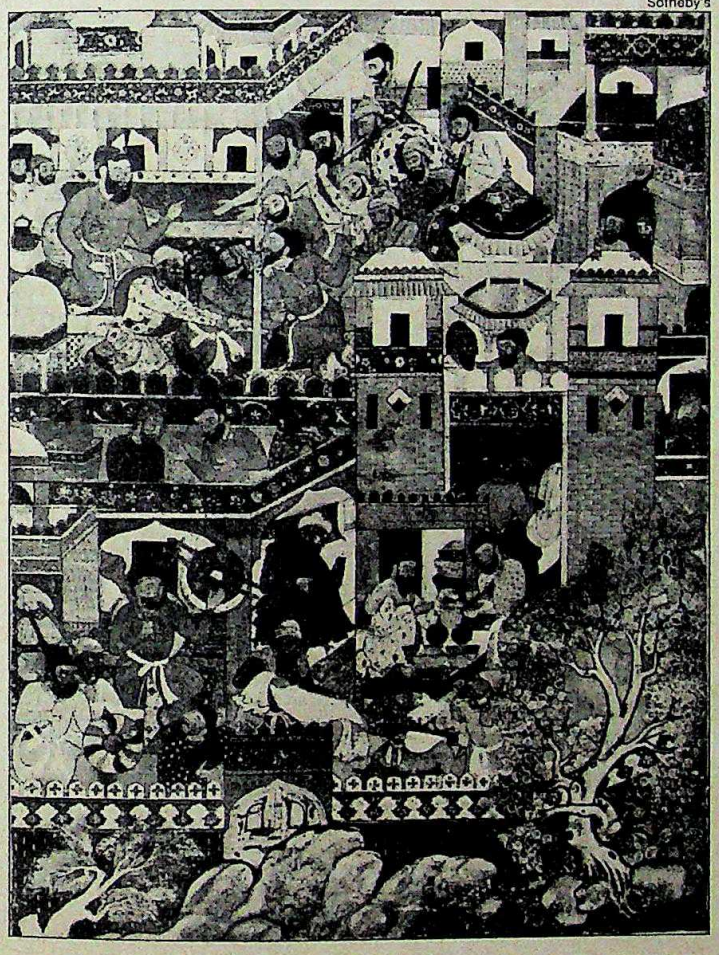
Priceless Sale

THEY are miniatures, but their prices aren't. Shock waves rippled through the international art markets recently when the bidding for just one page of the 1,400-page, 16th century *Hamzanama*, or *Daastan-i-Amir Hamza* (the saga of Hamza, uncle of Prophet Mohammed and a figure of popular legend), soared at Sotheby's in London to £148,000 (Rs 25 lakh) before the fall of the hammer. The high-priced page, captioned "Amir Hamza burning the armament chest of Zardust (Zoroaster) and the breaking of the urn", was acquired by a private collector in a closed auction, discreetly leaving no record of the collector's identity. But speculation has centred on the American oil billionaire, Paul Getty.

All Mughal miniatures are collectors' dreams, specially because of their rarity and the extreme reluctance of their owners to part with them. But *Hamzanama* is the foundation stone of Mughal painting and the most important of all Akbar-period manuscripts. The work, completed between 1562 and 1577, reportedly ran to 14 volumes, each having a hundred large illustrations on cloth of 67 cm × 51 cm. Periodically decimated by invasion and plunder, and ravaged above everything else by time, only about 150 pages of the illustrated chronicle can now be traced to the various museums and private collections, their prices rising over the years.

In Britain there have been just four known instances of *Hamzanama* folio auctions—all four at Sotheby's during the last decade, and providing a striking illustration of their soaring value. The first was more than a decade ago in April 1975, with the successful bidder being dealer H.P. Kraus for £ 12,000 (Rs 2 lakh). This page later resurfaced at a Christie's auction. In July 1978, two more *Hamzanama* pages were auctioned by Sotheby's. Amazingly, the two pages were spotted by a dealer at a house in the seaside resort of Torquay in south-west England, and were being used as fire-screens. One of the pages, the gorier one showing Hamza cutting off the arms of a Byzantine princess, fetched £32,000 (Rs 5.4 lakh) whilst the other one, showing Hamza with a Kalud king, got 26,000 pounds (Rs 4.4 lakh). Both were bought by the Felton Bequest Trust of Melbourne, Australia. But it was last year that collectors who had gathered at Sotheby's were astonished when one

Sotheby's



Miniature of Hamza with Kalud king

Hamza piece set a world record for an Indian miniature. As Margaret Erskine of Sotheby's told INDIA TODAY: "The price more or less reflected the true value of the Hamza pages. Collectors seem more aware when they evaluate a Hamza page that they are museum masterpieces."

Akbar's painting ateliers were directed by two of his father Humayun's Safavid artists, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd as-Samad to complete the *Hamzanama* pages. The boy-emperor, who was only 20 when the work was commissioned, had from his childhood been fascinated by the tales of Hamza and their undercurrent of absurdity despite obvious parental discouragement. Babur, his grandfather, had observed in his memoirs about the Hamza tales that they are "one long far-fetched lie, opposed to sense and nature". But Akbar's bemused biographers like Abu'l Fazl and Bada'oni testify to the lad's obsession with the most Peter Pan-like character of the Islamic pantheon, resulting in 15 years of effort at the *kutubkhana-i-aali* (royal bureau of books) involving hundreds of artists, mostly Hindus.

Nobody can tell what happened to the bulk of the *Hamzanama* pages, or exactly how many of them were taken away as booty by subsequent invaders like Nadir Shah of Persia. The fate surrounding the more than 1,200 lost pages of *Hamzanama* is still a subject of irresistible and fascinating appeal for mystery solvers. Even in the category of the existing 150 pages, there is surprisingly no comprehensive official catalogue to be found anywhere. But museologists estimate that the *Hamzanama* pages are distributed to all corners of the world whereas the collection in India may be not more than half a dozen.

In India the Baroda State Museum, the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad, the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Benares and the National Museum have retained between themselves only about six pages. But as the legend of Hamza continues to cast its spell on 20th century art collectors, the value of its pages in modern currency terms escalate by leaps and bounds, steadily becoming beyond the means of helpless Indian museum curators with lean budgets. Little wonder then, that the rare Hamza auctions are destined to become an all-West affair with the exclusion of the land where the fantastic exploits of the warrior-hero were painted four centuries ago.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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NOIDA

From Land-trap to Gold-mine

SUCCESS stories—in a land wracked by bureaucratic lethargy and corruption—are hard to find. But in the capital's backyard, a mere 10 miles away in what used to be the flood plain of the Jamuna, local residents and bureaucrats—in a unique display of common purpose—have succeeded in lifting their community out of social and economic chaos and dramatically improving their surroundings. The region—an area of 10,000 acres—is called the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (NOIDA) where co-exist some 80,000 people—a hybrid mix of villagers, Delhi commuters and small-scale businessmen. The area was acquired by the Uttar Pradesh Government in 1976 as an industrial estate for small businessmen, with a total investment of Rs 80 crore but businesses failed to take off, residents lived a hellish existence without roads or electricity, and thousands of farmers whose land had been acquired for the project were in revolt. But with a sudden swiftness two years ago, there began a remarkable revival which is still gaining momentum. Today NOIDA has become a national showcase for what is called 'integrated area development'. Government delegations from states across the country have visited the location to learn from its experience. Big names in television and electronics manufacture want to move in to do business. And Rajiv Gandhi has said that NOIDA should set an example for the rest of the country. Can the rest of the country learn something from NOIDA's experience? Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR reports on NOIDA's journey to hell and back:

IT IS a town without a name but with a reputation that is rapidly transcending its modest boundaries. It is a community without a rooted past but with a future that holds promise of stability. It is a place where village folk have made fortunes almost overnight and where sophisticated townsmen have come to financial ruin. NOIDA is a definition of administrative territory.

Here most of the villages are lit and brick-paved lanes bordered by efficient drainage systems wind their way through rows of huts and *pucca* tenements. In the town—where beats the modern heart of NOIDA—small industrial units hum efficiently with the juice of abundant electric power. Some 80 km of main roads paved with a smooth macadam 9 cm thick and mostly unencumbered by cluttered encroachments, provide speedy transport. Every morning an automated garbage collection vehicle sweeps the main streets. Trees, parks and rose gardens dot the still growing industrial area.

Industrial land, priced at the official rate of Rs 180 per sq metre sells in market for Rs 400. Residential plots whose controlled rate is Rs 540 per sq metre go for double that amount. A recent sales notice

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

"When I took over in 1984, my main task was to restore NOIDA to its original status of an industrial area—a haven for new industry."

YOGESH CHANDRA
chairman, NOIDA

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for 57 remaining plots in the first developed section of the area attracted more than 900 applications. The big names in television manufacturing—Dyanora, Weston, Nova, Niky-Tasha—are moving units here to join the 1,800-odd manufacturing units functioning here. The Nirulas restaurant chain wants to move in within the next few months.

Two years ago NOIDA was flat broke. The Government authority running the show was more than Rs 4 crore in the red. Today, the same authority has more than Rs 5 crore in its kitty. Two years ago NOIDA was the seat of *dharnas* and *morchas* and *andolans* by farmers and entrepreneurs who believed they were hopelessly caught in a land trap by the Uttar Pradesh Government. Factories were closing down in droves. Several businessmen who had lost their life savings after being lured into the new industrial area jumped to their deaths from nearby bridges. Effigies of a past NOIDA chairman were burned with regularity. Villagers whose lands had been acquired for the project were up in arms because they were now landless and jobless with destitution staring them in the face.

IT WAS a mess," admits Yogesh Chandra, a former joint secretary in the Finance Ministry, who took over as NOIDA's chairman in 1984.

Says Rakesh Agnihotri, a manufacturer of printing machine components: "The factory buildings looked more like tombstones in a graveyard." Adds J.B.S. Bakshi, who manufactures plastic pipes: "I had sold all my possessions to set up a unit here because it seemed like a good idea. But I seriously began to suspect my own judgement which had rarely ever failed me before."

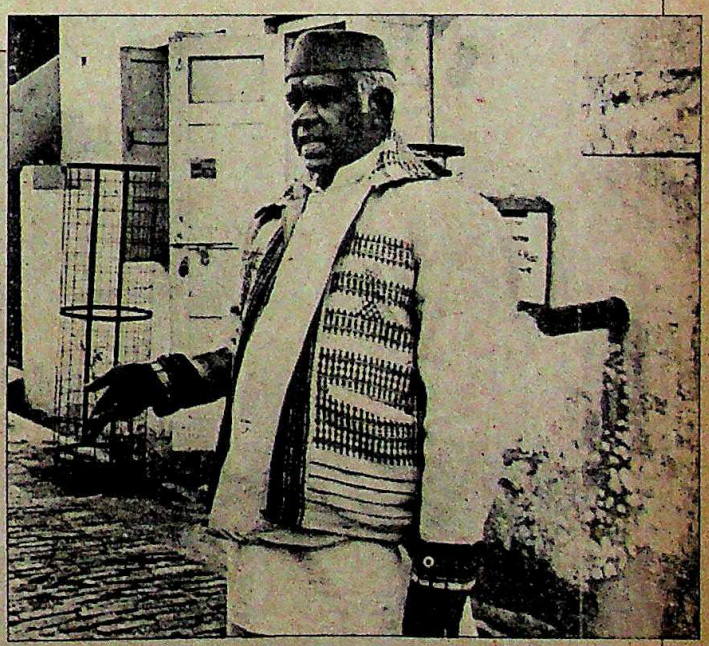
Raghuraj Singh, pradhan of Bhangel village whose land was acquired for NOIDA, recalls: "Our land was gone. We got compensation but people here lived like animals. You could not even walk through this village most of the time because of knee-deep slush. There were no jobs." T.H. Rao, president of the Block Residents' Welfare Association, says that two years ago the residential colony—built to house 1,400 families—was an undeveloped wasteland. "The colony was half empty when I moved in," he remembers. "It was like a desert with buffaloes roaming around."

Delhi was supposed to provide the market for goods manufactured by the small-scale units to be located in NOIDA. The sales pitch—designed to attract small-scale industrialists to what was best known as the area frequented by the gangs of Sundar and Gujjar moonshiners of illicit spirits—was that "all modern amenities will be provided".

But NOIDA was a land-trap. In those early days of 1976, land was certainly cheap. It could be acquired for Rs 40 per sq metres. But once the entrepreneur invested his savings, along with an Uttar Pradesh Finance Corporation loan, the trap was set. Interest on loans was charged from the date of allotment of sheds. But as Agnihotri explains: "Our machinery would just lie outside our sheds because there was no labour to move it in. And once you moved it in, there was no electricity to work the machines. It took about three hours to travel the 15 km to Delhi. And yet we kept paying interest on our loans."

And because there was no integrated

Factories in NOIDA: **bustling complex**



'The colony was half empty when I moved in. It was like a desert with buffaloes roaming around."

T.H. RAO
president, Block Residents' Welfare Association, NOIDA

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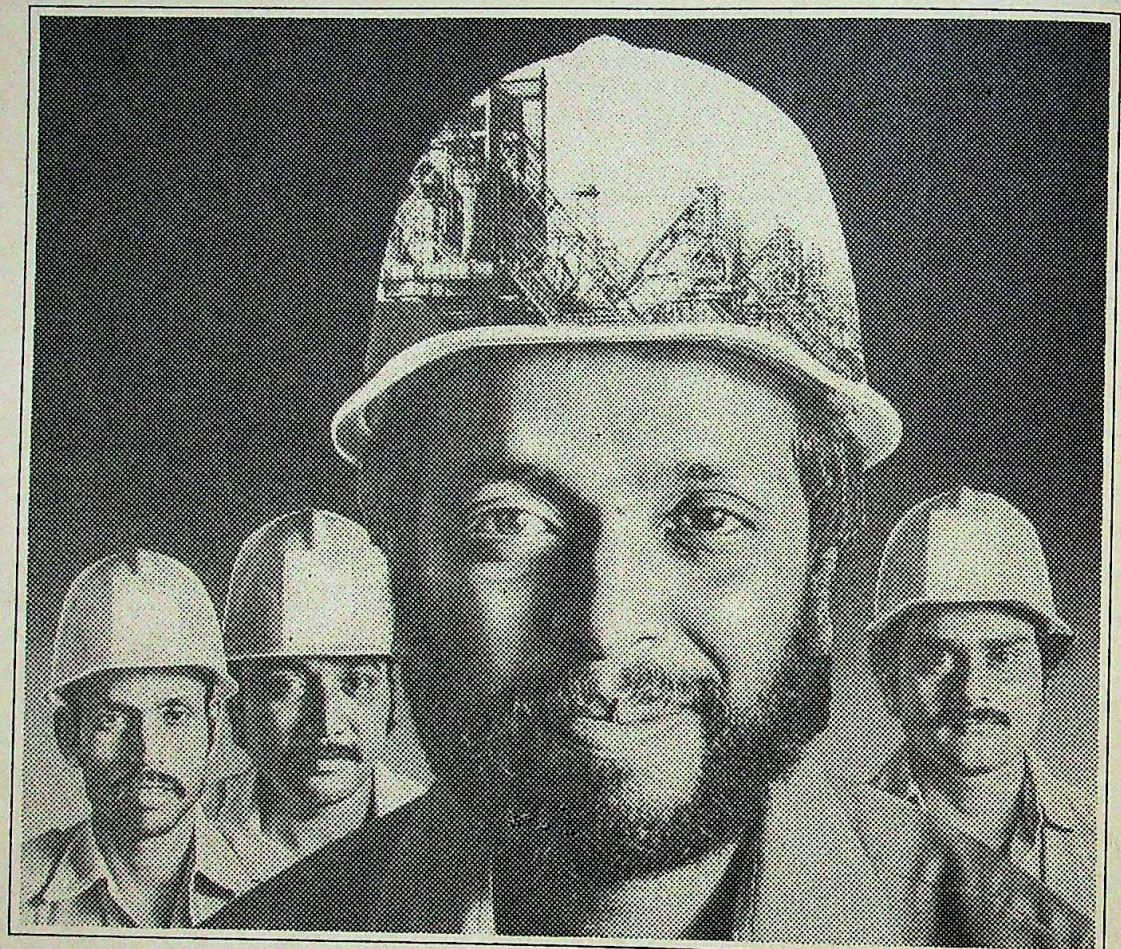

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administration, entrepreneurs had to run from pillar to post covering hundreds of miles within Uttar Pradesh for clearances, sales tax disputes, payment of electric bills, and industrial licensing. "This really kills you," says Anoop Bhandari, who now manufactures milk-separating machines in NOIDA. "The small entrepreneur is essentially a one-man show. If he spends an average of three days running around every week to different government offices there's no way he can run his shop."

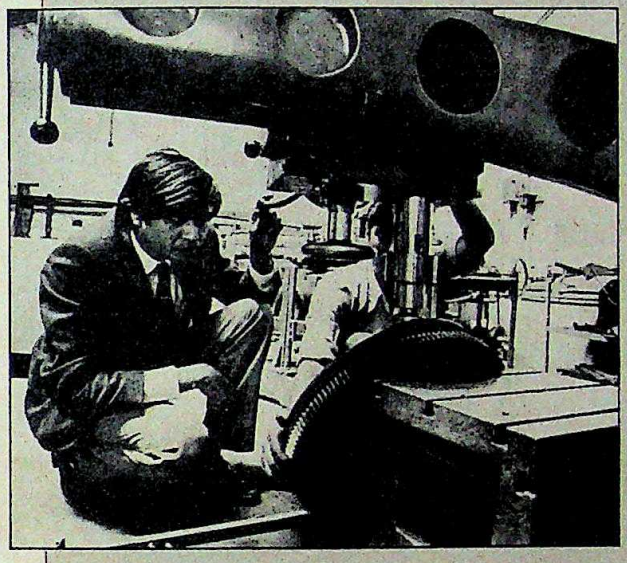
"By March 1982", Agnihotri adds, "this place had become a cremation ground for industry. The development authority had accepted 1,000 industrial applications and more than 800 had already been given cancellation notices because they could not begin production within the specified 18-month time period."

The Janata Government had declared NOIDA an "eyesore", transferred its district administration and rescinded all backward area benefits. In order to fight back, the pioneering entrepreneurs like Agnihotri and Bhandari formed the NOIDA Entrepreneurs' Association (NEA) as a group to lobby the state and Central governments through a series of well-publicised peace marches and hunger strikes.

"Those of us who stuck on", says Agnihotri, "did so for a number of reasons. My main reason was the fear of failure. I am a nuclear engineer by profession. I worked at the Tarapur plant. I had given up everything and borrowed about Rs 2 lakh. I had nowhere else to go. My family had never been in business. I am the first. No matter what, I was determined not to fail."

Like Agnihotri, most of the pioneers who had pitched their entrepreneurial tents in the black hole across the Jamuna were in their early 30s and technically qualified. They were army brats, the sons and daughters of government officials or petty traders and vendors in the Delhi area.

Almost to a man, Noidians agree that the watershed mark—when NOIDA started turning the corner—was 1984, when Yogesh Chandra was appointed chairman and inducted into his team, Uma Pillai and Indrani Sen, two young IAS officers. Says Vir Singh, a Lok Dal leader who lives in Chaura Raghunathpur, a nearby village: "I am an unabashed critic of the Government. But I have to admit that Chandra accomplished here in eight months what could not have happened in eight years. The main thing was that he flung open his doors. He listened to us. And he believed that the villagers whose land was acquired to form NOIDA had valid grievances. Before we came we weren't even allowed into the administration office."



"I had given up everything and had nowhere else to go. No matter what, I was determined not to fail."

RAKESH AGNIHOTRI

R.R. Engineers, manufacturers of printing machinery parts

Chandra is an unusual bureaucrat with an unusual style. He is known to be tough and to the point. He stresses that the 'family' concept is essential to the functioning of a hybrid social agglomeration such as NOIDA. It is one of the cardinal reasons for its success. NOIDA is perhaps the only place in India where village folk, townsmen, industrialists and bureaucrats sit together periodically and conduct freewheeling, often acrimonious discussions about how their different interests can be reconciled.

NOIDA has a unique town directory that also lists within its pages the names of pradhans and sarpanches from surrounding villages. Its industrialists run an employment exchange designed to find jobs for villagers displaced after their land was acquired.

As his Chief Executive Officer, Uma Pillai, explains: "There's a combined function here. This is unlike any other industrial estate in India. This is a new town, this an area where villagers deprived of land have to find work and become entrepreneurs themselves."

Says Chandra: "When I took over in 1984, in the midst of severe agitations and effigy-burnings, my main task was to restore NOIDA to its original status of being an industrial area—a haven for new industry that could benefit from the Delhi market." The first problem he faced was that of electricity. At least that was one place to start. To make matters worse, the Uttar Pradesh Government had decided to impose a four-day block closure on electric supply.

According to sources familiar with those developments, Chandra immediately travelled to Lucknow to meet the power minister and offered his resignation if an exception was not made for NOIDA. Within a few days NOIDA was promised—and it received and still does—electric power except for a three-hour peak period shutdown during evening hours.

"The point," Chandra says, "is that the Uttar Pradesh Government responded to us wherever it could."

A series of rapid-fire decisions designed to make things easier for industry were into effect:

► A sales tax holiday was declared for industry that came to NOIDA after 1982, along with a capital subsidy rebate. Chandra and his team began examining in detail the cancellation notices which had gone out to hundreds of industrialists. "Cancellations," Chandra says, "were punitive. What was needed was a change in attitude—major incentives to goad industrialists on."

► Cancellation was exercised as a last resort. Industrialists unable to begin production within prescribed time periods were given indefinite grace time. A myriad of taxes on transfer or surrender of plots or units were abolished or greatly reduced, making it easier for industrialists to pull out if they wanted, without carrying huge additional financial burdens to make room for new industry.

► The much talked about but rarely implemented 'one-window clearance

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system' was implemented with despatch in NOIDA. By canvassing the state Government, the new administration was able to pull every department connected with industry such as the Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board, Sales Tax, Posts and Telegraphs, Directorate of Industries and Uttar Pradesh Financial Corporation, into a NOIDA committee under the chairman to redress grievances and eliminate red tape on a regular basis.

► Along with these fiscal and industrial measures the development authority began a crash programme of building roads, planting trees and flower gardens, providing sewers, attracting schools, expanding bus services, telephone lines, providing new police stations, and implementing strict pollution controls.

"The response," Chandra says, "was electrifying. Land began selling rapidly. Industries started going into production. With current plans for 4,000 units, nearly 2,000 employing about 15,000 workers have now been established with about half functioning regularly. NOIDA's output from industries now total more than Rs 100 crore a year.

Agnihotri is already planning to expand his small operation. Bhandari, whose turnover from his milk separators was Rs 15 lakh last year expects to more than double that figure this year. He is planning to expand into medical electronics. Bakshi, notwithstanding severe destruction to his plant during the anti-Sikh riots in November 1984 in the trans-Jamuna area was healthy enough to recover and is planning an expansion of his turnover to Rs 10 crores within the next 30 months when his firm, Uniplas, expects to go public.

One industrialist who has done exceptionally well is Gulshan Arora. He is the owner of Supercassettes, a unit that records original sound cassettes. Arora, who buys film tracks outright and also does original recordings, has captured about 60 per cent of the export market for recorded sound cassettes and his unit now has an annual turnover of about Rs 20 crore. Five years ago, Arora and his family survived on about Rs 800 a month, selling fruit in the backlanes of Daryaganj. Today, Arora arrives at his modern NOIDA plant—which employs about 2,000 workers—in a stretched Mercedes limousine equipped with a VCR and TV. In the evenings he still goes back to his fruit stall in Daryaganj. He says incredulously: "I still can't believe it. What has happened is a miracle."

The famous Rajnigandha *pan masala* and Tulsi *zarda* also come out of NOIDA. S.N. Gupta, a managing partner in the firm, says Rajnigandha alone made about Rs 2.5 crore last year. The turnover is expected to double. One of the NOIDA pioneers, Gupta remembers: "There was a time, not too long ago, when the only thing NOIDA offered was *chai* (tea) and *namaskaars*."

"It is simply a story of a government responding well and doing what it is supposed to do for the people. For that reason, NOIDA works. And in India, that's saying a lot."

J.B.S. BAKSHI
proprietor Uniplast

The administration made extensive use of its funds to electrify the villages and improve conditions under which life was unbearable. "Those people had a legitimate gripe. Almost overnight they had lost the only occupation they knew—farming. They are entitled to get something back other than the compensation they received. We were determined not to leave roads, water supply and electric poles outside the villages and let development pass them by. Most of them have this infrastructure now," says Chandra.

Depending on the grade of the land and the time of purchase, villagers were given between Rs 15,000 and Rs 45,000 per acre of land acquired. Many of them became entrepreneurs. Raghuraj Singh of Bhangel who calls NOIDA a miracle has built himself a house worth several lakh rupees where a dilapidated hut once stood.

Dharamvir Singh, pradhan of Barola village, controls the Gujjar Transport Union which runs hundreds of tempos and trucks in and out of Delhi which were purchased by nearby farmers. The Gujjar transport system employs some 5,000 workers from surrounding villages.

Gulab Singh, born in Harola, a village adjacent to the industrial area, was the first graduate in his otherwise illiterate family. Before NOIDA, he tried his hand at several trades and failed after his 50 *bighas* were acquired by the Government. Today he runs a petrol pump whose turnover is about Rs 12 lakh a month. But not all farmers in the neighbourhood are as fortunate. Most of them paid off old debts with their earnings, paid exorbitant lawyers fees, constructed small brick houses, opened subsistence-existence tea stalls and are now unemployed.

But NOIDA has far from solved all its problems yet. Villagers complain that many of them were paid far less than the rates they deserved for their land. Residents complain of telephones that don't work, of bus services to Delhi that are still atrocious. Industrialists complain that the pioneers of NOIDA have not had the advantage of the sales tax exemption which went into effect for industries established after 1982. They also complain of an inequitable distribution of the industrial capital rebate, of unfair electricity charges, of inadequate planning to ensure that demands for electric power are met for the future. There is the usual litany of complaints of petty bribes having to be paid to inspectors, of inadequate provision of housing for labourers, of villagers not getting a square deal in being able to acquire subsidised plots in residential or industrial areas.

But, as Bakshi says: "The point about NOIDA is not difficult to grasp. It is simply a story of a government responding well and doing what it is supposed to do for the people. For that reason, NOIDA works. And in India, that's saying a lot."

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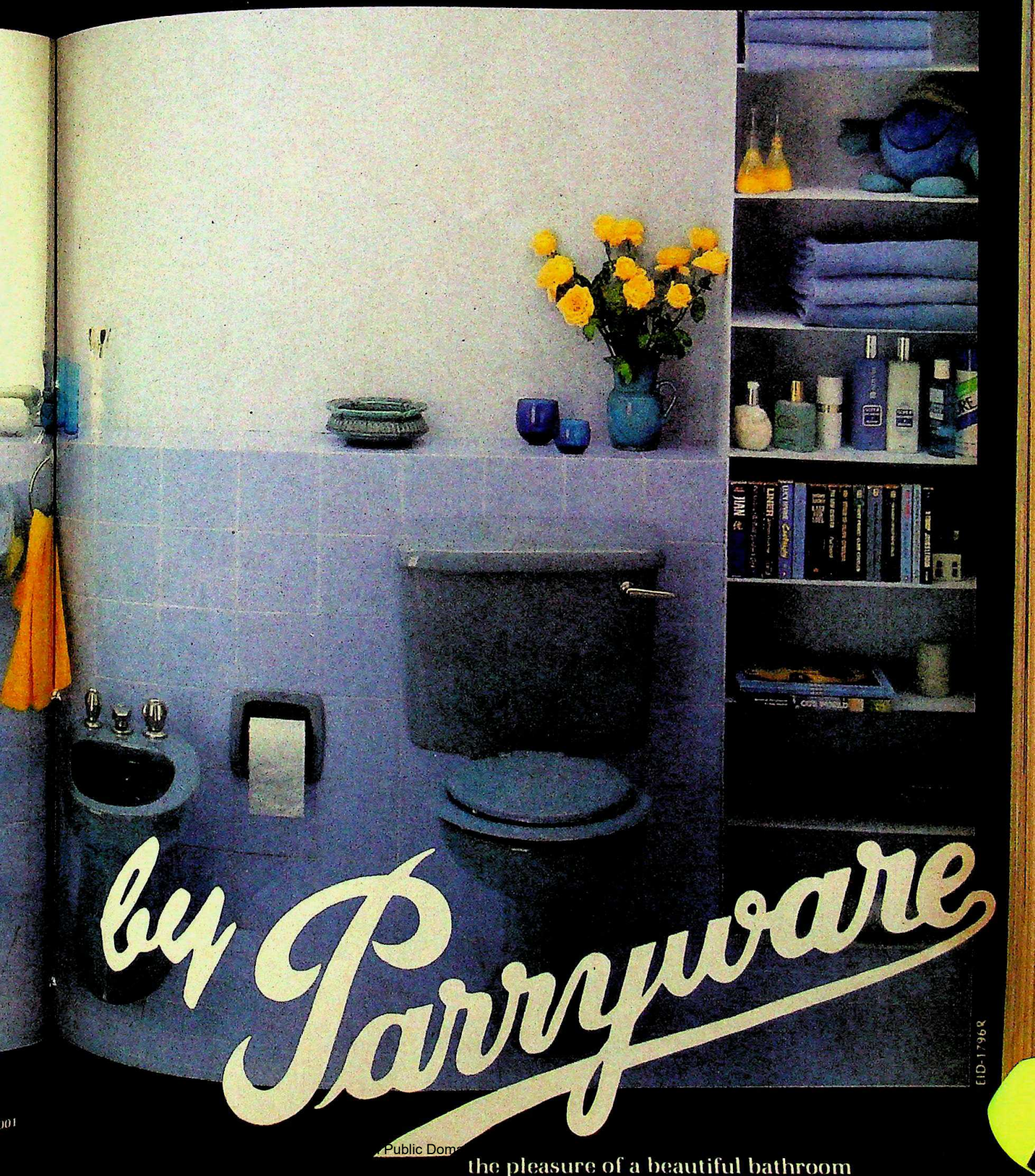
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Unholy Row

Photographs by S. PREMI

IT WAS likened to an act of God but the discord and bitterness it generated seemed to suggest otherwise. Last fortnight's order of the Faizabad sessions judge ordering the reopening of the controversial Ram Janmabhoomi temple complex in Ayodhya—venerated by Hindus as the birthplace of Lord Rama and by Muslims who know it as the Babari Mosque—saw tensions come to the boil. While the lanes and by-lanes of this holy city reverberated to the joyful strains of numerous bhajan groups, Muslims offered prayers, wore black bands and called for a state-wide bandh to protest against what they called a "judicial coup d'etat". The verdict has been challenged in the high court, but coming as it did 37 years after the complex was closed pending a legal decision on its ownership, it could hardly be a communal salve.

The story began when a young Faizabad lawyer, Umesh Chandra Pandey, moved an appeal before District and Sessions Judge Krishna Mohan Pandey —after his plea had been rejected by the town munsif—seeking the unlocking of the gates of the disputed shrine on the grounds that it was only an earlier district administration and not a court which had ordered its closure. Pandey heard the petition on February 1, and after examining Collector Indu Kumar Pandey and Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Karmveer Singh, directed that the gates be opened forthwith.

The Muslim community was taken by surprise. Charged lawyer Abdul Mannan: "Everything was pre-planned as the state police and the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) had been deployed much before the district judge had even pronounced his judgement." Added Mohammed Hashim, who has been fighting a court case over precisely this issue since 1961 on behalf of the Sunni Central Waqf and the Anjuman Muhafiz-e-Maquabir Avadh-Ayodhya (Organisation for the Protection of Tombs of Avadh-Ayodhya): "The whole procedure was illegal as none of the petitioners of the main case (of 1961) was heard." His petition, filed before the Allahabad High Court, challenged the legality of the sessions judge's orders and prayed that the high court quash the judgement and issue a writ of *mandamus* and *certiorari* asking the opposite parties to maintain the sanctity of the premises.

"Everything was pre-planned as the state police and the PAC had been deployed much before the district judge had even pronounced his judgement."

ABDUL MANAN
lawyer

The shrine: controversial

Minority suspicions centred on the administration, and the massive deployment of the police only served to fuel these suspicions. SSP Karmveer Singh was quick to dispel these misgivings. "The administration," he pointed out, "had to take precautionary measures. We apprehended trouble and deployed forces in advance."

Yet minor Hindu-Muslim clashes were reported from Bahraich, Rudauli and Barabanki. More important, minority sentiments were hurt over official admissions that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) had called on the chief minister when he visited Ayodhya on the occasion of the Ramayan Mela on December 19. Informed sources said that the chief minister had called for the entire file, and reportedly found no specific court order regarding its closure.

Roughly one month later Umesh Chandra Pandey moved the court on precisely this point and succeeded in getting the shrine opened. In this highly surcharged atmosphere, the Muslims could be, perhaps, pardoned for suspecting a political link between the chief minister's move to reduce the appeal of the VHP and Pandey moving the petition. Pandey, however, made it clear that his going to court had nothing to do with politics. His lawyer and cousin Vireshwar Dwivedi described the allegation as baseless. "I examined the legal aspects of the records and found no evidence of any court having ordered the locking and so I moved the petition."

But opinions had already polarised. Provocative moves by the Shriram Janmabhoomi Mukti Yajna Samiti—a VHP offshoot—which organised a *rath yatra* from Sitamarhi (where Sita is believed to have appeared) to Ayodhya on September 25, 1984, where the call to "liberate" Ram Janmabhoomi first made itself heard, hardly helped matters. An even more ominous development was in January 1985, when the Mukti Yajna Samiti general secretary, and VHP assistant secretary set the deadline of April 14 for the opening of the shrine. Simultaneously, members of the Bajran Dal, the youth wing of the VHP, began working on plans for a state-wide bandh on March 9.

The shrine itself is an object of some mystery. The VHP claims that a massive temple was built by Vikramaditya at the place where Lord Rama had "appeared" on the banks of the Saryu. What hap-

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pened during the intervening period is not known but it is believed that in 1528, when the Mughal Emperor Zahiruddin Babar visited Ayodhya to pay his respects to Fakir Quazal Abbas Qualandar, the latter apparently asked Babar to demolish the temple and build a mosque where he could offer namaz. According to historical accounts, Babar was reluctant to do so, but the Fakir prevailed on him and his wish was carried out. If the VHP leaders are to be believed, a staggering 76 wars were fought throughout the Mughal period on this issue alone with no fewer than 3 lakh Hindus losing their lives.

The Muslims continued to offer prayers at the shrine till heavy damage during riots in 1934 rendered that no longer possible. So it remained till December 22, 1949, when an idol of Lord Rama appeared in the shrine and a group of devotees led by Baba Abhayram Das of Nirmohi Akhada began offering prayers there. Protests from the Muslims of the locality—who filed an FIR—prompted the city magistrate to attach the property and nominate a receiver. A police guard was mounted and the administration locked the premises.

THEN began the first of a series of legal battles between Hindus and Muslims and among various groups of Hindus themselves, each staking their claims to the shrine. The first case was filed on January 16, 1950, by Gopal Singh Visharad of Gwalior—against the Muslims and the state of Uttar Pradesh—which requested the court to grant the petitioner the right to offer darshan at the temple. A perpetual injunction was sought whereby the defendants would be restrained from removing the idols and causing any hurdle in the puja. An *ex-parte* injunction was granted and confirmed on March 3, 1951.

Matters took a curious turn when the then deputy commissioner of Faizabad filed a petition in court on behalf of the state Government saying: "The property in suit (No.2/1950) is known as Babari Mosque and has for a long period been in use as a mosque...It has not been in use as a temple of Sri Ramachandra." The petition went on to add: "On the night of December 22, 1949, the idols of Sri Ramachandra were surreptitiously and wrongfully put inside."

Subsequently, two more suits were filed by other Hindu groups in 1950 and 1959. Then in 1961, the Sunni Central Waqf Board and others including Hashim filed a suit claiming the shrine was the historic Babari Masjid. All four suits were then consolidated, with the last case being treated as the representive case. Since then it has been pending in the high court. What the Muslims do not state but obviously fear is that with the sessions court order unlocking the shrine, the Hindus may have already won the legal battle. But Collector Pandey allayed such fears. He told INDIA TODAY: "Whether this is a mosque or a temple is still to be decided by the court. The present judgement would not have any bearing on the old case."

A Hindu meet: jubilation

"I examined the legal aspects of the records and found no evidence of any court having ordered the locking and so I moved the petition."

VIRESHWAR DWIVEDI
lawyer

But there is no denying the fact that the opening of the gates of the shrine has stirred the Muslim community. Last fortnight, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board held a meeting in New Delhi in the wake of the sessions court's judgement, and called upon all political parties and secular forces to support the demand for restoration of the shrine to the Muslims. Syed Shahabuddin, Janata MP and head of the All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mashawarat "condemned" the sessions court's order and exhorted Muslims to observe February 14 as a "day of mourning". Said he: "The unilateral seizure of the Babari Mosque has shocked the Muslims beyond measure and eroded their faith in secularism."

While the future of the shrine undoubtedly rests with the court, quarrels have broken out between the different Hindu groups. These include, apart from the VHP and its affiliates, the Hanuman Garhi led by Ram Dayal Sharma and the Nirmohi Akhara. According to temple sources, all these groups want the ouster of pujari Lal Das and receiver K.K. Verma so that they can have full control over the shrine and its property. Confirming this, Lal Das said that though the gates had been opened, certain communal elements were trying to capture it and exploit the situation. This became clear last fortnight when the VHP President, Shivnath Katju, demanded that the shrine be handed over to the Ramanandacharya Trust—which the VHP had set up last year—along with the seven-acre plot of land adjacent to the shrine with a view to building a new temple complex.

With the dispute showing no signs of ending, local administration officials fear that musclemen from Bihar may want a piece of the action. If that happens, it can only complicate an already tense situation in the land of God.

—FARZAND AHMED in Ayodhya

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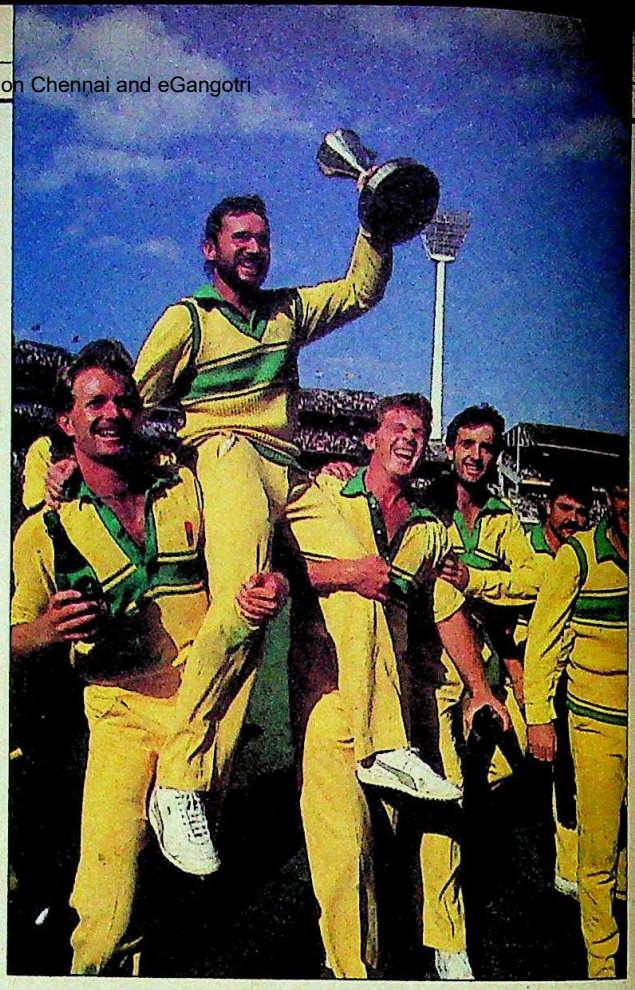
CRICKET

Going Down Under

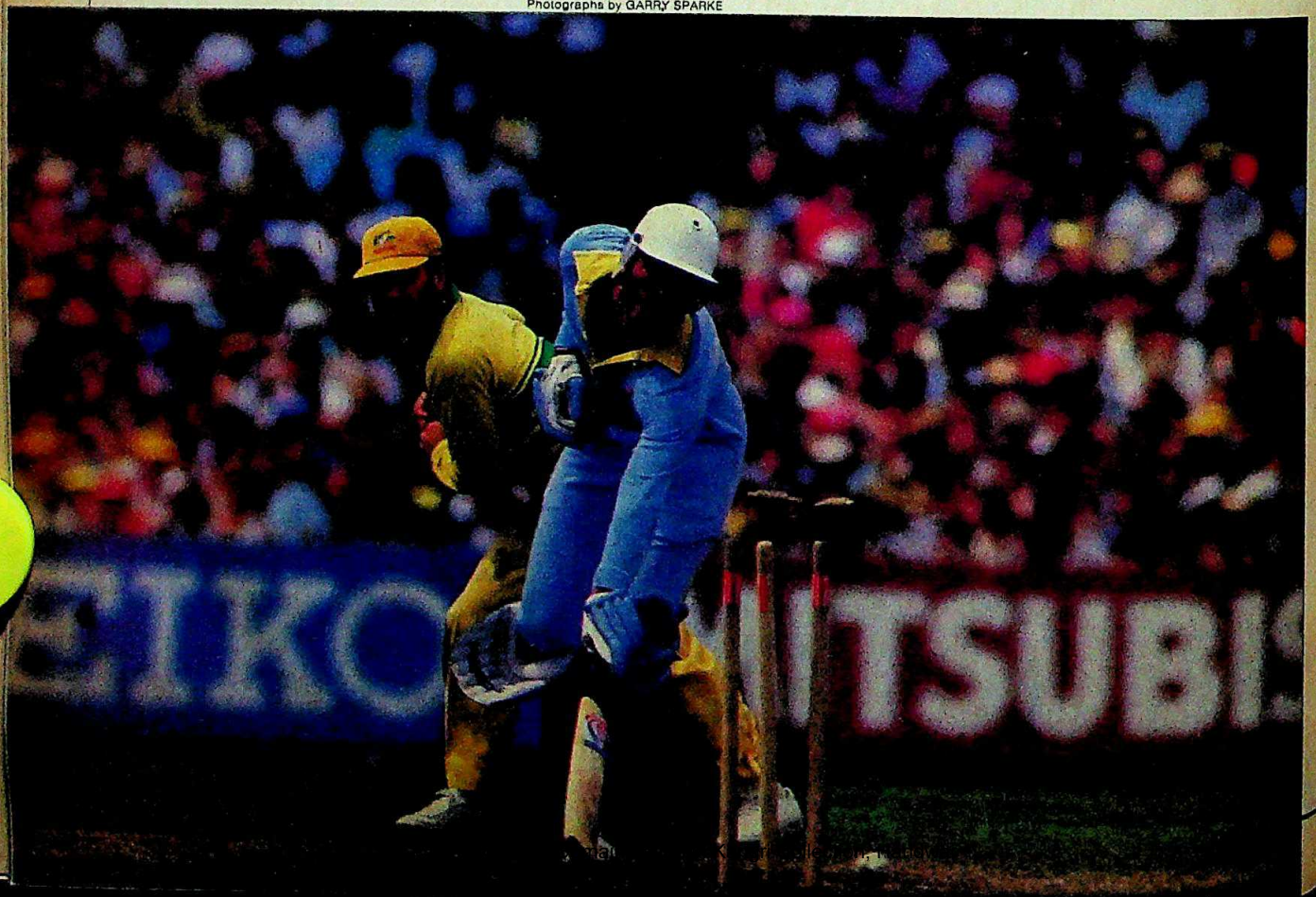
AS THE packed Melbourne Cricket Ground exploded with jubilation after Allan Border's Australians coasted to a comfortable win over India in the Benson and Hedges World Series Cup, the gloom in the Indian dressing-room seemed to symbolise the end of India's dominance in one-day cricket. But the series did expose some harsh truths regarding the failings in the Indian side and resurrected questions about Kapil Dev's captaincy. Associate Editor DILIP BOBB *flew down to Australia to cover the finals in Sydney and Melbourne last fortnight and gain an on-the-spot insight into the atmosphere in the Indian camp. His report:*

SYDNEY'S garrulous taxi-drivers, who traverse Australia's wide-ranging ethnic waveband, consider themselves experts on everything from the vagaries of the weather to the outcome of a cricket match. Driving in from Sydney's squeaky clean airport on the morning of the first final in the Benson and Hedges World Series Cup between



Border chaired by his team-mates after their victory in Melbourne (top); and Shastri's run-out terminates the Indian innings

Photographs by GARRY SPARKE



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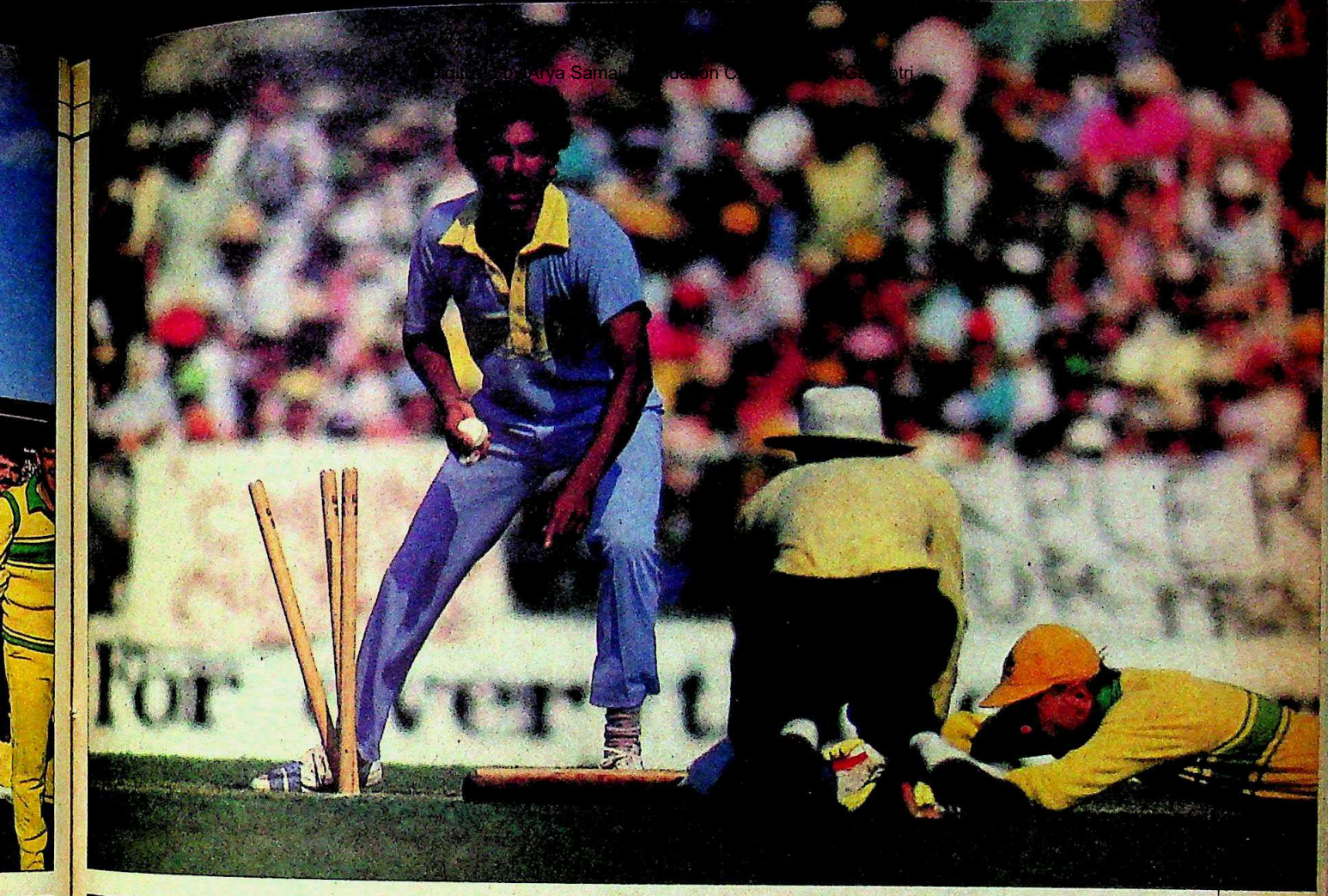

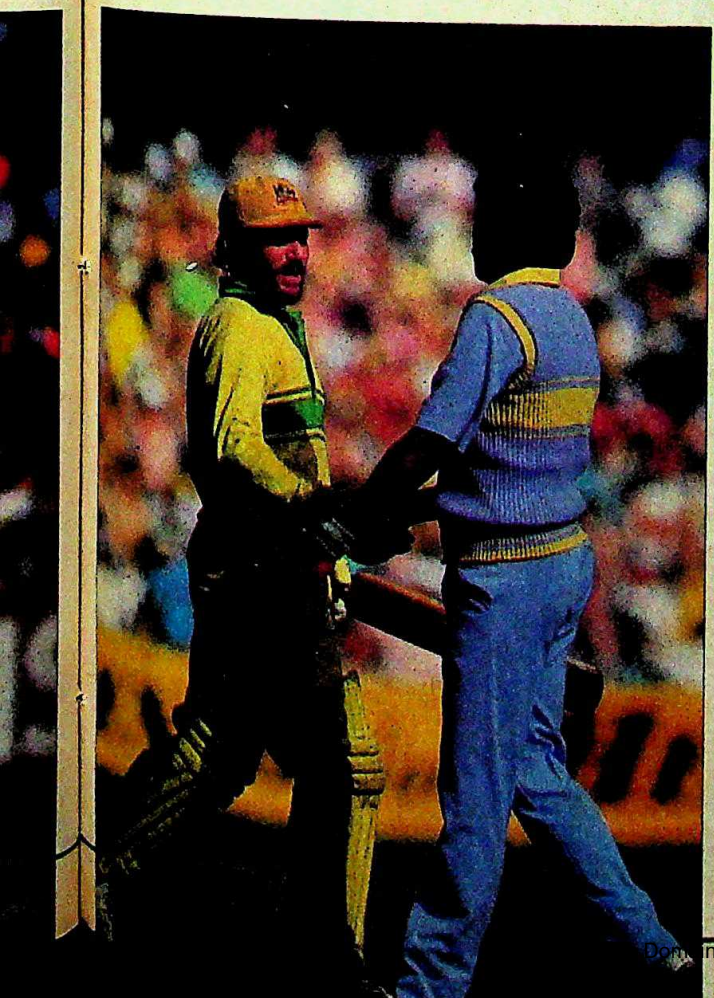

Shastri appeals for a run-out in the Melbourne final (top); and Kapil congratulates Border after the Australian captain hit the winning run

India and Australia, one grizzled member of the fraternity confidentially predicted that India would lose the encounter. "It's the money y'know mate," he drawled, hitching up his shorts. "The Aussies have been promised half a million smackers if they win." In the event, he was right about the outcome. But the large number of dejected Indian expatriates who turned out for the two finals at Sydney and Melbourne, Australia's two largest cities, could have been forgiven for thinking that it was the Indian team that had been paid the money—to lose.

Right through the emotion-charged tournament, the Indian squad displayed an inconsistency that was at amazing variance with their past reputation as 'one-day wonders'. Having launched their defence of the title on a high note, the Indian challenge diminished as alarmingly as the contents of the beer cans on the famous 'hill' at the Sydney Cricket Ground, with the world champions scrabbling frantically to find a toe-hold in the finals. Having achieved that, Kapil Dev's men seemed to be back in the form and spirit that has characterised their dominance of one-day cricket for the last three years. But it was the flattery of deceit. To the intense disappointment of millions of

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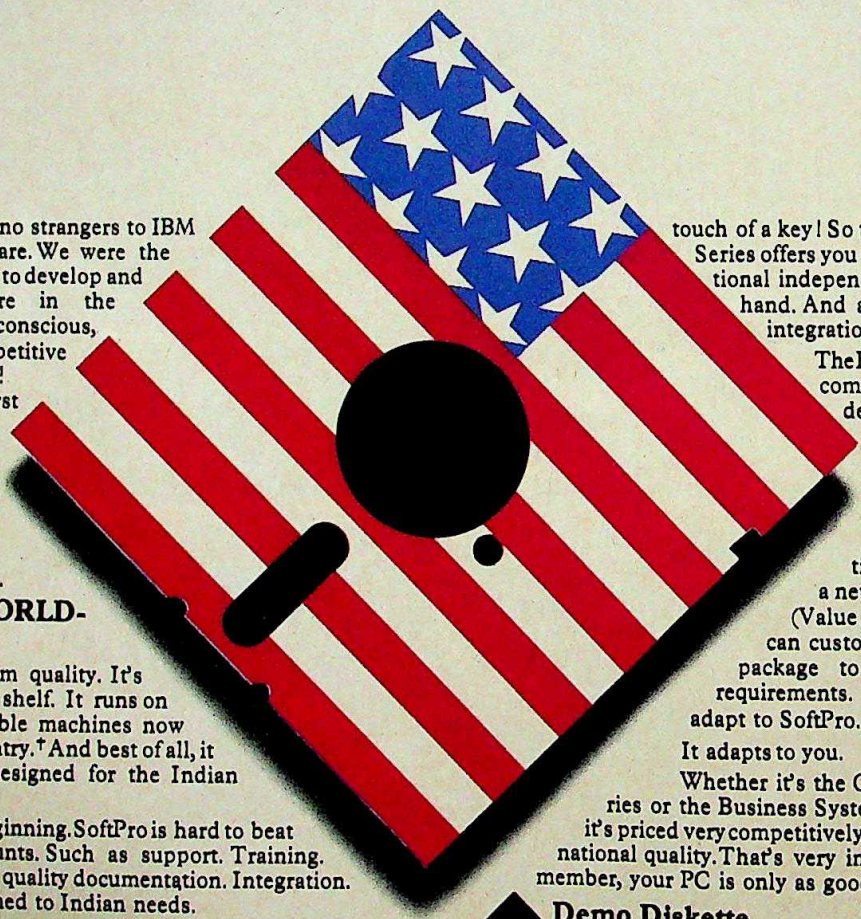

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Indian fans glued to the pre-dawn telecasts, India caved in tamely in the first two finals to a team that they had comprehensively outplayed in the Test series prior to the Benson and Hedges Cup. Suddenly, the catch-phrase 'Down Under India is Thunder', coined at the same venue last year, bore a depressingly mocking ring.

INSTEAD, the new slogans being displayed against the bobbing sea of colour in the stands offset by the profusion of bare-chests and bikini-clad women reflected the typical Australian fanaticism towards the game. "Allan Border walks on water," read one. "Bordering on the unbelievable," said another, while "Mathews loves eating curry" joined in after Greg Mathews, a cross between a cricketer and a vaudeville actor, picked up the vital wickets of Srikkanth and Amarnath. The frenzy and parochialism even, surprisingly enough, extended to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) authorities. On the morning of the match, an MCG radio advertisement for tickets to the match announced against the clash of cymbals: "Come to the MCG and see the Australians crush India."

The hard sell and the aggressiveness is aided by the attitude of the sponsors, in this case the Benson and Hedges cigarette company. The Australian team was promised a bonus of A$ 12,000 (Rs 1,03,200) if they reached the finals and an additional A$ 12,000 if they won the cup. The company offered them a similar amount for each Test match won against New Zealand and India and an extra A$ 6,000 (Rs 51,600) if they won a Test series. With the Kit Kat Company pitching in with their own prize money awards and an A$ 30,000 (Rs 2,58,000) Alfa Romeo for the international cricketer of the year (won by New Zealand's Richard Hadlee), cricket in Australia has become something of a commercial circus and a further attraction for the sporting Australian crowds.

Not that the Australian crowds needed much enticement. The Aussies are as fanatical about the outdoors as they are about their beer, and cricket matches, especially when Australia is on a winning spree, are treated more like rowdy picnics. At Melbourne, families, including old white-haired ladies and children, started arriving at the ground two hours before the start of play loaded down with picnic hampers to grab the best seats or get into the one section of the stands where drinking is allowed.

Australian cricket crowds are generally a sporting lot and animated discussions about "Kris", "Dev" and "Sunny", the three best-known members of the Indian team, are often heard over the popping of beer can tops and the crunch of popcorn and chips. This time, however, it was the the collective chant of "Border, Border" while the Australian team did their football-style victory lap that turned the stadium into a gladiatorial arena. This time there were no crowds of starry-eyed youngsters and scantily-clad girls around the door of the Indian dressing-room.

Even an hour after the match was over, the Indians were still to emerge from behind their locked dressing-room door and it was only Kapil, his swarthy face grim and gloomy, who walked out for his post-match press conference. Despite his earlier outburst against the standard of umpiring and the state of Australian pitches, Kapil was the first to admit that the team had performed well below par. Sipping coffee in the plush delegates' lounge of the MCG after the match, Kapil looked beaten and demoralised. "I just can't explain it," he said. "In the earlier matches we were batting well and bowling badly. In the later stages, we bowled well but our batting let us down. We have to do some serious thinking."

Ironically enough, the serious thinking being done by most Indian cricket-lovers was about Kapil himself and his qualifications as skipper, now under grave question. "I think the Indians are much too orthodox in their approach to the game," says former England captain Tony Greig, now a member of the Channel Nine commentary team. "There appears to be a lack of improvisation and adaptability to changing fortunes."

For that failing, Kapil as a captain who has still to record a win after 20 Test matches, must perforce accept much of the responsibility. As the only match-winner in the side following 'Kris' Srikkanth's dismal performance in the one-day series, referred to as 'pyjama cricket' by the purists, Kapil seemed to cave in to the increasing pressure with some unforgivable errors in strategy. In the final match, he promoted himself in the batting order and was out on the fifth ball, edging a simple catch after having scored a duck in the first final. When asked after the match why he had changed the batting order, Kapil was on the defensive and made the surprising declaration that "I wanted to improve the running between the wickets".

Similarly, when India took the field to the Australian war chant of "c'mon Aussie, c'mon", Kapil appeared incapable of stemming the runs, and as the only strike bowler in the side, only brought himself on when Australia needed just 45 runs for victory and the 72,000-strong crowd was already on its feet waving the traditional hand-written banners in anticipation of an Indian defeat. With Australia's lengthy tail, a couple of quick wickets would have put the pressure on Border's men. Kapil's reply that Ravi Shastri and Shivlal Yadav were bowling economically at the time was unconvincing to say the least and reflective of his seeming lack of strategy and reluctance to go on the

GARRY SPARKE

Melbourne crowd in one of the stands after Australia's victory

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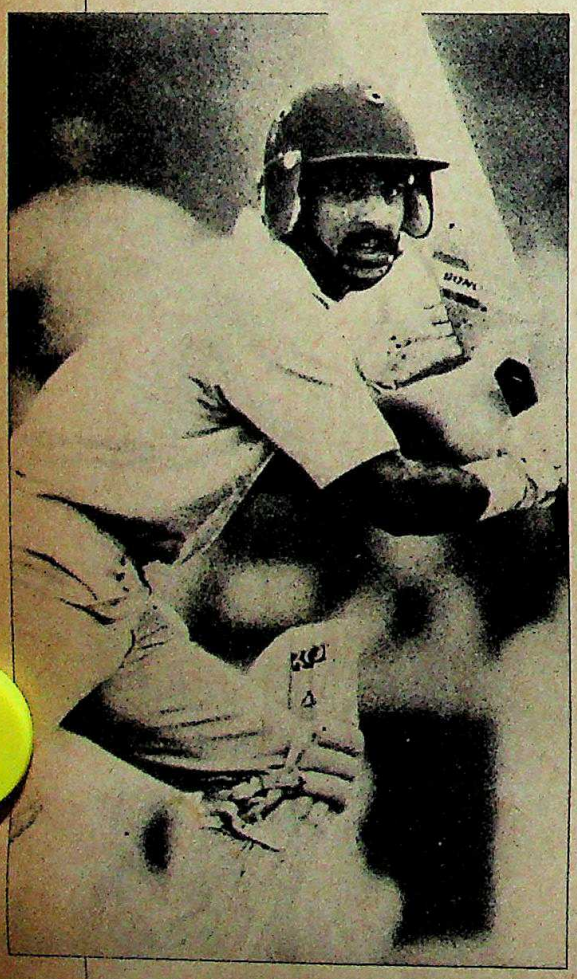
attack at crucial moments. Says former Australian Test star and Channel Nine commentator Keith Stackpole: "The Indians have made it harder on themselves by constantly shuffling their batting order and chopping and changing their attack. They also seem unable to decide whether to set a target or chase one. To me, they looked an inconsistent side, lacking in direction or purpose."

Kapil also tended to put too much of the blame for India's poor showing on the tousled head of young Sivaramakrishnan. Yet, at the nets both he and manager and former spinner Venkataraghavan made no great effort to guide or encourage the youngster. Says former Australian captain and leg spinner Richie Benaud: "Siva just needed the right guidance. He wasn't keeping his head still at his delivery and wasn't really looking where he intended to bowl. He has also changed his run-up by slowing down a lot before delivery." He also felt that there seemed to be no effort to counsel Srikkanth, the other key failure in the series, on how to counter the Australian strategy of bowling to him short and around the off-stump.

CERTAINLY, 'Kaps', as his teammates call him, can hardly be faulted for the poor form of key players like Srikkanth (labelled the 'Orient Express' by Australian cricket-writers), Azharuddin and Sivaramakrishnan, a factor that played a major role in their overall performance. But even so, it was the pressure that told in the end with Chetan Sharma and Roger Binny faltering in line and length when it was most required, 'Jimmy' Amarnath making dubious history with a crestfallen grin by becoming the first batsman in a one-day international to be declared out handling the ball and 'Colonel' Dilip Vengsarkar whittling down the crucial run tally by his ponderous running between the wickets. Kapil's own failure with the bat in the last two matches was also a contributory factor of no small measure.

Not that the tour was unprofitable in other ways. The Indian side picked up A$ 24,500 (Rs 2,10,700) for the five wins and five losses in the 10 qualifying matches they played and an additional A$ 16,000 (Rs 1,37,600) as the losing finalists (this was in addition to the A$ 20,000 (Rs 1,72,000) they earned for the three-match Test series). The team also shared four A$ 500 (Rs 4,300) player of the match awards (Kapil, Azharuddin, Vengsarkar and Chetan) and Kapil's A$ 2,000 (Rs 17,200) for winning the Kit Kat strike rate award. In fact, it was a poor reflection of India's batting performance that only one Indian, Kapil, featured among the seven players who qualified for the Kit Kat prize. Kapil, of course, earned an additional bonus in the form of the royalties from his book, *In God's Decree*, released in Australia during the tour. Despite its shortcomings, the book shot up the Australian publishing charts and was the third biggest seller after literary offerings by more established writers like Leon Uris and Len Deighton.

But despite the financial rewards, it was an abject lack of purpose and strategy



(From left) Srikkanth, Sivaramakrishnan and Chetan Sharma in action during the series

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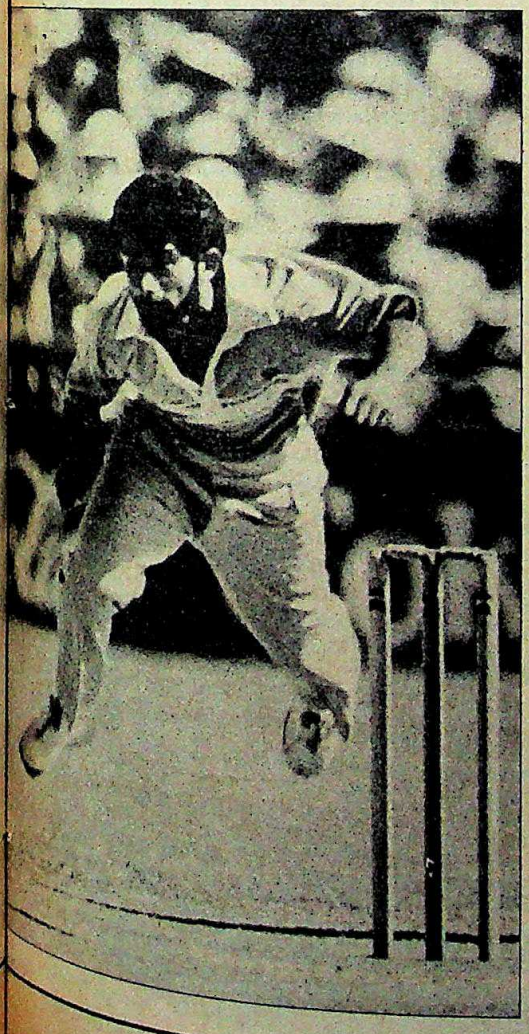
which mainly prevented India from winning the A$ 32,000 (Rs 2,75,200) winners' purse, a failing that was in fact clearly evident at the halfway stage of the tournament when Kapil suddenly decided to replace three members of the team—Sivaramakrishnan, Raju Kulkarni and Syed Kirmani. In a frantic message to the Cricket Control Board of India, Kapil requested that Sandeep Patil, Madan Lal and Sadanand Vishwanath be flown out to replace the three. It is debatable whether their inclusion would have made any difference to the eventual performance of the team, but the board flatly refused.

In fact, the performance of the Indians brought out the flaws in the board's refusal to make some changes in the team after the Test series was over. In the discussions before the tour, some members of the board were in favour of sending back some of the 16 and replacing them with players more suited to the one-day game, like Sandeep Patil, Kirti Azad and Madan Lal. The majority view which eventually prevailed was that the team could not be changed as the expense involved would be too high.



THE result was that the Indian team was subjected to constant reshuffles, with Kulkarni making sporadic appearances, Ashok Malhotra and Siva shuttling in and out of the side and, above all, Kirmani, despite being fit for the last five matches, being sidelined in favour of Kiran More when his superior batting and experience could have made a crucial difference. Kirmani's exclusion was inexplicable, specially considering that all the other team members who were injured came back into the side immediately they were declared fit. The Kojak-headed wicket-keeper made no bones about his disgust at the shabby treatment he was given.

There also seemed to be little truth in the revived rumours about the supposed friction between Kapil and Gavaskar. Both players denied the reports and Gavaskar even jokingly promised that "in the next series, Kapil and I will have to share a room to put an end to the issue." But though the duo made an effort to act friendly and co-operative whenever outsiders were around and even on the field during play, it was quite obvious that the two are totally incompatible and find it difficult to establish any kind of rapport. Kapil is an earthy, impulsive, somewhat immature personality who earns respect by his sheer cricketing talent. Gavaskar has a shrewd, calculating mind that thinks in terms of his personal achievements and his commercial value. He was the only one who stayed back in Australia, officially to receive treatment for his strained sciatic nerve but the local grape-vine in Sydney has it that he is there to negotiate a contract with Channel Nine.

The Indians didn't help matters by their extra-curricular activities on the tour. Ravi Shastri reportedly spent much of his spare time in Australia's wild west-type casinos while one Indian journalist covering the tour went so far as to blame Jimmy Amarnath's poor performance on the field on his alleged nocturnal activities. Amarnath, as a gesture of defiance, appeared the next day at the nets wearing a bright red T-shirt emblazoned with the slogan "Jimmy the Hooker".

During internal flights and on the practice field, the team hardly gave the impression of being a single tightly-knit unit. The junior members like Binny, Sharma, Kulkarni, Azharuddin, Srikkanth, Siva and Yadav hardly ever mingled with their more senior colleagues. Kapil, team manager Venkataraghavan and Shastri, occasionally joined by Gavaskar, formed a separate group but whether they were discussing strategy or the latest exchange rate between the rupee and the Australian dollar was open to question since the practice sessions seemed more a matter of going through the motions rather than plotting moves or plugging individual gaps and weaknesses.

But perhaps the most ineffective member of the side was team manager and former Test star S. Venkataraghavan. On a long and gruelling tour like the one Down Under, when tensions and individual differences and media criticism are bound to be in excess of normal, the manager is the key man in the side. Venkat is a likeable enough personality but clearly lacks both spirit and authority. His public relations and his dealings with the press left too much to be desired and right through he acted nervous and timid, shying away from making statements on record.

He contradicted himself on numerous occasions, only adding to the feeling that there was very little coordination in the team. The most notable instance was when he initially stated that he had officially reprimanded Sunny Gavaskar for his slow batting in a qualifying match against Australia, while Gavaskar himself later vehemently denied being spoken to by Venkat. Throughout the final vital matches, Venkat stuck to Kapil like a shadow having very little to do with the other team members, specially the more inexperienced ones who required his guidance the most. And, it was only on his return to India, that Venkat lashed out against the Australian umpiring, an issue that he had carefully avoided discussing while in Australia.

In actual fact, the umpiring had little to do with India's showing, which lacked the confidence and character of its earlier World Cup performances. Kapil did not make matters any easier when umpire Ray Isherwood was quoted in a local Australian paper as having stated that Kapil barged into his hotel room after the match in which the former gave some

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EXIM BANK

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS 1985

AT YEAR END 31ST DECEMBER 1985*	Rs. (mn)	Change over 1984 (%)
– TOTAL ASSETS	8163.0	22
of which LOANS, ADVANCES & BILLS	5544.0	34
– OWNED FUNDS	1800.0	21
of which RESERVES	325.0	54
– BORROWED FUNDS	5870.0	21
– GUARANTEES OUTSTANDING	4661.0	-9
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 1985		
– TOTAL INCOME	637.0	24
– NET INCOME (after interest, depreciation, provisions)	154.0	28
– DIVIDEND (payable to Govt. of India)	40.0	33
FUNDED OPERATIONS		
– Sanctions	4412.0	30
– Disbursements	3813.0	8
GUARANTEES		
– Sanctioned	732.0	28
– Issued	683.0	19

*General Fund

Note: This does not purport to be a full statement of accounts. Summary of audited annual accounts available on request.

भारतीय निर्यात-आयात बैंक
EXPORT-IMPORT BANK OF INDIA

The export finance source

Maker Chambers IV, 222 Nariman Point, Bombay 400 021.
Representative Offices at : Calcutta, Madras, New Delhi, Abidjan (Ivory coast), and Washington D.C. (U.S.A.)

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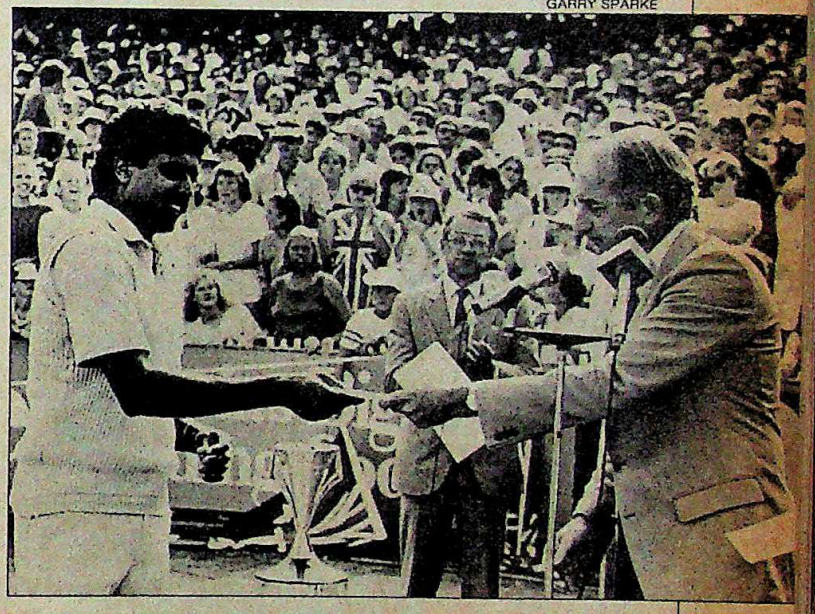
controversial decisions and said sarcastically: "I congratulate you Ray. Well done." Kapil later denied that he had done any such thing but Isherwood stuck to his story. Kapil's displays of petulance in his encounters with the press only revealed his impulsive nature and the lack of maturity so crucial for a captain. After India's loss at Melbourne, Kapil reacted sharply to a question of how he would be treated when he returned home. Said the captain: "It is up to the selectors to change me if they think I'm not doing a good job as captain."

There is, however, a division of opinion whether or not there should be a change at the helm. Viewed at close quarters, Kapil seems bereft of the imagination and flair required to inspire a team to greater heights and make on-the-spot improvisations or the mental adjustments required between Test cricket and one-day encounters. On at least two encounters, his field placings allowed the stronger batting partner to dominate the strike and thus wrest the initiative. Certainly, as a player, Kapil must rank among the best. But as a captain, he has been far from impressive. Says M.L. Jaishima, a former manager of the Indian team during Kapil's tenure as captain: "Cricket comes naturally to Kapil but not leadership. Kapil's cricketing intuition is undeniable but he is weak when it comes to tact and strategy as a captain. He has not been able to bring out the best in the team. The problem with him is his lack of a back-up plan or ability to switch tactics. Today's tight cricket demands commanding leadership like Tiger (Pataudi) and the only one with the potential is Ravi Shastri." Pataudi himself agrees: "I don't think Kapil is a great captain. He gets hassled when things get tense. We need someone who can get the boys together. I would change the captain."

FORMER Test star Erapalli Prasanna holds a slightly different view: "Kapil is okay as a captain. Under the present circumstances without a good strike-force, it is difficult for anyone to lead the team. Unless someone better is found, Kapil should stay on as captain". Abbas Ali Baig, who was manager of the Indian team for five Tests and the Asia Cup, is not so sure: " One gets the impression that there is either a dearth of strategy or there is a lack of coordination between the perception of strategy and its execution. I am not sure how much the captain is to be blamed and whether there should be a change."

Eventually, however, that decision will be left to the Indian selectors. But Kapil stated in Melbourne that he will not be available for the Asia Cup in Sri Lanka, due to start late next month, which means that current vice-captain Ravi Shastri may finally get the nod. Shastri, despite his comparative youth, obviously has a mature head on his wide shoulders and is extremely popular with his team-mates, but it is difficult to see the selectors keeping him on as captain with Kapil back in the team. Gavaskar and Amarnath are nearing the end of their careers and Vengsarkar, the only other senior member of the side, is too much of a loner to be an effective skipper.

GARRY SPARKE



Kapil receiving the loser's cheque after the Melbourne final

But, however the captaincy issue is resolved, the current Indian team desperately needs some major overhauling with the bowling department in particular need of an effective strike-force. Madan Lal, despite having Kapil's backing, is clearly a spent force. Chetan Sharma and Roger Binny lack the consistency and self-confidence required to partner Kapil as the spearhead of the attack. With the failure of Siva to deliver the goods when the chips were down and Yadav hardly of match-winning class, the spinning department is again solely dependant on Ravi Shastri. In fact, Shastri and Kapil were the only two bowlers to turn out consistently good bowling performances during the Benson and Hedges series.

Former Indian captain Bishen Singh Bedi feels that the team lacks enough specialists. "To expect Azharuddin to bowl 10 overs while a specialist bowler like Maninder was left at home shows that something is seriously wrong," he says. "The team is packed with utility men and most of the senior players are jaded and have lost their competitive edge and spirit." Abbas Ali Baig echoes that sentiment: "The senior players let the side down. Either they were not fully alive to the requirements of the one-day game or were unable or unprepared to execute the required strategy. The senior members seem to be playing for survival to hold out in the lucrative business that cricket has become." Pataudi feels that the bowling department needs immediate attention if India is to start winning Tests."People like Siva should be encouraged and not discouraged," he says. "It takes years for a spinner to mature. I would also bring in another opening bowler and Maninder."

Indian claims of having the greatest depth in batting of any international side sounded hollow in the face of their last two performances of the series. Dilip Vengsarkar still has the style and the talent but is a liability when quick runs and quick running is the order of the day. Azharuddin—whose bowling performance was the surprise bonus of the season—and Srikkanth have the latent ability to handle any attack but replacements will have to be found for Gavaskar, Amarnath and Vengsarkar in the near future. Clearly, Indian cricket administrators have their work cut out in trying to rebuild the side into the kind of combination that catapulted India to the top of international one-day cricket in the not so distant past.

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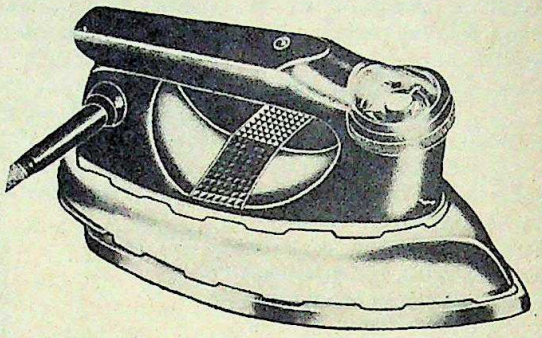

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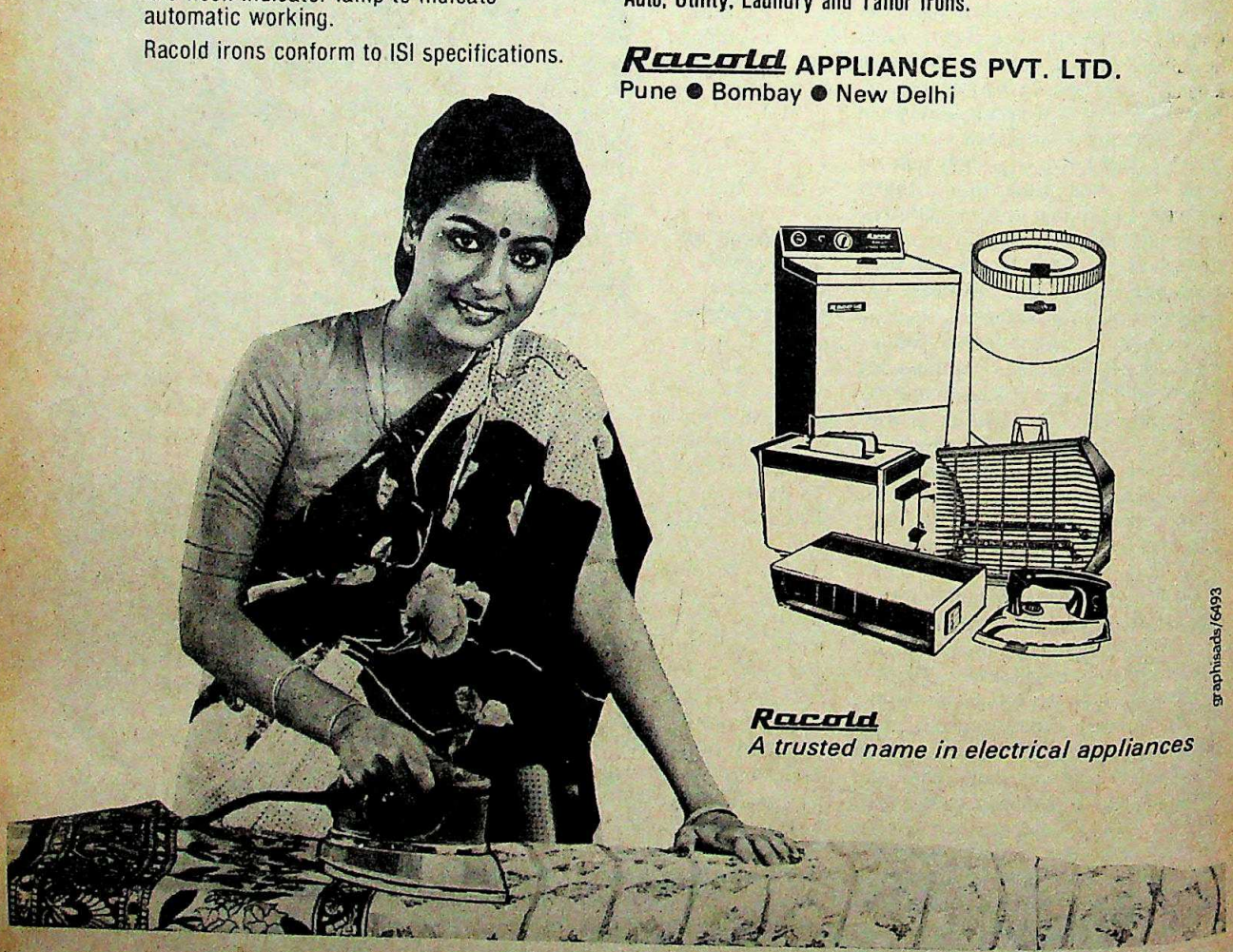

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DRUG EDICT

WITH the Government's new drug policy expected to be announced this month, numerous drug companies are revising their strategies for the pharmaceutical sector. Pfizer, owned 51 per cent by its parent company in the United States, has decided to reduce its overseas shareholding to 40 per cent so that it can escape the purview of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA) and get more elbow-room to take advantage of the freer policy environment that the Government is expected to introduce. Other drug companies that had planned to reduce their presence in the pharmaceutical sector because of poor profitability, and focus instead on such allied sectors as pesticides, are taking a fresh look at the new opportunities expected to be available for manufacturing drugs. Sandoz is one example and, industry observers say, there are others waiting in the wings.

CHIPPING IN

THE KILACHAND-owned Dodsal group of companies is sinking some Rs 20 crore in manufacturing floppy diskettes, computers and in a company to maintain and service power plants. Dodsal is better known as a pipeline laying firm. But Indmag, a sister firm, has obtained government clearance to manufacture 1.5 million floppy diskettes a year in collaboration with the US company Xidex-Dysan. A far bigger computer project is also on the cards in collaboration with Gould, the US computer company which Indmag represents in India, but its outcome depends on whether the Government will continue to reserve super-mini computer manufacture for the public sector. The third venture involves a tie up with Combustion Engineering, also a US firm.

QUE FERA FERA

THE CAMPAIGN by Indian entrepreneurs to get the Government to amend the FERA so that companies with a 40 per cent overseas shareholding do not get the same treatment as wholly Indian-owned companies, has finally failed. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi told a closed-door gathering of foreign and Indian businessmen in New Delhi last fortnight that the Government had no intention of rewriting FERA in any manner.

However, the parallel campaign to prevent the Government from revising its patent laws seems to have succeeded. Foreign businessmen had been pressing for a change of India's patent law on the ground that this did not provide sufficient protection from malpractices to patent-holders. But Indian businessmen argued that this would inhibit local enterprise, and have carried the day.

DIVISION OF LABOUR

PRIME Minister Rajiv Gandhi is thinking of reshuffling the ministerial division of labour, and combining commerce with external affairs to the extent possible so as to give a better push to the country's exports. Something like a department of economic relations or international trade may be set up as a separate wing in the External Affairs Ministry, and will be modelled on the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). The original author of the idea is believed to be a Delhi-based businessman close to the Rajiv Gandhi, and the prime minister made a mention of this at a recent meeting he had with businessmen.

COMMERCIALS BREAK

DOORDARSHAN seems to be making money hand over fist through advertisements and sponsored programmes. A recent study by the Operations Research Group (ORG) shows that money spent on TV advertising increased from Rs 3.78 crore in May 1985 to Rs 6.38 crore in November 1985—an increase of more than 68 per cent in six months. Colour advertisements through sponsored programmes account for the bulk of this sum, but the interesting finding is that the percentage of money coming in through the 'Super A' category has dropped from 86.4 per cent in May to 54.4 per cent in November.

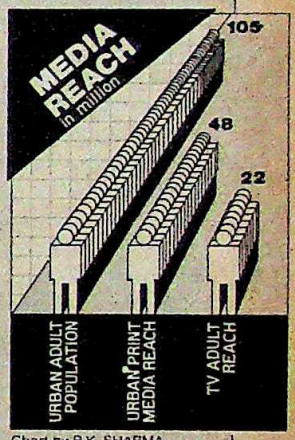

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

A second study conducted by Marketing Research and Advertising Services shows that TV advertising now reaches 22 million adults, whereas the total urban adult reach of the print media is no more than 48 million. Doordarshan has also begun eating into other forms of entertainment. The listnership for Vividh Bharati has dropped significantly in the evenings, while TV-owners went to the cinema only 67 per cent of the time that non-TV owners did.

YARN TANGLE

WITH large new capacities expected to be commissioned in both polyester staple fibre (PSF) and polyester filament yarn (PFY) in the coming months, a glut in the market seems imminent. Reliance Industries is commissioning its 45,000- tonne PSF unit in a month or two, so that the PSF capacity in the country will increase by more than 50 per cent at one go. Similarly, the Government's policy of encouraging all PFY manufacturers to increase their capacities to a minimum of 15,000 tonnes is expected to see PFY capacity more than double to the region of 1.5 lakh tonnes before the end of next year. Manufacturers, worried by the threatened glut, have resorted to a variety of stratagems to try and prevent a crisis. PSF manufacturers met recently in a move aimed at forming a price cartel, but most of those present refused to go along with this strategy. Hopes are now pinned on the Government announcing a duty reduction that will increase the demand for both commodities. The only hitch here is that a virtual halving of the duty on PSF last year did not result in any noticeable drop in the price of polyester cloth.

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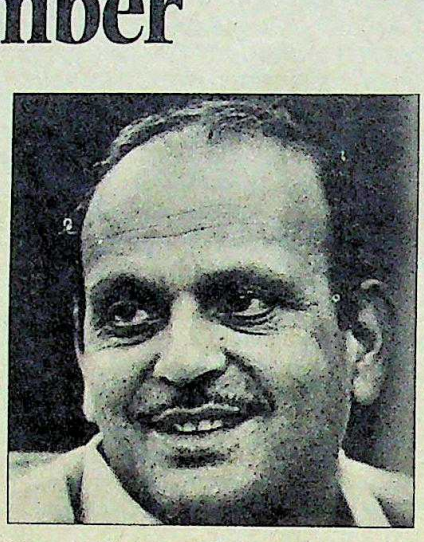
ECONOMY

Forever Amber

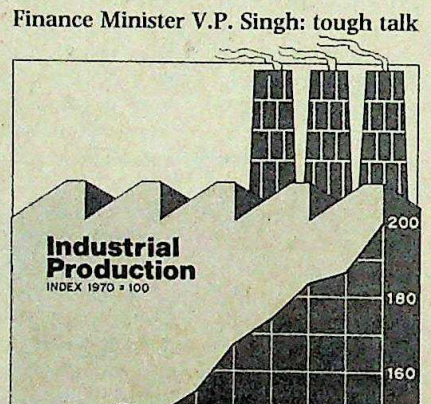
THE MACHINES are no more than a week old, and are the first thing to hit the visitor's eye: clean white computer facades, monitor screens, printers big and small, the latter capable of churning out slick charts in colour. The Finance Ministry's economic advisers now store their data on the economy's heart-beat and blood pressure on 20-megabyte hard disks. And in between reading the proofs of the annual economic survey, to be presented to Parliament later this month, or flipping through Faber's Book of Aphorisms (perhaps for an appropriate nugget of wisdom to be incorporated into the finance minister's budget speech), they listen to music on the IBM machines: Dvorak's lilting Humoresque, or such playful tunes as 'Yankee Doodle' and 'Pop Goes the Weasel'. As the sound fills the room, a musical note dances around on the piano keys displayed on the computer screen.

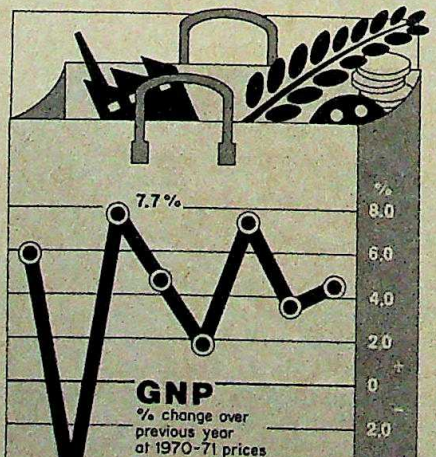
If all this looks like fun and games, the fact is that the economic advisers are up to serious business. Forced to retract somewhat on the price increase in petroleum goods last fortnight, and faced with pressure from members of Parliament to reduce plan investment if the alternative is to raise prices or taxes, the Finance Ministry is wrestling with an ambitious task: raising the level of plan investment more than the 7 per cent that has already been announced, with hefty increases in outlays for the Government's anti-poverty programmes. Indeed, far from shirking battle and shrinking the plan, the Government is getting ready for a level of spending that should take public sector investment in the seventh plan to more than the Planning Commission's five-year spending target of Rs 95,000 crore.

As Finance Minister V.P. Singh told a group of economic journalists last month, the development thrust has to be maintained while simultaneously reforming the tax system. The last budget did this successfully, for tax revenues are up sharply despite a slashing of income, corporate and wealth tax rates. But Singh said that a similar experiment with indirect taxes—like excise and customs duties—in the coming budget may be risky because the sums involved are much larger (revenue from indirect taxes is more than three times that from direct taxes).



Finance Minister V.P. Singh: tough talk





Charts by B.K. SHARMA

There were few other indications emerging from the Finance Ministry last fortnight on the budgetary effort round the corner. But the pre-budget mood in the Government last fortnight was cautiously optimistic. As one official confessed: "Certainly there are problems, and I can't say we are not worried. But we are on top of the problems."

He is right. Prices began to shoot skyward immediately after the last budget, but have been kept in check since then: the increase in wholesale prices till mid-January was just 3.3 per cent. There were also the doomsayers who forecast disaster because of the tax reliefs in the budget, but tax revenue is climbing by 23 per cent, which is almost double the budgeted increase.

But new problems have cropped up, most notably the trade deficit. The figures released by the Government for the first half of the financial year (April-September) show a fall in exports and a startling increase in the trade deficit by Rs 1,833 crore to Rs 4,124 crore—up by 80 per cent. But officials explain that these figures are misleading. Because of an inexplicable blunder, exports of gems and jewellery worth Rs 500 crore have not been included in the published figures of exports, so that the half-year trade deficit is much smaller. Nevertheless, the full year's trade deficit is expected to end up at a record Rs 7,000 crore, almost 40 per cent more than last year's Rs 5,100 crore.

There are other problems too: the industrial growth rate, measured by the Government's production index, shows a 7 per cent increase in the first seven months of the year, up to October. But confidential statistical exercises done in the Finance Ministry suggest that the picture is not quite so rosy, and this different method of charting production trends reveals a more modest growth curve.

Finally, there is the prospect of a very large budgetary deficit, certainly much larger than the estimate of Rs 3,349 crore presented in the budget last March. One ball park indication of the fiscal gap is the increase in the Government's treasury bills (instruments for getting 91-day credit from the Reserve Bank and others), and this figure has been running unusually high this year: by mid-January, the Government had issued additional bills worth Rs 6,516 crore. This figure varies widely from week to week, but the trend so far suggests that a large deficit is in the offing.

The finance minister is also worried by the negative fall-out of some of the Government's changes in economic pol-

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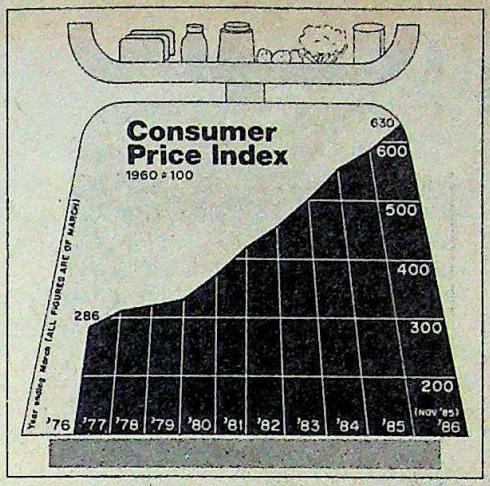
icy. At his meeting with economic journalists, he pointed out that the liberalisation of industrial policy had resulted in large-scale imports because new production facilities had a high import content. V.P. Singh in fact sounded a sombre warning when he said that if matters did not improve on the trade front, the Government would be forced to "cut consumption of luxury goods" and reduce the imports of items like sugar and edible oils. This, he said, would have to be done despite the risk of higher prices resulting. And even the thrust of the Government's licensing policy might have to be changed.

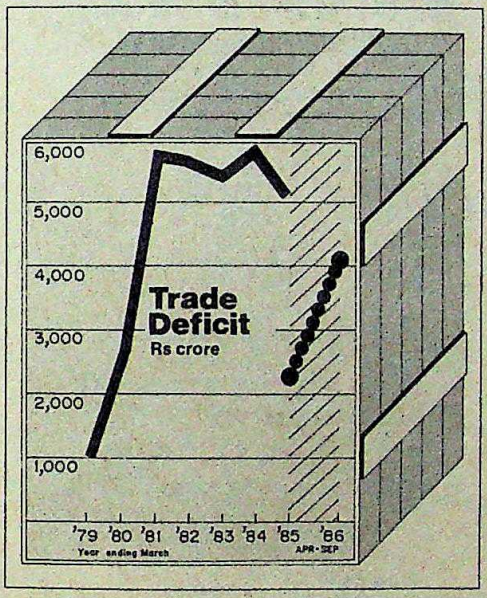
IF THAT sounded ominous, officials in the ministry paint a more positive picture. Thus, the Government has already cut back on sugar imports while keeping prices under check by increasing the percentage of sugar available in the open market (and reducing rationed sugar supplies). And with the announcement of a two-year sugarcane pricing policy for the first time, production is expected to get a major boost. The Finance Ministry economists' forecast: no sugar imports at all next year, and a saving of Rs 400 crore in foreign exchange.

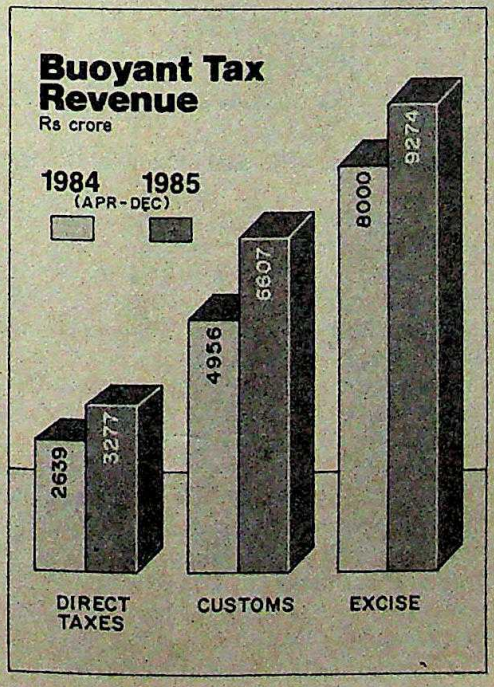
A different policy package has been worked out for oilseeds, which too is a heavy drain on foreign exchange. The Government has reduced the supply of imported oils to the vanaspati industry, forcing it to use otherwise shunned domestic substitutes like rice bran oil and cottonseed oil. The saving in imports this year alone, as a result, are estimated at Rs 160 crore; the savings next year will be more.

Finally, fertiliser imports are expected to drop in the future, with new plants being commissioned. And the petroleum import bill (up sharply this year from Rs 3,500 crore to Rs 4,700 crore) will drop because the Government is re-negotiating long-term oil import contracts in order to take advantage of the falling international oil prices. As a government official explained: "Eighty per cent of the increase in imports this year is because of bulk items like sugar, edible oils, fertiliser and petroleum. But all of them will present an improved picture next year."

Meanwhile, the somewhat alarmist talk of a devaluation of the rupee and a fresh recourse to borrowing from the International Monetary Fund is pooh-poohed by officials of both the Reserve







Bank of India (RBI) and the Finance Ministry. The RBI in fact points out that despite the large trade deficit, the country's foreign exchange reserves are in reasonably good shape. The RBI's figures show that the reserves have held steady till mid-January, at Rs 4,860 crore.

If the Government has drawn up its plan of action to tackle the trade problem, similar action had been planned to reduce the budgetary deficit, mainly by attacking the burgeoning subsidy bill. The subsidy on food has grown from Rs 710 crore to Rs 1,650 crore in the last three years, and that on fertiliser from Rs 600 crore to Rs 2,000 crore in the same period. Between them, the Government will thus be paying out Rs 3,650 crore this year.

The price increases in fertiliser and foodgrain prices last month will tackle this problem to some extent by reducing the subsidy element by Rs 550 crore, while the petroleum products' price hike was aimed essentially at reducing the subsidy on domestic cooking gas (Rs 10 per cylinder) and kerosene (70 paise per litre). Even after the Government climbed down partially on these price hikes, it stands to take in Rs 550 crore in a full year.

There is little doubt that the Government sees public sector pricing as a key method of bringing in the shekels for spending on the plan: the long-term fiscal policy which was released two months ago, said as much when it declared that "The bulk of the effort for augmenting...savings...will have to come from...public enterprises." Coal prices were raised last month, and steel prices might go up too, while telecommunications officials have warned that they too might have to raise tariffs in the near future.

Certainly, with the long-term fiscal policy talking of steady tax rates and reducing the Government's level of borrowings, the primary area of resource mobilisation from now on is expected to be the public sector. The only other option is to go in for large-scale deficit financing, but the finance minister has been advised by his economists that deficit financing is four times as inflationary as hiking product prices.

What they didn't warn him was that hiking prices might be four times more dangerous politically than a large budget deficit. But V.P. Singh will have learnt that by now. And the coming budget may well bear this out.

—T.N.NINAN

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PUBLIC SECTOR

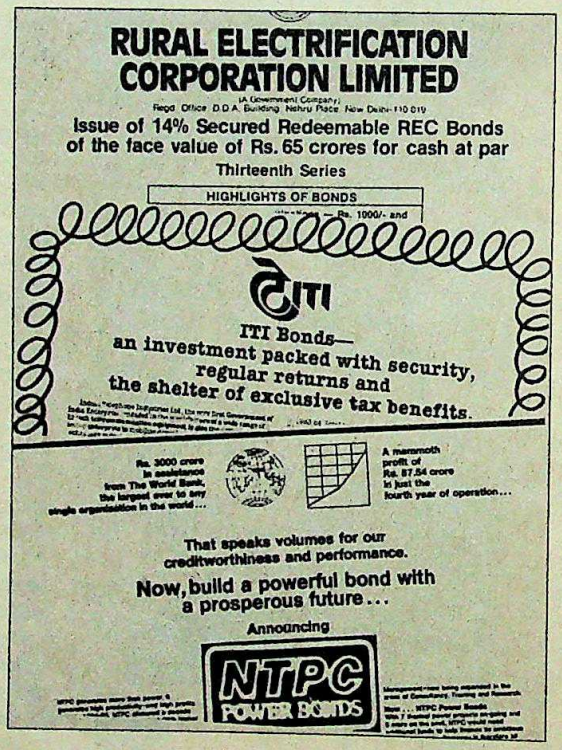
Tapping the Market

THEY STOMPED the country, addressing press conferences and stockbrokers' gatherings, hawking the uniqueness of their bonds. And newspaper advertisements and television spots drove the point home further. But what stood out at the end of it was not so much the hard sell as the companies behind it—all are profitable government-owned firms.

Last fortnight, after a media blitz that would have done private companies proud, the Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) and the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), kicked off the state sector's latest bid to tap the investor's purse with a Rs 100-crore bond issue each. Poised to follow suit early next month is the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) with a Rs 65-crore bond offering. And other government companies are waiting in the wings—the NHPC has a bond issue of up to Rs 150-crore in the works, the Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd (IPCL) has an initial debenture issue of Rs 40-crore on its drawing-boards, and two oil firms may be planning to take the plunge. Some of these bonds and debentures will be peddled to the financial institutions. Nevertheless, what is clear is that these firms are readying to mop up over Rs 500 crore from investors this year, more than double the amount they tapped last year, and the figure could sharply shoot up if firms are allowed to retain excess subscriptions. The message is clear—the public sector wants a hefty slice of the booming capital market cake, estimated at over Rs 3,000 crore this year.

The headlong rush to the market to fund investment programmes is also not a flash in the pan. IPCL alone wants to rake in an additional Rs 260-crore through bonds in the next three years. NTPC Chairman and Managing Director M.L. Shishoo says that his company's bond issue is meant to "probe the market", implying more issues to come.

If the public sector is gearing to give private companies a run for their money, government initiative and the resources famine in the seventh plan are clearly responsible. Along with the last budget, Union Finance Minister V.P. Singh proposed a scheme of special bonds for state-owned power and telecommunications companies. Both are crucial infrastructural areas and faced resources cuts. (In telecommunications, for example, seventh plan outlays were pruned from over Rs 12,000 crore to Rs 4,010 crore.) Details of the scheme were unveiled some months later, but the Government had plainly launched a new, more flexible, security. With their buy-back facility after a year, coupons to collect interest from banks instead of the company as is the case with government bonds, and some income and wealth tax exemptions, the new bonds are seductive enough.



Prospectus' of public sector companies

Certainly, the bonds offer a ray of hope to companies strapped for cash. At the ground level, the expansion programmes of a number of firms will be in jeopardy if the money for them is not forthcoming. ITI Chairman and Managing Director K.P.P. Nambiar implies as much when he says: "One reason for going to the public is the inadequate resource allocation." The Government has earmarked Rs 335 crore for ITI's seventh plan projects but expects the telecommunications firm to raise well over a third of this from the market. The NTPC wanted Rs 12,700 crore for both ongoing and new projects, but was sanctioned only Rs 5,600 crore, barely enough to foot the bill for work under way. Since it takes five years to set up a major power unit, eighth plan projects have to begin now and the cash for this is therefore important. Similarly, the REC gets most of its money from the Government in the form of loans and equity. But the funding agency has now been told to seek 17 per cent of this year's outlay of Rs 379 crore from the public.

The bonds have another advantage for firms. With a 14 per cent rate of interest, they are a cheaper means of raising money than bank loans which carry an 18 per cent interest tag. The exception to this rule is the REC. It gets money from the Government by paying 8.75 per cent interest, and company officials are plainly unhappy about going the new bonds route. The firm's Finance Director M.Prasad, reckons that his company will drop Rs 1 crore in profits next year as a consequence of the higher interest.

What emerges from all this is that the money to be picked up from the investor will be small beer compared with total corporate requirements. But most are banking on foreign aid and internal profits to plug some of the gaps. Some are also counting on their issues being heavily oversubscribed. The ITI hopes to bag a neat Rs 150-crore from the public plus another Rs 50 crore from the financial institutions, while the NTPC expects to garner "a minimum of Rs 300-crore". Controller of Capital Issues P.G. Mankad says: "We are yet to decide on whether the companies should be allowed to keep the extra subscriptions."

Much rides on the Government's eventual decision, but what is really at stake is the credibility of public sector firms in the market-place. As one company chairman put it last fortnight: "This is a test case for our credibility." Few will quarrel with that assessment.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

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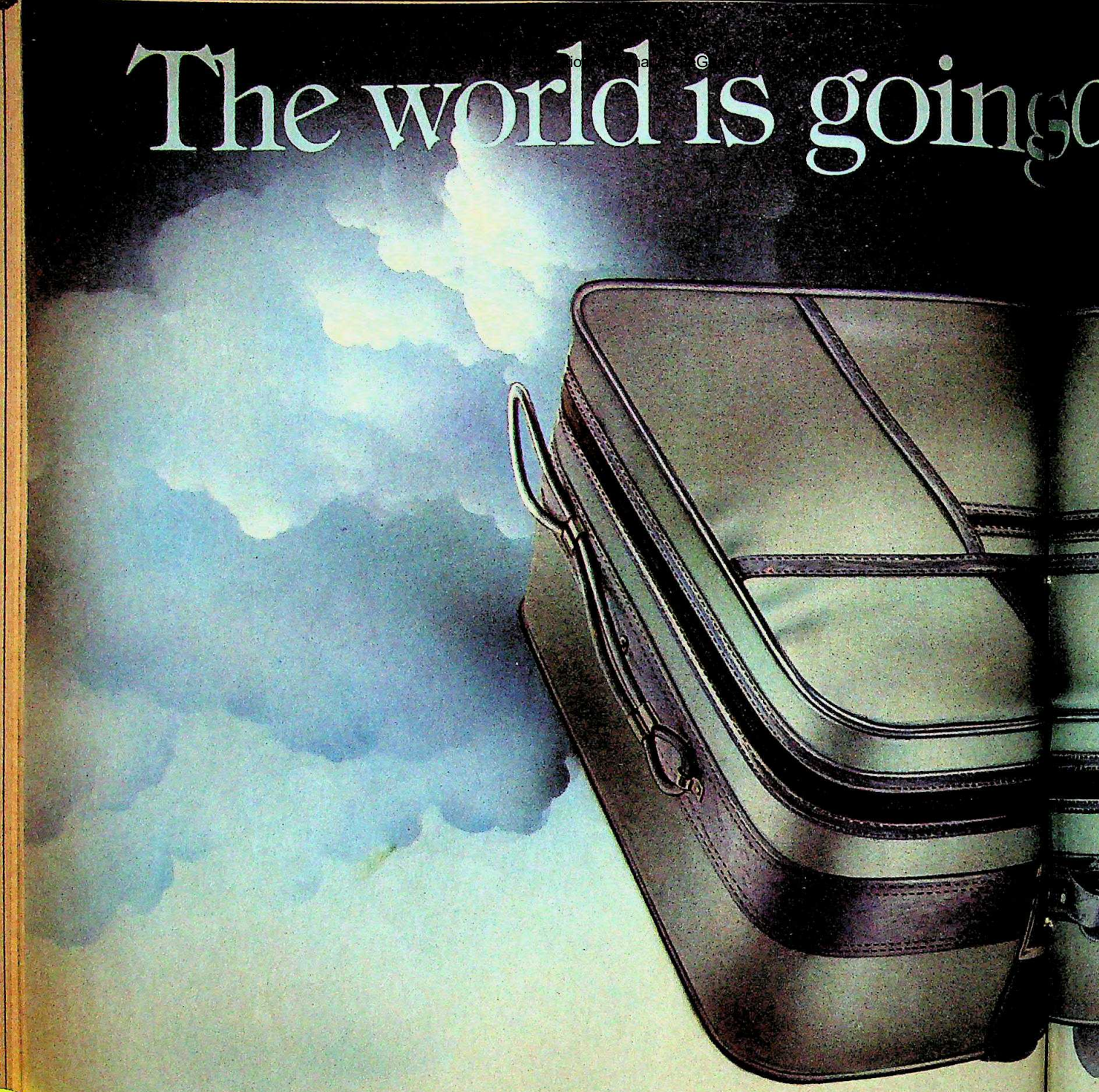

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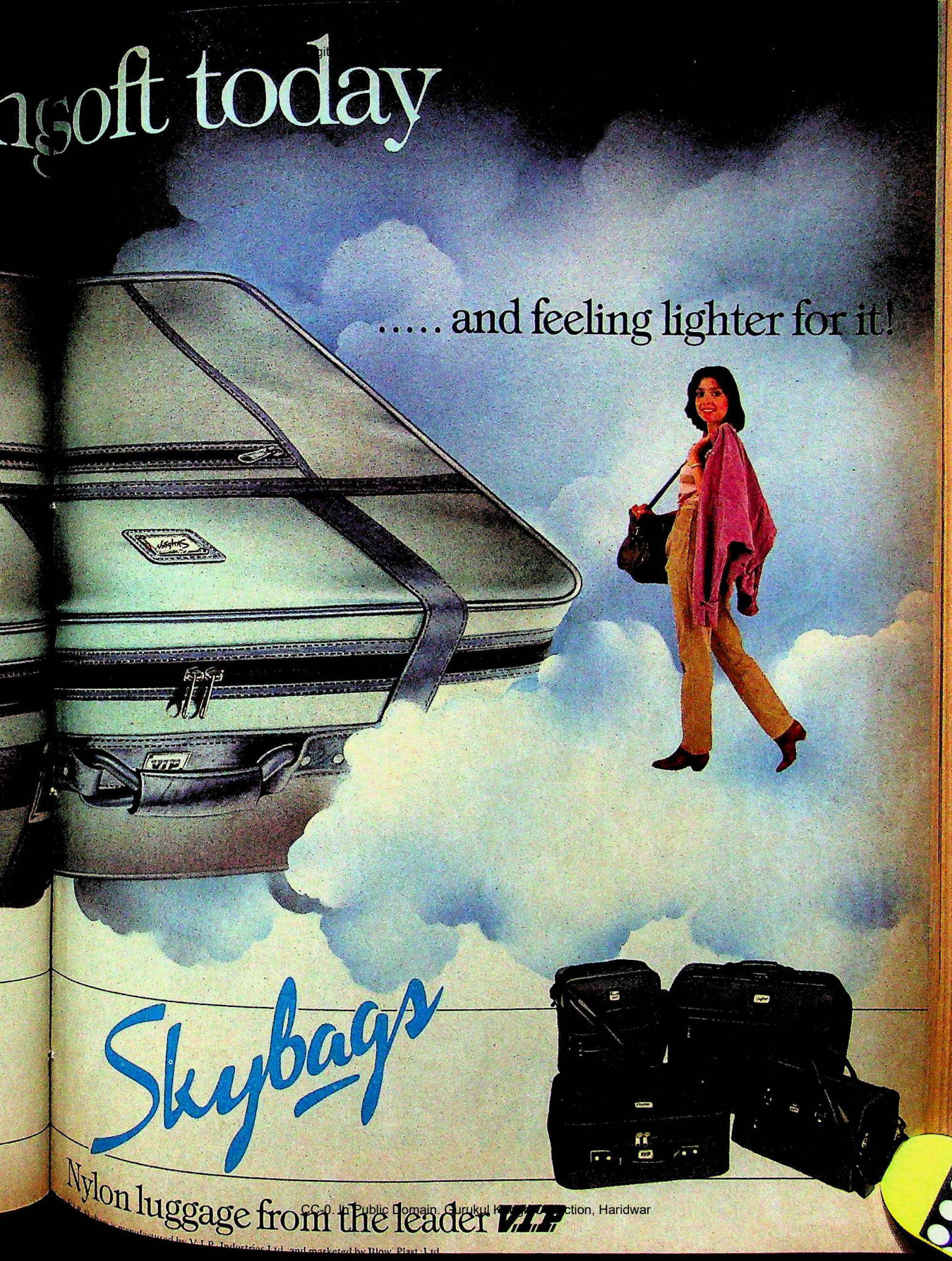

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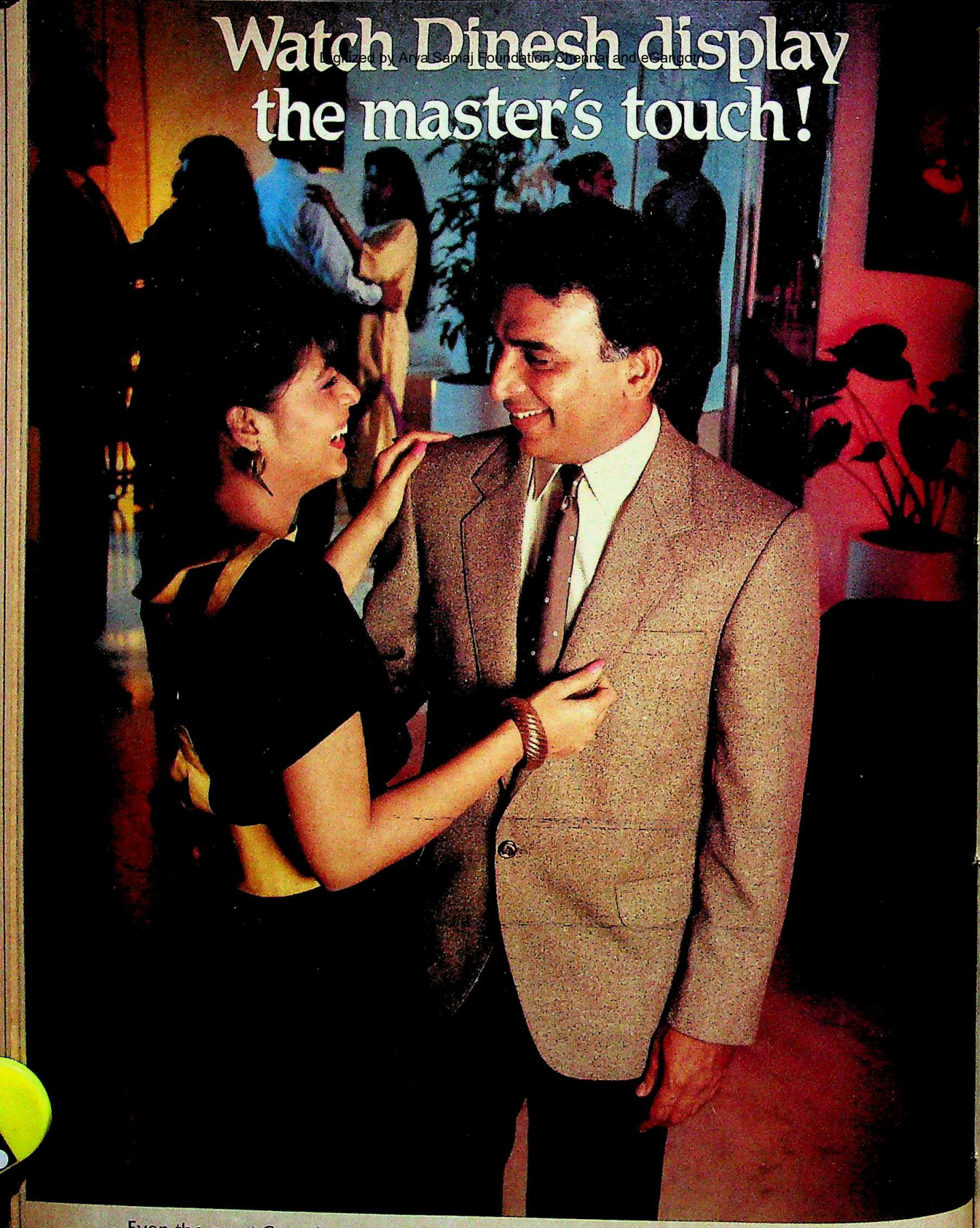

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HOTEL BANJARA

Snapping Ties

OFF CAME the ITC Welcomgroup's stylised *namaste* logo from the external facade, crockery, furnishings and stationery of the Banjara Hotel, Hyderabad's only five-star hostelry; on went the Banjara wheel of the Lambada tribals.

Hotel Banjara Ltd (HBL), the company which owns the hotel property, and ITC's Welcomgroup, which has managed the nine-storey hotel for the last six years to earn 7 per cent of its Rs 46 crore turnover, did *namaste* to each other late last month and parted ways. The Welcomgroup's seven managers flew out of the city without ado, and ITC's directors who had booked rooms in the hotel for a board meeting in the city cancelled their bookings and decided to stay elsewhere. And in HBL Managing Director Radhey Shyam Agarwal's office, the porcelain ashtray had the Banjara wheel pasted over the *namaste*.

This is no ordinary parting of ways. The HBL chairman is A.N. Haksar, who was chairman of ITC till three years ago. And HBL's managing director, Agarwal, is one of ITC's biggest distributors of cigarettes: he does a mammoth Rs 25-crore worth of business with the company and its affiliates. As if that didn't make the affair enough of a family dispute, ITC's present Chairman, Jagdish Sapru, is Haksar's brother-in-law.

So within days of the parting of ways following failure to renew a technical services contract that expired 19 months ago, the air was thick with reports of other Welcomgroup hotel owners breaking ranks and joining hands with Agarwal to start a rival chain. Indeed, Agarwal himself said that he hoped to build a new hotel chain "with Haksar Saab as the guiding spirit".

Three hotels were initially expected to switch camps: the Searock in Bombay, the Adyar Gate in Madras and the Rama International at Aurangabad, all of them presently under management contracts with Welcomgroup. The Aurangabad hotel is in fact owned by Anil Agarwal, nephew of Banjara's Radhey Shyam Agarwal.

But a Welcomgroup spokesman said last fortnight that Anil Agarwal had rushed to New Delhi to reassure them that he had no intention of quitting, and Haksar said: "I wouldn't try to get other hotels from the Welcomgroup chain; even if I did, I don't think I would succeed. Each hotel owner has to look after his own interests."

Whatever the case, one fact was immediately clear: the split in Hyderabad was not an isolated event, and perhaps had a bearing on the relationship between Haksar and Sapru. Although Haksar insists that there is no friction between the two (Sapru was not available for comment), it is common knowledge within ITC that the two don't get along.

In his final months in office as chairman, Haksar had decided on a deal that involved the twin takeover of India Cements and Ashok Paper, which Sapru undid. Then Haksar, who had become chairman of the tea company Jokai India, was keen on getting ITC to use its distribution network to market packaged tea. Once again, Sapru would have nothing to do with it. And while Haksar had talked in the past of diversifying into such areas as electronics, Sapru has stayed clear of this as well.

These differences did not come in the way of Haksar staying on after retiring, to help the Welcomgroup chain. But that last link was snapped a year-and-a-half ago. And now, it seems, other links are to be snapped too.

The key question is whether Agarwal will be able to retain his multi-crore distributorship of ITC's cigarettes. The kind of friction suggested by ITC directors cancelling their bookings at the Banjara could mean a snapping of ties, though it is just as likely that ITC will be unwilling to severe links with a long-standing business associate because of differences concerning a relatively small hotel operation.

While there was no official comment on the subject from ITC last fortnight, Agarwal said: "More than half my annual business turnover is through sales of ITC and its companies' products, and I have no interest in ruining my business." Nevertheless, there is friction in the air. The new Banjara managers complain that Welcomgroup is diverting business to other hotels or simply declaring that "Banjara is under renovation", a charge that the Welcomgroup spokesman denied.

If Agarwal's relationship with ITC has soured somewhat, he has by all indications struck a good working relationship with Haksar, who is helping Agarwal plan a Rs 70-crore real estate project outside Delhi, involving the building of 750 luxury flats.

"I hope to build a new hotel chain with Haksar Saab as the guiding spirit."
R.S. AGARWAL
managing director, HBL

JANATA STUDIOS

Hotel Banjara: parting company

"I wouldn't try to get other hotels from Welcomgroup; I don't think I would succeed."
A.N. HAKSAR
chairman, HBL

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INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN COMPETITION

INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR ARTS

Government of India has announced an International Architectural Design Competition for the proposed Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts in New Delhi. The Centre is to be located at a site on the Central Vista from the cross-section of Janpath and Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road and Man Singh Road. The site is approximately 21.9 acres. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts Complex will have five buildings comprising of (i) The Kala Nidhi Division for Information System and Data Bank for Arts and Humanities, (ii) The Kala Kosha Division for research studies and publication projects of Encyclopaedias of Art and reference works (iii) The Janapada Sampada for Folk and Tribal Arts, (iv) The Arts Projection Complex suitable for performing visual, literary arts with multi-media projection facilities called Kala Darshana; and (v) The Administrative Building. The envisaged built-up area is approximately 100,000 sq. metres. The design should reflect the integration of the Arts. It should also suitably reflect both Asian artistic traditions and modern manifestations.

Registration for the Competition is open from 26th January, 1986 and final day for submission of design is 30th September, 1986. All qualified architects may register for the competition on payment of a non-refundable registration fee of Rs.500 for architects, residents in India, or US Dollars 200 for foreign architects. Request for registration for the Competition together with photo copy of the Architect's registration entitling him to practising in his country should be sent to Shri Ranjit Sabikhi, Professional Adviser, IGNCA International Design Competition Secretariat, Department of Arts, Vigyan Bhavan Annexe, New Delhi-110011 by registered post. Enquiries regarding registration may also be made at the same address. Registration request should be accompanied by the fee payable by Bank Draft drawn in the name of Director, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi. Architects in India are advised to submit separate copy of their registration with the Council of Architects.

The International Jury for the Competition consists of Mr. Fumihiko Maki, Mr. James Stirling, Shri B.V. Doshi, Shri A.P. Kanvinde, Shrimati Pupul Jayakar, Dr. (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsyayan and a representative of the International Union of Architects. There will be three prizes; the first prize carrying an award of Rs.10.00 lakhs; the second prize Rs.5.00 lakhs and the third prize Rs.3.00 lakhs.

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Meanwhile, the immediate question was how well Banjara would fare on its own. Agarwal said that the 13 per cent of the take being paid to ITC (Rs 30 lakh last year) would be used to improve the hotel's facilities. Haksar said Rs 4 crore would be spent on Banjara alone, including a project to add to the hotel's 130 rooms. He added that the best hotels in the world were not part of any chain.

But Welcomgroup spokesmen pointed out that the absence of the chain's association at a time when rival five-star hotels were about to be opened in Hyderabad by the Oberois as well as the public sector India Tourism Development Corporation would inevitably hamper Banjara's operations. Also, the Taj and Senator hotel chains have identified land for their own hotels in Hyderabad, while Welcomgroup quickly signed up with the Navabharat Group (tobacco and tea exporters) to put up a brand-new hotel in three years.

Agarwal, however, seemed unfazed by all the threatened competition, and said: "Let us wait and see whether the Banjara wheel of fortune will roll to different parts of the country."

—AMARNATH K. MENON

DINERS CLUB

Paying Strike

DR DATTA Samant (MBBS) MP is not a person whom businessmen and industrialists take lightly: the massive trade union leader speaks on behalf of over 15 lakh workers in Maharashtra and Gujarat. But, in recent times, no foray of his has caused more consternation than the strike by 125 Bombay employees of Diners Club India Pvt Ltd affiliated to Samant's Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union (MGKU). The high-profile, upper-class credit organisation, with a membership of nearly 68,000 and total annual billings of over Rs 60 crore, was crippled for over a month at the beginning of 1986 by the strike which revealed among other things, that the majority of its employees were receiving salaries lower than those earned by peons in similarly profitable corporations else where.

The Aggarwals (left); and Diners employees: accord

It was a soul-stirring experience for Shamsunder and Parveez Aggarwal, the go-getting couple who took over the Diners franchise 10 years ago and have since quadrupled membership—they added 15,000 in the last year alone—even as billings multiplied nearly 20 times. Perhaps the fact that they were busy expanding all these years may have had something to do with the fact that as punch operator Suresh Rao puts it, "we got pittances while they raked in the cash", and even Parveez admits that "we know that there have been mistakes". The company, which earns a commission of roughly 4 per cent on billings—current earnings are therefore over Rs 3 crore a year—has given birth to two highly lucrative spin-offs: Diners Business Services, an office services set-up and Diners World Travel, a travel agency, but had no personnel department until two years ago.

The result was that people like R.S. Mundhye, a clerk with 16 years experience could earn Rs 670 a month and telephone operator Moni Menezes, with 15 years experience made slightly over Rs 1,000 a month. Says Brian Crasto, a union leader: "When we realised that the management wasn't going to do anything for us we asked Dr Samant to lead us." The employees who struck work said that although accounts showed an amount of Rs 30 lakh under salaries, the executives took a large chunk of it away, with the result that they were paid only Rs 1.20 lakh a year.

Their first charter of demands requested definite wage scales and a consolidated pay rise of about Rs 700 a month; the second, put together after a mutual lawyer friend of Samant's and the Aggarwals took a hand in the negotiations, asked for a Rs 500 increase all round. Indications were that the Aggarwals would accept this: their motivations in doing so were not exactly altruistic—every month of strike means Rs 6 crore in billings gone.

The new wage bill will, according to Shamsunder, be doubled to Rs 60 lakh. But the Aggarwals appear to have taken this in their stride. What Parveez calls "one big family" appeared to have resolved its differences for the time being and a slightly amused Samant—"Why do you want to talk about this small thing?"—is reported to have assured the owners that "discipline is my responsibility from now on". But the Aggarwals will wait and see for some time until they give him credit for that.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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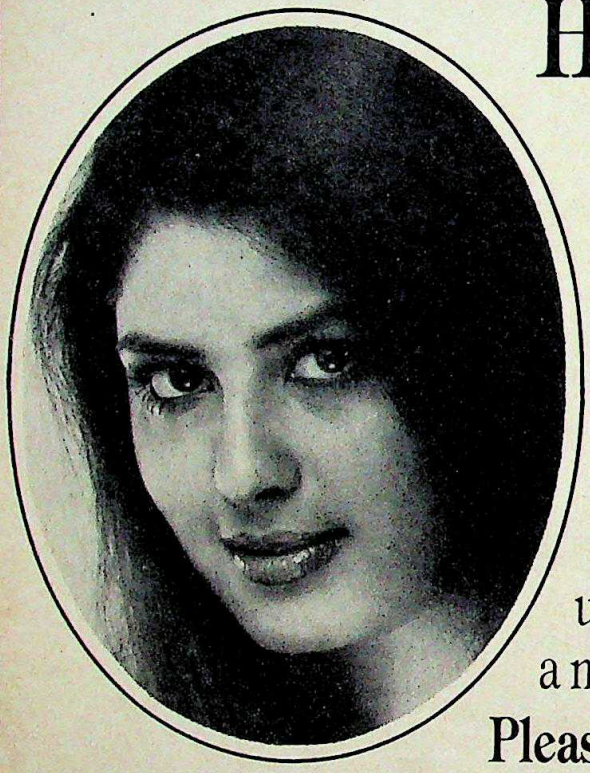
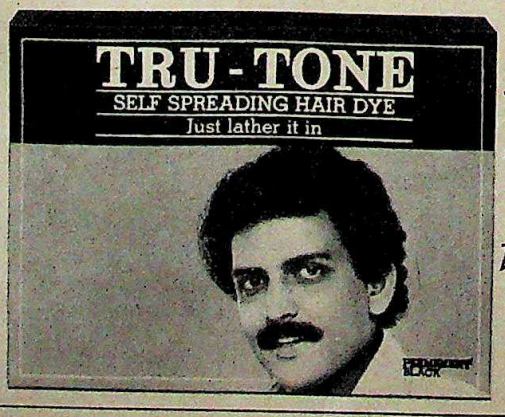


Self-spreading action:
Just apply the dye and lather it in.
It spreads evenly by itself.

Longer lasting, deep-dye action:
New Tru-Tone comes with the unique deep-dye action to give you a natural colour that stays on longer.

Pleasantly perfumed, with conditioner:
Tru-Tone keeps your hair soft and manageable.
Looking younger was never so easy!



New

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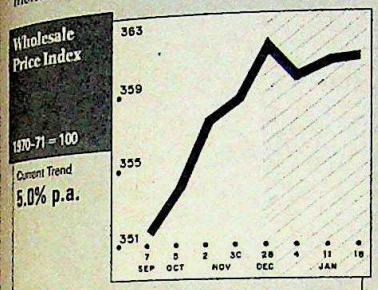
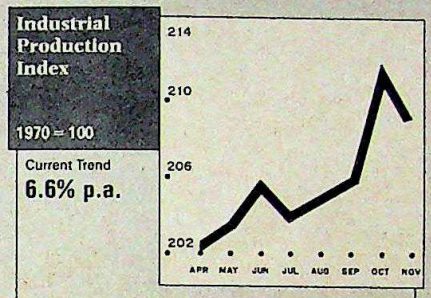
THINGS are no longer looking good on the price front, with the wholesale price index steadily rising. Complementing this is the sluggishness of the industrial and manufacturing sectors, whose growth rates leave much to be desired. The rate of growth of power generation, too, has dropped. Money supply remains on trend, bank credit has contracted and gold prices keep falling.

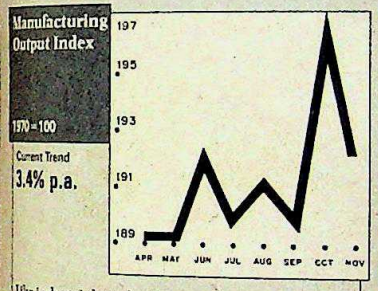
All data are seasonally adjusted. The current trend is computed on the basis of the past six months' data, to which regressions are fitted.



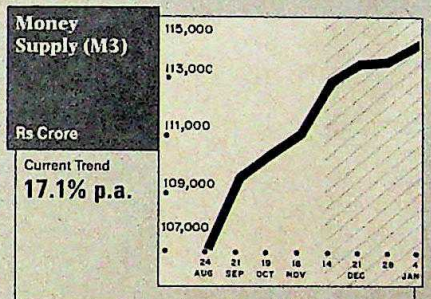
Wholesale prices are steadily but surely rising. Since the base year is 1970-71, the true price trend would be higher than shown.



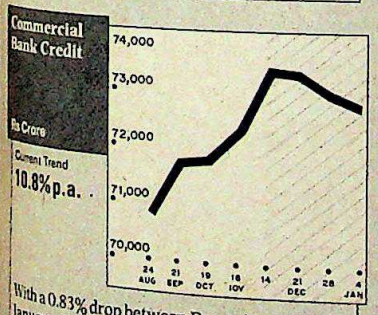
Industrial production nosedived by 1.4% in October-November 1985. Budget concessions do not seem to have helped.



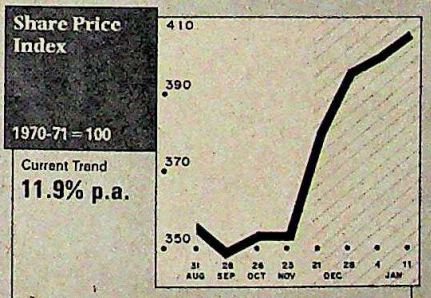
Like industrial production, manufacturing output fell by 2.5% in November 1985, reversing the sharp upswing of a month ago.



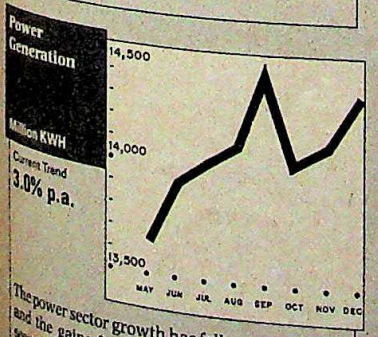
Money supply remains in line with the long-term trend, fluctuating around 17% per annum, with a tight control over M3.



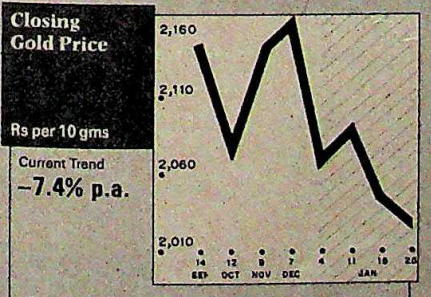
With a 0.83% drop between December 1985 and January 1986, commercial bank credit has tightened further.



Though share prices rose by 2.5% between end-December and mid-January, the market seems to have stabilised at a reasonable rate of growth.



The power sector growth has fallen to barely 3% and the gains from better capacity utilisation seem to have petered out.



Though general prices have risen, gold prices seem to be steadily falling—and the marriage season has made no difference at all.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of Items in September 1985

	%Growth
Cement Machinery	195.37
Metallurgical Machinery	50.69
Dairy Products	30.25
Artificial Leather & Oil Cloth	21.18
Watches & Clocks	19.44
Explosives	19.32
Handtools & Small Tools	16.03
Chemical & Pharmaceutical Machinery	14.87
Air-conditioners & Refrigerators	12.54
Tea Machinery	12.14
Salt	12.01
Sewing Machines	11.82
Pens & Pencils	8.80
Hydrogenated Oil	8.21
Man-Made Fibres	7.98
Dairy Machinery	7.53
Jute Textiles	6.97
Paints & Varnishes	6.31
Railway Locomotives	5.59
Electrical Machinery	5.46
Dye-Stuffs	5.30
Beverage Industry	5.26
Coffee Curing Works	5.15
Iron & Steel Structurals	4.23
Typewriters & Duplicators	4.20
Telecommunications	4.15
Pharmaceuticals	3.63
Iron & Steel	3.23
Motor Cars	3.20
Cotton & Blended Yarn	3.07
Electric Light & Power	3.06
Non-Ferrous Basic Metal Industries	2.98
Inorganic Chemicals	2.40
Mining & Quarrying	1.73
Electrical Lamps	1.23
Power-Driven Pumps	1.23
Bakery Products	0.98
Tyres & Tubes	0.32
Soaps & Glycerine	−0.11
Newsprint	−0.38
Cotton & Blended Fabrics	−0.69
Paper	−0.77
Conveying Equipment	−1.22
Matches	−1.38
Fertilisers	−1.54
Buses, Trucks & Jeeps	−1.97
Cement	−2.16

Of the 86 series considered, 39 of them with a total weight of 51.6699998 had a positive growth and 47 of them with a total weight of 36.306 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1985	1984
Electricity Generation		
Million Kwh, December	14871	13995
Call Money Rate		
Percent, December	10.0	10.0
Industrial Licences		
Numbers, November	58	62
Letters of Indent		
Numbers, November	85	90
Foreign Collaboration		
Numbers, October-December	337	208

Compiled by THE POLICY GROUP ICIM

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"If you have leprosy, you have nothing to fear"

A young girl and her enlightened in-laws teach the world a lesson

Malti has just got married. There is nothing unusual about this fact since most girls of twenty do get married. But what makes Malti an unusual bride is that she once had leprosy.

Malti has nothing to hide

Raju had fallen in love with Malti when she was eighteen — a bright, vivacious, good looking college student. Four months later, he proposed to her and she, on the advice of her parents, accepted.

But there was a hitch : her history of leprosy. Should her parents conceal the fact ? "After a great deal of debate we decided not to," explained Malti's father, "after all, Malti was cured. But we didn't want her in-laws to learn of her past condition from some other source."

Malti's in-laws understand

Raju's parents listened to Malti's story. Malti was ten when a pale patch on her arm was shown to a doctor. The diagnosis was leprosy in its earliest stage. Her treatment lasted a few years. Yet, all along, Malti led a normal life. She went to school. She played with friends. She travelled. But never once did she miss her appointments at the clinic. In time, the patch on her arm disappeared and after a comprehensive check-up, she was pronounced completely cured. "There is absolutely no chance of either Raju or their children getting the disease because of her," concluded Malti's father.

It was then that Raju's mother did an astonishing thing. She took off her gold chain and put it around Malti's neck. "To us Malti won't ever be a daughter-in-law," she said, "but a daughter."

Leprosy is curable

All the patient needs is :

- Early detection
- Early intervention
- Sustained treatment
- Community support throughout

Your support counts

Leprosy is the least infectious of all infectious diseases. Only neglected cases run the risk of deformities at a later, more advanced stage. Yet, this condition need never occur. That is why leprosy patients can be — and should be — retained in the mainstream of life.

Encourage them. Support them. Remind them — and yourself — that they pose no threat to their family and friends.

Malti's story proves that it can be done. All you need is an open mind.

TATA STEEL

Issued in the interest of better understanding and support for the leprosy patient — by TATA STEEL and UNICEF.

The real healing touch must come from you

The true identity of the leprosy patient has been concealed for want of community support.

For further information, write to : Leprosy Awareness Campaign, C/o UNICEF Information Service, 73 Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110 003.

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THE MARKETS

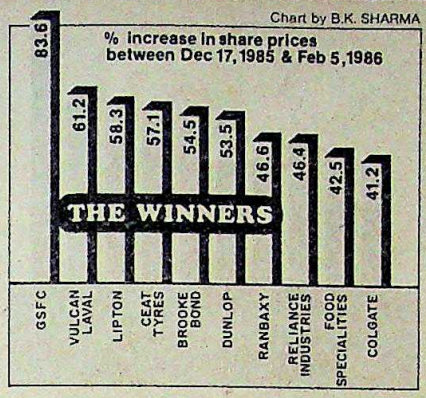
Bonus Fever

THE STOCK-market hasn't seen a boom year like 1985. But 1986 has had an even more astonishing start, with an amazing rise in the equity prices of a whole range of companies. In the last six weeks, the prices of Gujarat State Fertiliser Corporation (GSFC) shares have shot up by an astounding 83.6 per cent, while Dunlop, Brooke Bond, Ceat, Lipton and Vulcan Laval have all gone up by more than 50 per cent.

This reflects extraordinary confidence in the future of these companies, for the Government's reputation has taken a beating and the Union Budget is round the corner. Last year's equity boom had come only after the path-breaking budget, and the big question is whether this year's budget will produce the opposite effect.

Nevertheless, there are reasons for the boom. GSFC's sudden acceleration was caused by an inspired leak that the company board might be considering the issue of convertible bonds, and that a decision would be known later this month. Similarly, Reliance scaled new heights because of the expectation of bumper profits in 1985, an expanded dividend and of a bonus issue. And Tata Steel sky-rocketed after Steel Minister K.C.Pant declared that a price increase in steel was inevitable.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



For all that, there were the slumps too, and something seemed amiss. Many of the shares that had led an earlier spirited climb tended to fall back down the slopes. There was a clear downtrend in automobile and related shares, including Premier Automobiles, the once consistently supported Motor Industries, Hindustan Motors, Ashok Leyland, Chloride India, Kinetic Engineering, Kirloskar Cummins, and Lohia Machines. This unusually consistent trend across the stock-market for automobile shares suggests that investors have reassessed the future of the automobile industry.

Some companies that had announced bonuses also declined, including Hindustan Development. Clearly, the bears have not left the field to the bulls rampaging the market. This was most evident in Century Spinning, where the bulls speculated on the possibility of a bonus issue and drove the price up from Rs 1,460 to Rs 1,600. But this fell back the next day to Rs 1,520, and after climbing again to Rs 1,700 finally settled at Rs 1,640. This suggested that the bulls had really been concentrating their attack on just these shares.

If indeed the recent buoyancy has been fuelled mainly by windfall bonus issues, then the market may in fact quieten down in the last couple of weeks before the budget. Certainly, the pre-budget revenue-raising exercise does not promise good news on budget day.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1986 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 5.2.86	Change on Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	40.00	40.00	5.00 –
Associated Bearings	895.00	775.00	880.00	45.00 +
Associated Cement	386.00	346.00	374.00	12.00 +
Atlas Copco	91.50	77.00	91.50	13.50 +
Bajaj Auto	2030.00	1950.00	2015.00	5.00 +
Ballarpur	65.50	55.00	62.50	3.50 +
Baroda Rayon	470.00	410.00	470.00	60.00 +
Bata India	82.50	72.00	72.00	5.50 –
Bayer	575.00	445.00	570.00	110.00 +
Best & Crompton	102.00	84.00	102.00	6.00 +
Bharat Forge	86.00	73.00	74.00	3.00 –
Blow Plast	160.00	122.00	140.00	10.00 –
Blue Star	110.00	92.50	105.00	nil
Bombay Dyeing	120.00	86.00	93.50	7.50 –
Brooke Bond	95.00	74.00	95.00	13.00 +
Ceat Tyres	385.00	240.00	385.00	80.00 +
Century Spinning	1655.00	1430.00	1640.00	150.00 +
Chloride India	122.00	99.00	105.00	2.00 –
Citurgia	65.00	53.00	59.00	4.00 –
Colgate	262.50	220.00	240.00	10.00 +
Cyanamid	100.00	70.00	93.00	7.00 –
DCM	58.50	46.00	46.50	3.50 –
Dunlop	67.50	49.75	66.00	14.00 +
Elecon Engg.	97.50	82.50	95.00	12.50 +
Escorts	94.00	78.00	81.00	0.50 –
Food Specialities	260.00	235.00	260.00	20.00 +
Garware Nylon	61.50	46.00	49.00	6.00 –
Glaxo	87.00	66.00	75.00	5.00 –
G.E. Shipping	36.00	27.75	32.00	0.50 –
Gujarat St Fertilisers	1580.00	925.00	1570.00	450.00 +
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	80.00	85.00	2.50 +
Hindustan Lever	139.00	127.50	137.00	3.00 +
Hindustan Motors	128.50	120.00	124.50	1.00 +
Indian Explosives	84.50	69.00	81.50	12.50 –
Indian Hotels	130.00	115.00	130.00	2.50 +
Indian Organic	90.00	78.50	85.00	1.00 +
Indian Rayon	137.00	119.00	124.00	6.00 –
Indrol	360.00	285.00	342.50	32.50 +
Ind. Suzuki	81.00	58.00	71.00	4.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	480.00	360.00	445.00	5.00 +
ITC	63.50	53.00	63.50	8.00 +
J K Synthetics	122.00	106.00	118.00	8.00 +
Kinetic Engineering	325.00	280.00	280.00	15.00 –
Kirloskar Cummins	700.00	655.00	660.00	32.50 –
Lakme	195.00	172.50	185.00	5.00 –
Larsen & Toubro	198.00	180.00	192.50	5.50 +
Lipton	68.25	46.50	66.50	9.75 +
Lohia Machines	70.00	65.00	66.00	2.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	72.00	79.00	2.00 +
Motor Industries	910.00	760.00	790.00	50.00 –
National Organic	777.50	585.00	772.50	120.00 +
Nirlon	77.00	61.00	71.00	2.00 –
Orkay Silk Mills	167.00	125.50	151.00	7.00 –
Peico Electronics	104.50	80.00	84.00	nil
Premier Auto	745.00	632.50	667.50	25.00 –
Ranbaxy	152.50	116.00	152.50	32.50 +
Raymond	97.00	84.00	86.50	6.50 –
Reliance Industries	327.00	226.00	325.00	47.00 +
Sandoz	87.00	62.00	87.00	1.00 +
Shriram Fibres	80.00	71.00	78.50	2.00 +
SPIC	146.00	129.50	143.00	5.00 +
Tata Steel	1325.00	1142.50	1325.00	130.00 +
Telco	900.00	780.00	890.00	24.00 +
Vulcan Laval	140.00	85.00	138.00	nil
Zenith Steel	97.00	73.00	83.00	6.00 –
20th Century Leasing	77.50	62.00	62.00	5.00 –

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.7745	8.6882
Austria	Schilling	100	74.8957	74.0965
Bahrain	Dinar	1	32.2922	32.1730
Bangladesh	Taka	100	41.5430	41.2211
Canada	Dollar	1	8.8010	8.7187
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.4275	1.4146
Egypt	Pound	1	14.9332	14.9091
France	Franc	1	1.7176	1.7017
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6177	1.6044
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1132	1.1003
Iran	Rial	100	14.5770	14.4032
Italy	Lira	100	0.7600	0.7501
Japan	Yen	100	6.5871	6.5296
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7720	0.7699
Kuwait	Dinar	1	43.3532	43.2029
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.1174	5.0726
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8532	0.8301
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6080	0.5900
Netherlands	Guilder	1	4.6531	4.6120
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7873	0.7530
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.9125	5.8601
Spain	Peseta	100	8.2030	8.1139
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4580	0.4471
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.6696	1.6547
Switzerland	Franc	1	6.2133	6.1554
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7689	0.7440
Thailand	Baht	100	47.7132	46.5230
UK	Pound	1	17.4657	17.3460
USA	Dollar	1	12.6025	12.4850
UAE	Dirham	1	3.3932	3.3033
USSR	Rouble	1	16.1032	16.0500
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	5.3533	5.2219

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 6.2.86.

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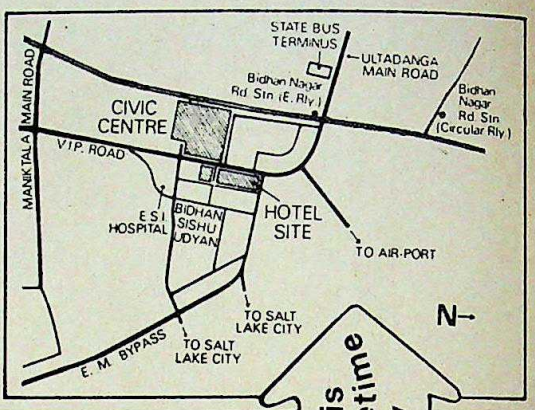
3 STAR HOTEL SITE



at CIVIC CENTRE MANIKTALA

Grab this once in a lifetime opportunity

With an area of approximately 10 acres Civic Centre at Maniktala is growing into one of the most ideally located shopping Centre in the prestigious residential area of East Calcutta. Situated on the approach road to Salt Lake City and Calcutta Air Port it is well connected by Tram, Circular Rail numerous Bus and Mini Bus Route and very near to Bidhan Nagar Road Railway Station. The Civic Centre is proposed as a well designed Commercial Complex on modern planning concept. It has apart from the Hotel Site ;—

- 2-storied shopping complex contained in 5 different blocks inclusive of a National Textile Complex.
- About 17000 sq.mtrs. of office space in 14 storied Tower Block in the centre with basement car parking facility.
- 5-storied low rise office building already occupied by State Bank.
- A lodging house to be developed by private enterpreneur.
- A Cinema Hall and a Theatre Hall to be constructed by State Govt.
- A Youth Centre with Library and Art Gallery.
- A park and Garden integrated with the Complex.
- Sufficient parking space in the Shopping-cum-Office Complex—both open and underground.

Applications are invited from the entrepreneurs who are already in the Govt. of India (Tourism Deptt.) or the Govt. of West Bengal (Tourism Deptt.) panel and/or any Indian Citizen or group of Indian Citizens, a Firm, Company or registered Co-operative Society who are running at least 3-star Hotel and have experience in the line for taking on lease the Hotel Plot for a period of 99 years with option for renewal for a further term of 99 years.

The Hotel plot is being leased out exclusively for construction of modern hotel with minimum 3-star facilities along with other ancillary facilities. The Hotel is to be constructed and used in accordance with the terms and conditions of lease.

Some details of the plot are as under :—

- Area of the plot—Approximately 6689 sq.mtrs. [100 kottahs (1 kottah=720 sq.ft.)]
- Ground Floor coverage a maximum of **35** percentage of the plot area.
- Commercial area in the form of shopping arcade etc. at Ground Floor and 1st Floor only **10** percentage of the total floor area.
- Reserve premia—Rs. **1,495-04** per sq.mtr. [Rs. 1,00,000/- per kottah (1 kottah=720 sft.)]
- Application Money—Rs. 1,00,000/-

Application Forms are obtainable from the following branches of BANK OF INDIA-Jawaharlal Nehru Road branch at Calcutta, Parliament Street Branch—New Delhi, Nariman Point Branch—Bombay and main branches at Madras, Bangalore and Ahmedabad on payment of Rs. 50/-.

Forms can also be obtained by post on payment of Rs. 60/- by Crossed Postal Order in favour of Bank of India A/c. Calcutta Improvement Trust from Bank of India, Jawaharlal Nehru Road Branch, 44 Jawaharlal Nehru Road, Calcutta-700016.

Offers in the prescribed from in sealed cover along with requisite Application Money by Bank Draft/Pay Order drawn on any Bank at Calcutta will be received at the branches of Bank of India mentioned above within 31st March, 1986.

A. K. Chatterjee I.A.S.,
Chairman

Calcutta Improvement Trust
P-16, India Exchange Place Extn.
Calcutta-700 073

BEEVAS/CIT/85-11

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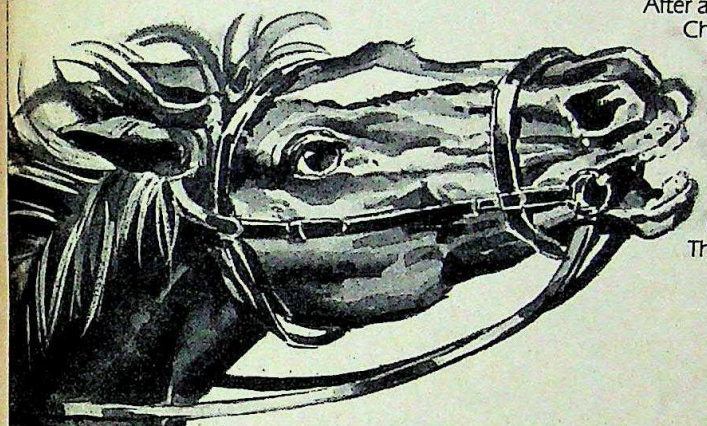
Gwalior Rayon selects HGE for effluent treatment.



This horse really appreciates that.

After a strenuous gallop in the ravines of the Chambal, he is always given a cool drink in the Chambal. The river into which many companies send their effluents, including Gwalior Rayon. But Gwalior Rayon's wastewaters are made totally safe by HGE before they reach the river. Safe enough to satisfy the most fastidious pollution control experts — and this horse as well. He only wishes more companies would follow Gwalior Rayon's example. Then the Chambal would be clean and pollution-free again.

HGE — Turnkey Capabilities

HGE (Hydraulic and General Engineers Ltd), a subsidiary of Batliboi, is the only company with turnkey capabilities in industrial effluent treatment. From concept to commissioning. With dependable after-sales service. Since HGE houses all the skills — manufacturing, engineering, contracting — it can keep costs low and guarantee timely execution without cost overruns. HGE is also a leader in Sewage Treatment Plants, trusted by Municipalities and Water Supply and Sewerage Boards the country over.

HGE — Clients

Besides Gwalior Rayon, HGE's other clients for industrial effluent treatment include —

* Maruti Udyog
* Century Pulp & Paper Mills
* Century Spinning * Harihar Polyfibres
* Corn Products * Rashtriya Chemicals & Fertilizers * National Newsprint & Paper Mills * Parle Products
* Bharat Petroleum * Dairies, Sugar Mills and Pharmaceutical Plants

So if you have an effluent treatment problem — just hand it over to HGE. And it becomes HGE's responsibility — totally.

HGE

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CHAITRA-B BB 231

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KASHMIR JEWELS

Tax Ploy

WHEN the hoard was first discovered in a time-forgotten vault in Kashmir valley two and a half years ago, Karan Singh had come forward to stake his claim as the scion of the former ruling family of Kashmir and thus the natural heir and claimant to this priceless legacy. The jewels and robes, he claimed, were family heirlooms and not part of the state wealth turned over to the Union at the time of accession. Ever since, he has been trying to establish solid proof for his claim.

Now after a year of trenchant arguments in the Jammu and Kashmir High Court and the Supreme Court, the prince has hit upon a bright idea, and as a result, secured a court order for the inspection of the jewels by officers of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and antiquarian and archaeological experts. Which step, once it comes through, will virtually amount to a tacit acceptance of his claim that the jewels by right belong to him.

The modus operandi was simple. When filling in his wealth tax form for the year 1979-80, Singh listed the hoard as part of his wealth, which he himself assessed at Rs 6,93,928. Later, the assessment was revised upward to Rs 10 lakh—a paltry figure, given the crores at stake—and Singh claimed exemption under the Wealth Tax Act of 1961. Now his lawyers knew full well that to make even a preliminary assessment of this wealth, the tax authorities would have to see it for themselves. And sure enough came a request to this effect from the Revenue Department of the Finance Ministry.

In the assessment, the wealth tax officers put the value of the jewels at Rs 22 lakh, obviously a wild guess since they could not conceivably have had an inkling about their real worth. Penalty proceedings were initiated forthwith and Singh's total wealth tax liability was assessed at Rs 98,380, of which Rs 55,114 remained to be paid. However, the tax boys needed to look at the jewels first and this was the trump card that Singh took to court.

But it was not as if the court wasn't wise to Singh's ploy. The first time round, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court ruled against him, heeding the argument of the state Government that allowing an inspection would amount to "grant of practically the main relief"—in essence, conceding that the jewels were his.

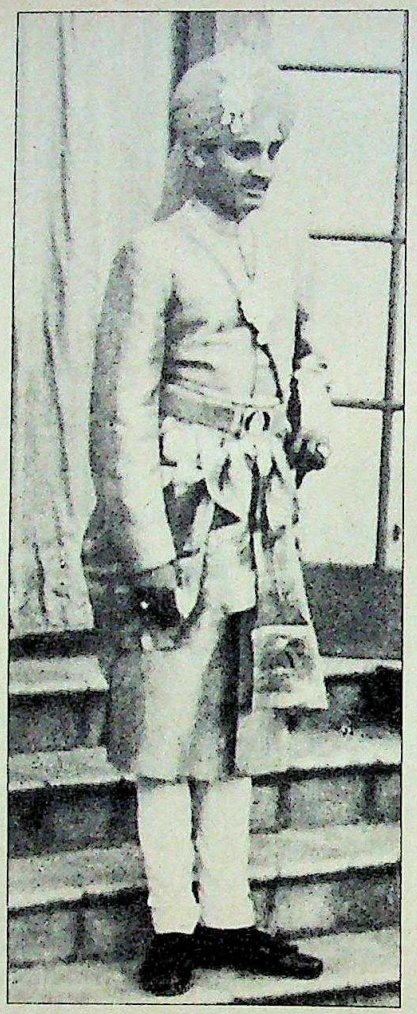
However, the Supreme Court, where Singh appealed immediately afterwards, declared the high court order "completely erroneous". It directed that representatives of both sides be joined by a member of the CBDT, the director-general of the Archaeological Survey of India, the director, antiques, and the director of the National Museum, besides assorted valuers, to inspect the jewels.

The purpose was to "determine the true nature and character of the same and whether any and if so what items constitute heirlooms or articles of personal use of the appellant and his family". What had won the day was the fact that the tax authorities had assessed the treasure lying in the Srinagar Toshakhana as belonging to the former *yuvaraja*. Says Singh's lawyer S.K. Kandhari: "This was a significant step in the case."

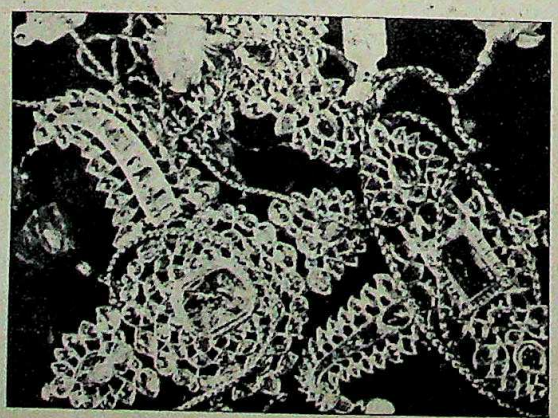
This is something of a coup for the former education minister and leader of the Virat Hindu Sammelan. Quite apart from the immense value of the 563-piece collection—which according to a conservative estimate is worth at least Rs 1,000 crore—there is considerable sentimental substance to his claim. In interviews, Singh emphasised that his father and grandfather wore many of the ceremonial dresses that form part of the collection and, in his appeal to the Home Ministry and the courts, he attached photographs showing his forefathers in them. But the state Government had constantly blocked his requests for inspecting the jewels and it was to this end only that most of his efforts were directed last year.

But even though he is making so much of it, all that he has won is merely the right to inspect the jewels. The knotty question of whom the jewels really belong to will probably take many more months to be resolved. But still, the former prince can rest easy for a while with the knowledge that in this fierce battle for what is being called one of the most sumptuous kingly legacies of recent time, he has at least won the first round.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI



Singh has got a court order to have the jewels inspected by taxmen—the first step to getting his claim accepted.



A young Singh in royal garb (top); and the jewels: clever move

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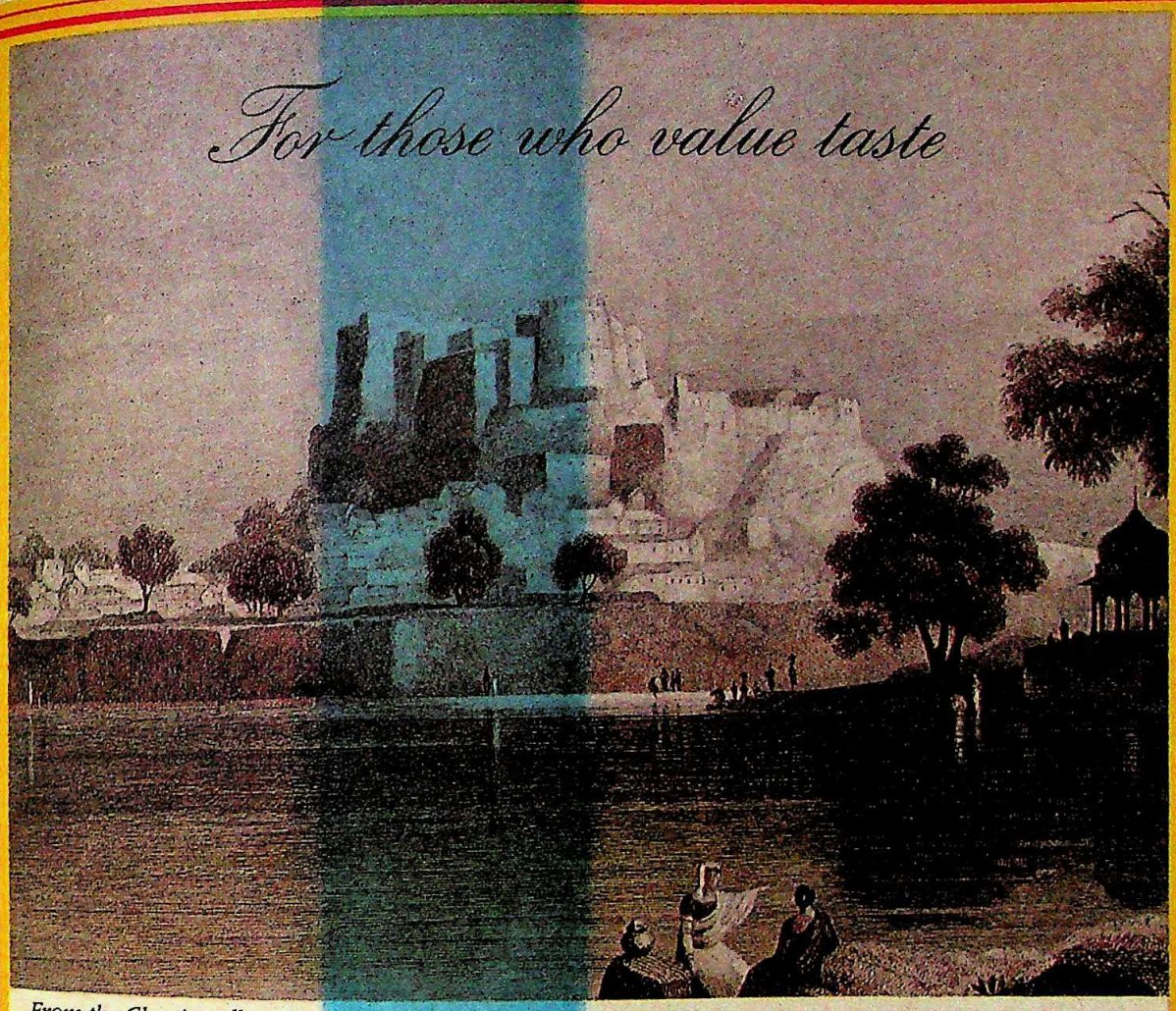
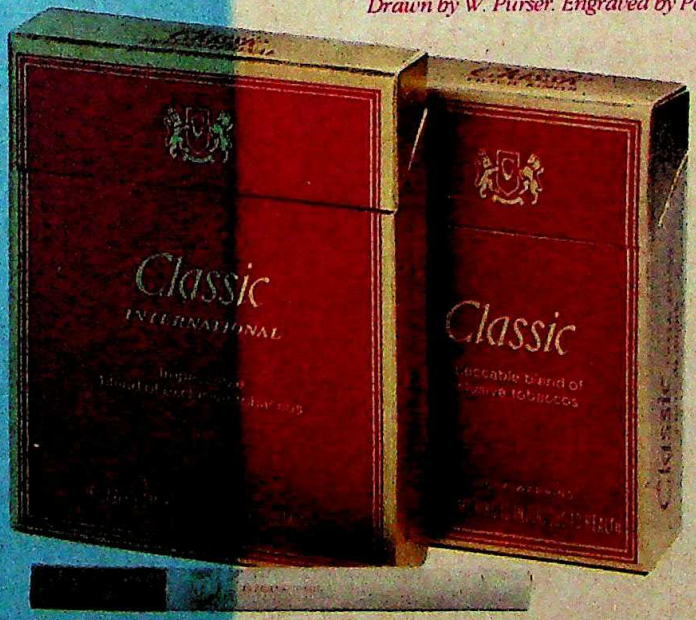
For those who value taste



From the Classic collection at ITC Ltd., 37 Chowringhee, Calcutta

FORTRESS AT SHUHUR JEYPORE, RAJPOOTANA
Drawn by W. Purser. Engraved by Percy Heath.



Contemporary Classics from ITC

CALRION C-CL-1

STATUTORY WARNING: CIGARETTE SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

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Featuring Ms. Persis Khambatta in Vareli RoyalCrepe

The new passion...

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Gurukul Collection,

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UTTAR PRADESH

Quick Quacks

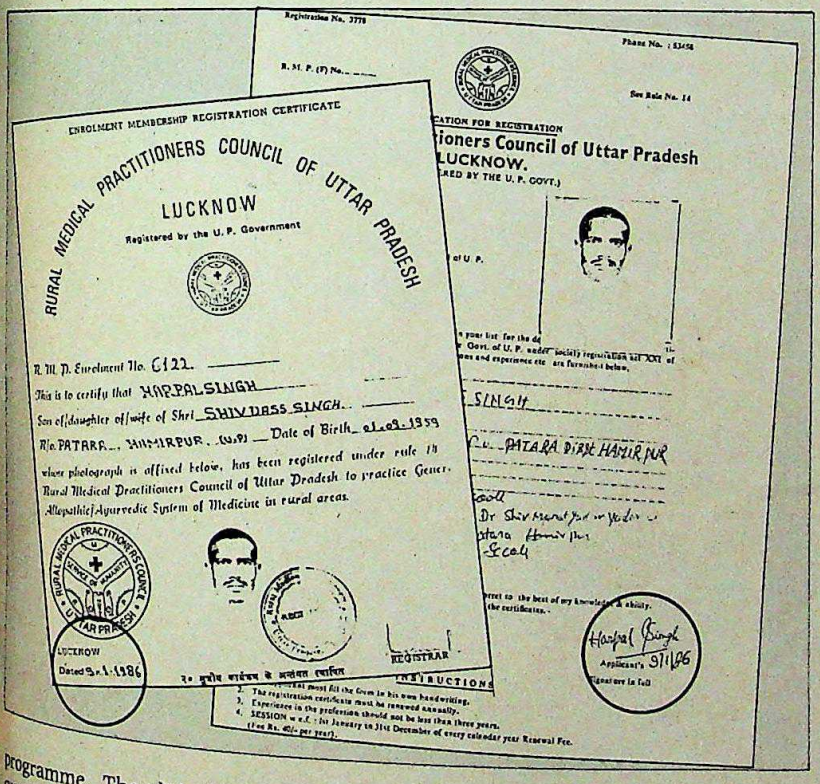
HEAD Constable Harpal Singh became a doctor on the evening of January 9 by the simple expedient of depositing Rs 500 with the managing director of the Rural Medical Practitioners Council of Uttar Pradesh. By doing so, he blew the lid off a successful racket involving the issue of fake medical certificates for money.

The scandal came to light by sheer accident. Harpal, on a visit to his village in Hamirpur district, found one of his brothers working as a medical practitioner when he had been jobless a year ago. A board at his clinic announced that he was a doctor authorised to work in the rural areas under the 20-point programme. The disbelieving Harpal questioned his brother and then returned to the office of Brij Lal, the city superintendent of police in Lucknow and told him what he had found. On the latter's instructions, Harpal deposited Rs 500 with the council and got himself registered as a doctor the same evening.

With the damaging certificate in hand, Harpal filed a first information report and the police promptly raided the offices of the so-called council at Chander Nagar and that of the International Acupuncture Research and Training Institute at Vigyanpuri Road, Mahanagar, both posh localities in the Lucknow suburbs. Hundreds of blank certificates signed and sealed by some 'registrar' were recovered alongwith thousands of money order receipts, application forms and accounting registers, and expensive equipment.

Detectives arrested Dr Ashok Chaudhary, the founder of the council and its managing director, and questioning revealed that he had registered over 10 societies through the state Registrar of Firms, Societies and Chits. In fact, Chaudhary's earlier Rural Medical Practitioners Association of India had been cancelled by the deputy registrar in August 1983 on the grounds that it had been selling medical certificates by levying a fee of Rs 275 in blatant violation of the rules set out in the Societies Registration Act.

Chaudhary (right); and Harpal Singh's certificates



Service (IAS) were brought in as 'advisers' and signboards even mentioned the names of leading city doctors as consultants in Chaudhary's ventures.

Chaudhary's past would have done credit to any con artist. He had previously posed as an IAS officer, a regional transport officer, an income tax officer and then as a doctor holding an MBBS degree. Even more interesting, he had been detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) in Kanpur in 1975 but when contacted by INDIA TODAY he smugly stated: "It is true I was arrested under MISA but that is nothing but a misunderstanding." And about his qualifications: "I have passed class VII from Farrukhabad but to promote rural health under the 20-point programme, I have involved in this venture *miyan biwi bacchon sahit* (husband, wife and children). That is what MBBS stands for. And MD stands for managing director, not doctor of medicine."

The police action came close on the heels of a letter written by the Registrar of the Uttar Pradesh Medical Council, Dr J.P.Saxena, to SP Brij Lal. The letter stated that "Chaudhary was not registered with either the Board of Indian Medicine or the Board of Homoeopathic Medicine and was not authorised to issue medical treatment certificates. All his activities are fraudulent and action must be taken against him". But with Chaudhary now in the bag, the police have to come to terms with the unpalatable fact that his activities go well beyond the state's borders. Said city Senior Superintendent Tilak Kak: "The number of so-called 'rural doctors' must have gone beyond 20,000 in the northern states besides Uttar Pradesh."

Meanwhile, details of Chaudhary's operations continue to unravel. The money deposited in banks all went into his personal account and officials have confirmed that three more of his associations, Rural Society for Health, International Acupuncture Research Centre and Charitable Hospital and Indian Medical Society, have been granted registration till the year 1990.

But all the attendant publicity and the arrest of Chaudhary and his wife Pushpa notwithstanding, people continue to queue up at his plush offices in the hope of becoming instant rural medical practitioners.

—S. PREMI in Lucknow

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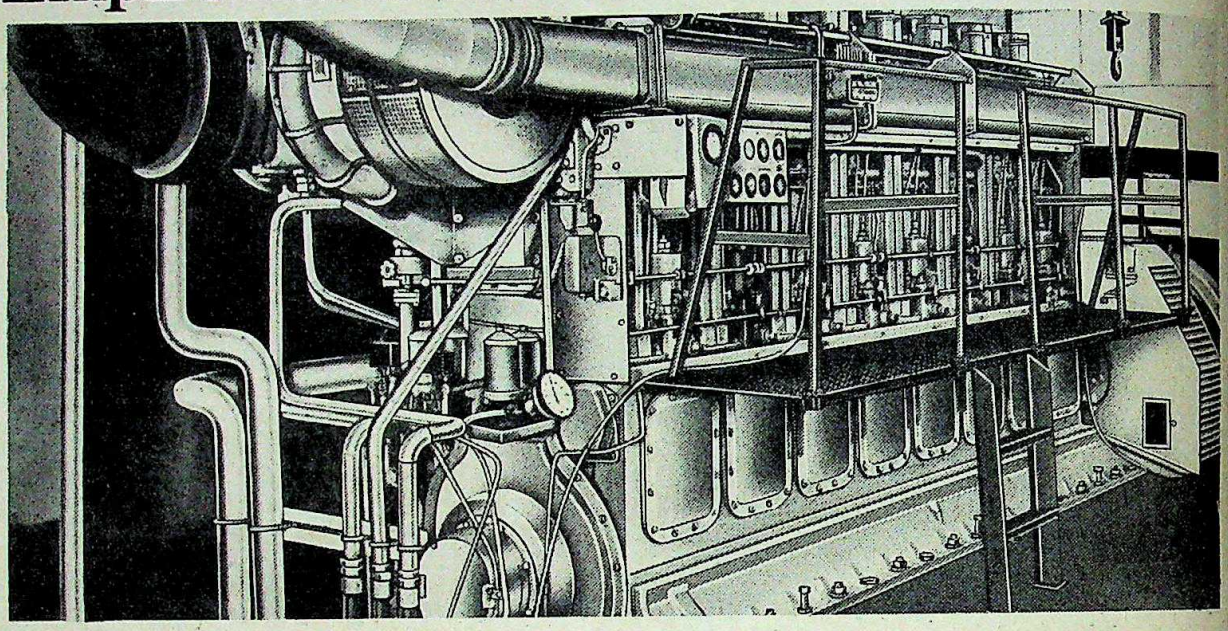
Another enterprise of
Empire Industries



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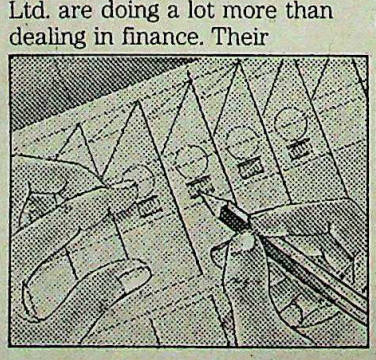
We offer wide-ranging financial services to help you get your business off the ground.

Empire Finance Co. Ltd. provides financial services in the fields of Leasing, Hire Purchase, Warehousing, Commodity Finance and Bill Discounting. Tailor-made to suit you. Ensuring maximum tax and financial advantage to clients. Catering to your needs of financing plant and machinery, electronic equipment, computers and more.

Of course Empire Industries Ltd. are doing a lot more than dealing in finance. Their manufacturing and marketing operations cover the additional areas of Medium and Heavy Crane manufacturing, Machine Tools, Instruments and Instrumentation Systems, Glassware and Textiles.

The other enterprises of Empire Industries Ltd.

Garlick Engineering, Empire Machine Tools, Empire Instrumentation, Vitrum Glass and Empire Dyeing.



The Empire Finance Co. Ltd.

AN ENTERPRISE OF

EMPIRE INDUSTRIES LIMITED

Empire Industries Ltd.
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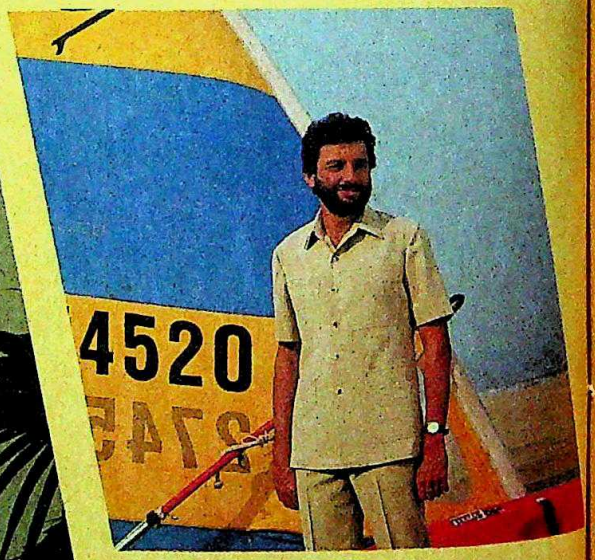

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DOORDARSHAN

The Missing Telecast

IT STARTED out as a harmless enough idea—a TV film on India on the threshold of major changes. But last fortnight Jack Anderson's film entitled *Rajiv's India* had become an acute embarrassment—for producer Barbara Newman who came to Delhi for its release, for Doordarshan which cancelled the telecasting of the film literally at the eleventh hour and for the sponsor, Press Trust of India (PTI) whose Chairman, Ram Nath Goenka, had hosted a preview party only two days earlier. Most embarrassed of all was I&B Minister V.N. Gadgil who had gushed initially that the film would "not only entertain but educate the audience".

The prime minister's office, which had helped obtain the necessary clearances for the film did not escape embarrassment either. And, by the end of the fortnight the film had become a whodunit, with nobody prepared to say who had ordered the film's postponement.

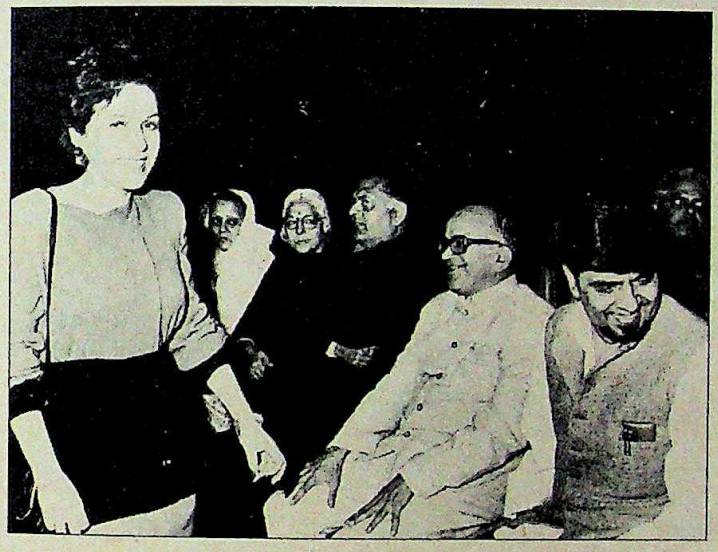
Girish Mehra, secretary in the I&B Ministry said he was not involved in the decision. The prime minister's information aide Mani Shankar Aiyer who had coordinated the film project with Anderson's team refused to say at what point the postponement decision was taken. And Additional Director General of Doordarshan Shiv Sharma deepened the mystery by saying that the postponement order had come neither from the prime minister's office nor from the minister. "Doordarshan decided to postpone the showing and will fix the next date for telecast," he said. Sources in the prime minister's office said Rajiv himself had not seen the film and that the screening as well as postponement must have been decided in the I&B Ministry.

All of a sudden the film had become too hot for anyone to touch, even for the sponsor, PTI, which had announced at the preview that it would inaugurate PTI's entry into the audio-visual field. The agency now disclaimed involvement. Having handed it over to Doordarshan the film was now the "government's problem. It has nothing to do with PTI," said General Manager P. Unnikrishnan.

But one man, Yashpal Kapoor—former confidant of Mrs Gandhi—was all too keen to take the credit for stopping the telecast. Kapoor, who attended the preview, bragged that he had protested to Goenka and Gadgil that the film denigrated Indira Gandhi and gave free publicity to Goenka's *Indian Express* chain of newspapers. "Is this Rajiv's India or Goenka's *Indian Express*?" asked Kapoor. He said other characters in the film also made outrageous statements: Khushwant Singh saying Rajiv was better than his mother and grandfather, industrialist Nusli Wadia being introduced as the grandson of Jinnah and the other big shareholder of Bombay Dyeing, Madhavrao Scindia, reading a "ten-minute lecture" about the Gwalior royal family's service to the people.

Kapoor said that he phoned Gadgil only to be told that a decision had already been taken to screen the film. He then called Rajiv's Private Secretary V. George in the Maldives where Rajiv was on a state visit and complained about the film. Kapoor says the next day M.L. Fotedar, the prime minister's aide on party affairs, phoned him and said he had received a message from Male about the film. Kapoor says he was told that G. Parthasarathy, Gadgil and Arun Nehru had later probably reviewed the film and decided to postpone the telecast.

The first newspaper accounts about the film's postponement said Kapoor and Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jagdish Tytler had protested. Delhi's *Sunday Mail* wrote that after the preview "Tytler was heard loudly exclaiming: 'This is India through the eyes of a press tycoon, industrialist and maharaja". Tytler initially did not deny this but when asked about his role in the affair, said he had nothing to do with the postponement. Other Congress(I) men objected to the choice of protagonists—Goenka, Wadia, Scindia all of whom the partymen said belonged to the big business lobby. But the ministers who saw and applauded the film at last fortnight's preview were Minister for Steel and Mines K.C. Pant, the Chairman of the Policy Planning Committee in the Ministry of External Affairs G. Parthasarathy, Minister of State for External Affairs K.R. Narayanan, Minister of State for Welfare Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, and Mohammed Yunus of the Trade Fair Authority.



Newman (left) with Vijaya Raje Scindia, Pant, Gadgil and Tytler at the preview

What made things worse was that Doordarshan decided to sanitise the film by excising some shots of poverty ridden children, a survivor of a bride burning incident and a Khushwant Singh remark that Rajiv was just a "namby pamby Avro pilot who would make an ass of himself and take the country to ruin". His later remarks praising the prime minister for being better than his mother and grandfather were retained. "This would leave the picture incomplete" said Khushwant. Angrier still was the film's chief correspondent Inderjit Badhwar: "The jump cuts in the (edited) film looked awful. This film was very delicately faceted; to interfere or tarnish any one facet destroys the flow and continuity." Continuity apart, the film remains very much in limbo. That is all the more surprising because it's quite an innocuous, ineffective film made for a specific western audience. But having become a political issue it is unlikely that Indian television audiences will get a glimpse of *Rajiv's India*.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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RESEARCH ESTABLISHMENTS

Formula for Efficiency

"The electrician in our house does not think twice, he opens out the plug, he leaves all the wires open and off he goes. Somebody has just not taught him the basics".

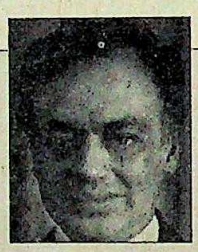
—Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at a conference on science and technology in New Delhi in November 1985

LAST fortnight Rajiv Gandhi, who is in a way the chief engineer of the science ministry, was busy rewiring the frayed circuits and replacing luminaries in the house of science and technology in a bid to get scientific research to really light up the common man's life and, of course, teach electricians not to leave any live wires lying around.

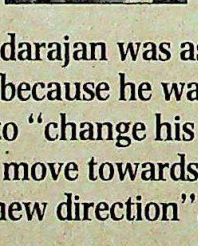
Naturally a few scientists were in for nasty shocks. The first bulb to be replaced was Dr S. Varadarajan, director-general of the mammoth Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), probably most easily remembered as the helmet-wearing scientist who announced on national television that the remaining deadly toxins in the leaking Union Carbide tanks had been neutralised after the Bhopal gas tragedy. Varadarajan, who had a year-and-a-half to go in CSIR, was told on a bleak Thursday morning last month that he was being made chief consultant of the Planning Commission.

While sounding impressive enough, it really meant that Varadarajan was off the "operational side", as a prime ministerial aide put it, and had been given an advisory post. While the normally vocal Varadarajan refused to comment on his summary transfer, it is learnt that Rajiv was "unhappy" with his inability to come up with steps to revitalise CSIR.

A week later, when the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Cabinet (SACC) was replaced with a new body that would directly advise the prime minister, not only were many of the shining lights of science blacked out but the number of heads was reduced from a crowded 25 in the previous committee to a trimmer—and younger—eight. Those axed were such grey eminences as Raja Ramanna, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, U.R. Rao, chairman of the Space Commission, V. Ramalingaswami, director-general of the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), and a host of secretaries to government departments: Yash Pal of the Science and Technology Department, S.Z. Qasim of Ocean Development, Maheshwar Dayal of Non-Conventional Energy, D.V. Kapur of Industry, and so on. These stars of the scientific firmament were politely told that as heads of government departments, they had to report to the prime minister, who could seek their advice whenever he needed it. As an aide put it: "What the prime minister wanted was views from people who were in the field and involved in research who would be able to present a different viewpoint from the official one." Unlike the previous panel, only one member now is a government servant, while the others are men directly from laboratories and from private industry.



Varadarajan was asked to go because he was not able to "change his style and move towards the new direction".



The only grey eminence to survive the purge was M.G.K. Menon, who will now also be the scientific adviser to the prime minister.

The only grey eminence to survive the drastic purge was the experienced and durable M.G.K. Menon, member of the Planning Commission, who will now also be Scientific Adviser to the prime minister. Menon was cautious about his new assignment and said: "Let's see how it works out, but my endeavour would be to continue to contribute to science and its applications in a meaningful way."

The new council is headed by eminent chemist Professor C.N.R. Rao, current director of the prestigious Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore. Among the council members are environmentalist Madhav Gadgil, aeronautics expert Roddam Narasimha, Hindustan Lever Chairman A.S. Ganguly, neurosurgeon P.N. Tandon, astrophysicist Jayant Narlikar, physicist Sekhar Raha and defence advisor V. Siddharta. Each of them have built up considerable reputations in their fields of research.

The new council, with an initial term of two years, is to advise Rajiv on major issues facing science and technology and chalk out a perspective plan for the much-talked-about "twenty-first century". Soon after his appointment, Rao said: "It is a difficult and challenging task we have been given and I hope we would live up to the prime minister's expectations."

In recent months, Rajiv had given plenty of warning about his dissatisfaction with the record of India's scientific establishments. In a hard-hitting address at the conference on science and tech-

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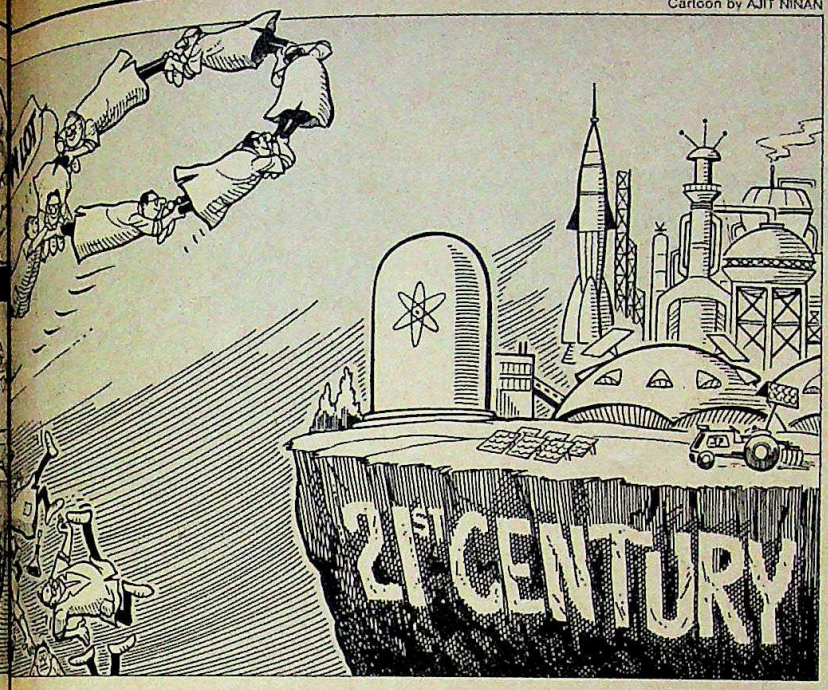

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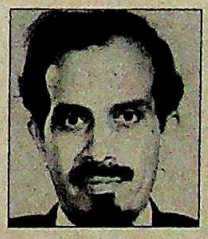
gyin the capital three months ago—now being waved around as his policy statement—Rajiv had been particularly severe indeed scathing on the scientists' obsession with import substitution to the exclusion of much else. As he had bluntly put it: "What we have really done? We have given very poor targets to our scientists and technologists. This has to change. We have got to tell them: no, you do not have to replace a component, you have to replace the whole thing, with something new, and as advanced as is available at the time that you come out with it."

THE PRIME minister was keen on bringing the managerial concept of accountability into scientific research in a big way. Enthused by the success of the Space and Atomic Energy departments that have set ten-year targets for themselves and have made rapid strides in achieving them, Rajiv wanted most departments to follow suit. The buzzword among scientific circles is the "mission" approach coined by the Space Department to chart out its many launches. All the departments have been asked to come up with missions that would tangibly help the country within a specific time frame.

Varadarajan was asked to go because he was not able to "change his style and move towards the new direction" as an aide of the prime minister put it. True, the CSIR does list an impressive amount of products and processes that it has developed in the 35 institutions under its control in such varied fields as chemicals, engineering, oceanography and biological sciences. But what Rajiv reportedly wanted Varadarajan to come up with was not only a set of missions that would enable industry to directly benefit from laboratory research, but also to ensure that these would link up with the basic development plans of the country. In the past, much of the industrial research carried out in CSIR's laboratory had gone unutilised. As Professor P.K. Jena, a metallurgist and acting director-general of CSIR, explains: "Not only was there a large communication gap between industries and research laboratories but the industries also wanted a no-risk, already tried and tested product or process. That's not possible in research. These things have to be set right." And much of the research has gone largely unaccountable. Professor Yash Pal, secretary to the Science and Technology Department, says: "Nobody can be hauled up if no targets are set. We must set up tasks and our policy should be: do it and do it on time; or else, move out."



(Clockwise from top) Rao; Narasimha; Tandon; Raha; Narlikar; Ganguly; and Gadgil: new line-up

But submitting a list of missions is not enough. Rajiv was also irritated with the long list of technology missions put down by the high-power steering committee on science and technology for the seventh plan. As he sarcastically remarked: "We have come out with missions, but somehow the mission of getting the mission ready is not ready itself." Right now an inter-ministerial group being coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office is working out a handful of missions that would concentrate on making an impact on key areas like agriculture, energy, family planning, food, water and health.

The aim, as Yash Pal puts it, is to "break the tyranny of bureaucracy and cut across the boundaries of departments." "What we are working towards is multi-organisation missions," he says, citing the example of the agriculture mission which will not only come up with complete soil surveys and weather forecasts but provide the farmers with new farm techniques, improved variety of seeds and better fertilisers. For doing this expertise would be drawn from various research institutions specialising in geophysics, meteorology, agricultural research and chemicals.

With last fortnight's dramatic changes, the prime minister hopes to get scientists and technologists cracking in the direction he wants. But he is going to have plenty of loose wires to take care of before he can be certain that the new system would not be short-circuited.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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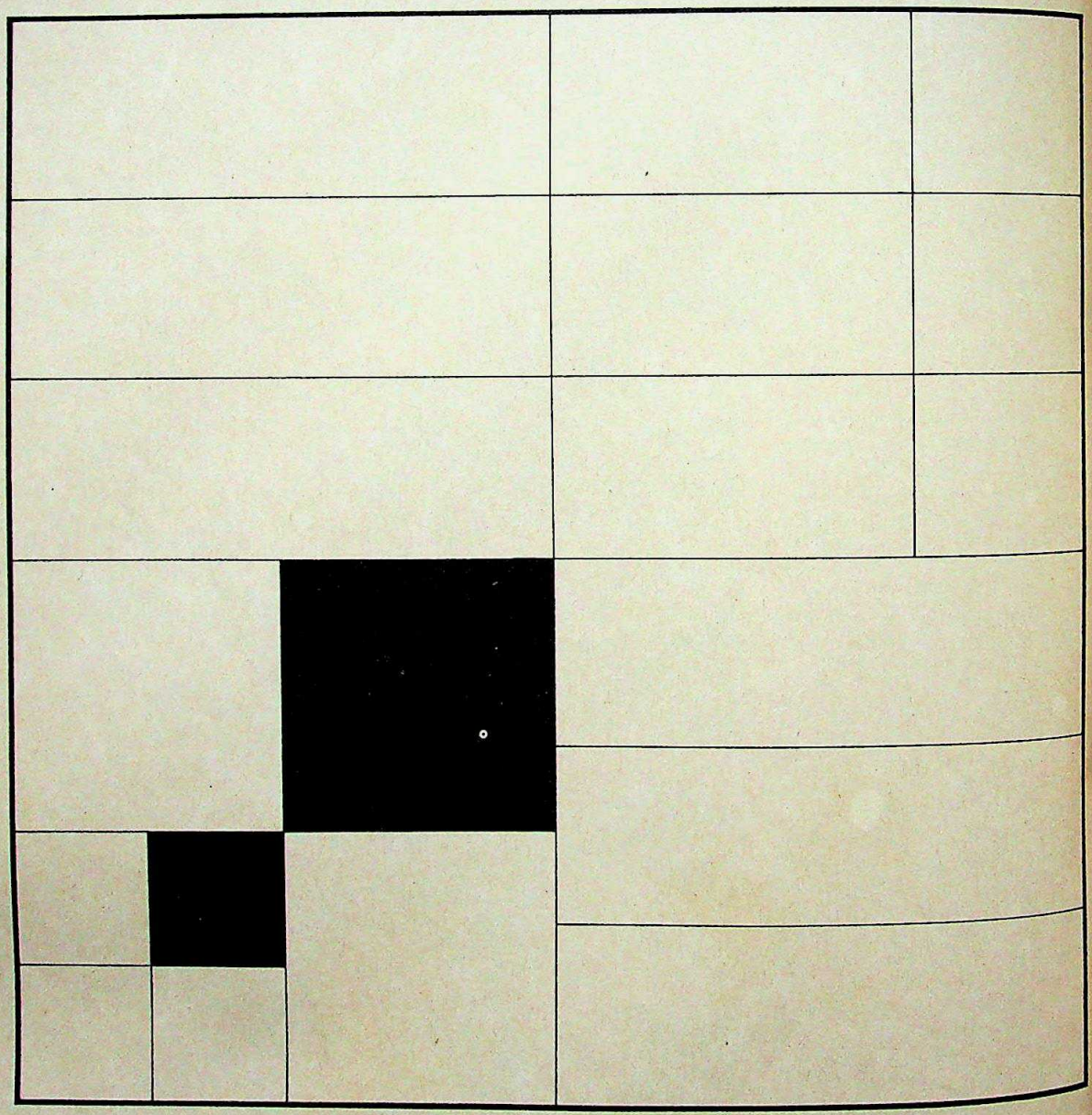

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CENSOR BOARD

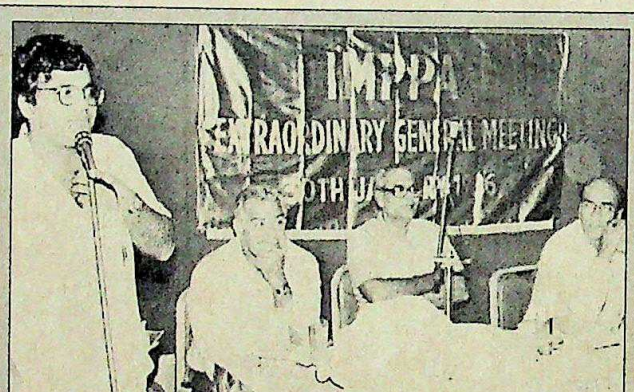
Cutting Charges

LIKE brown sugar vendors dispensing larger and larger doses of the drug, Bombay's film producers have specialised in recent years in including more and more scenes of sex and violence in their films. What stands between them and the audience's seemingly insatiable appetite for blood and gore is the Central Board of Film Certification, known more commonly as the Censor Board. Last fortnight, the film producers finally decided that they had had enough. From February 3, the All India Film Producers' Council (AIFPC), the apex body of Bombay's three film producers' associations, boycotted the Censor Board and stopped sending films for certification.

A delegation of the AIFPC, led by President Ramraj Nahta, rushed to New Delhi for a meeting with Union Human Resource Development Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao where they wanted the censors censured. The producers, accompanied by Congress(I) MP Amitabh Bachchan (two of whose films, *Mard* and *Inquilab*, have recently faced censor trouble), submitted a memorandum to the minister and demanded the immediate replacement of Censor Board Chairman Bikram Singh, a respected film critic and former editor of *Filmfare*, "preferably by someone from the film industry itself". The producers complained of delays by the Censor Board in clearing films, discrimination between one commercial film and another, excessive cuts and too many "A" certificates.

"Every second feature film is a victim of censor trouble today," Nahta said after his meeting with Rao. "The guidelines given by the Government are vague and are interpreted any way the Censor Board likes. Some films have been issued "U" certificates (for universal viewing) and some others with similar contents have been given "UA" or "A" certificates."

Ideally, the film producers would like the Government to scrap censorship altogether. Till such time, they want the board to be made autonomous with a majority of the members and the chairman from the film industry itself. But most of all, they want the dismissal of Singh. "He is biased against commercial cinema," Nahta said. "But for art films he has different standards. See how *Party* was even shown on TV, all the girls drinking, smoking."



Nahta (centre) at IMPPA meeting

Ideally, the film producers are against censorship itself. But most of all, they are against Singh, whom they accuse of bias.

Bikram Singh

"I am anti-bad cinema, pro-good cinema," Bikram Singh maintained, when contacted by INDIA TODAY. "The producers themselves have quarrelled with the distinction between commercial and art cinema. Now that it suits them they are making the distinction." Singh pointed out that over 25 per cent of the 912 films cleared by the censors last year included scenes of rape or gang rape. When such films are given "A" certificates the producers protest because they complain that those days are gone when "A" films fetched a good price".

Any protest by a producer invariably leads to repeated viewings of films at various levels of the censorship process. This can cause delays, but Singh emphasised that roughly 75 per cent of the films are cleared within 15 days at the Censor Board offices in the country. However, about 90 per cent of the films cleared by the initial examining committee, selected from a panel of critics, eminent citizens, without the chairman or other members of the board seeing the films. "In this way lots of films have been cleared, to the embarrassment of the board," Singh added.

The crunch came because of Singh's decision to tamper with three films, *Chameli ki Shaadi* from Prakash Mehra's unit; *Aurat* produced by Dhirendra Bohra and *Main Chup Nahin Rahungi* by I.M. Kunnu. Their main crime: to excise the scenes of sex or violence in films like *Awaaz*, *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*, *Saagar* or *Arjun* as precedents set by Singh himself to allow the new crop to go scathed. As one film producer argued, what has been allowed in films earlier should be acceptable to the censors, otherwise producers will always be in the dock. Prakash Mehra, whose film directed by Basu Chatterji was cleared recently after a few minor cuts, was vehement in his criticism of the board: "The kind of cuts demanded by the censors are very silly and stupid."

Bohra's *Aurat* is one film devoted to the theme of a woman's revenge against rapists and killers. Zeenat Aman plays the victim-turned-avenging angel who, subjected to a 10-minute rape on the screen by real-life husband Mazhar Khan), shoots the gang leader Sadashiv Amrapurkar dead and figures in an inconclusive court trial at the end of the film.

The Censor Board examining committee recommended that the film should be given any certificate. Bikram Singh referred it to the revising committee which came to the same conclusion. The producer submitted a revised version after deleting 407 feet from the film. A second examining committee upheld the original decision. At this stage, instead of submitting the film for a second revising committee, the producer decided to appeal to the appellate tribunal, a newly-formed body headed by retired Judge Vyas Dev Mishra. After three viewings and 11 cuts, the tribunal gave an "A" certificate to

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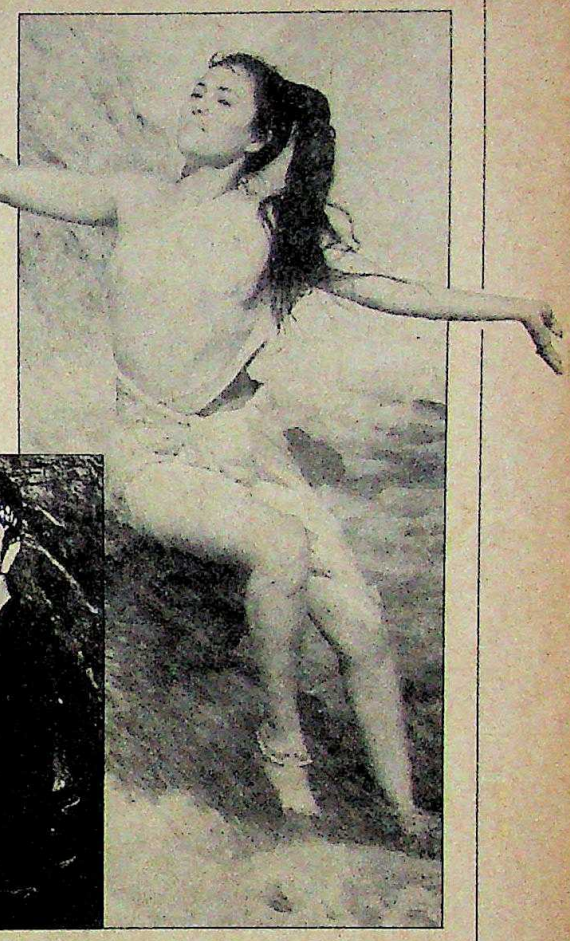
...But before a certificate could be ...ued, the ministry called for the film ...der Section 6 C of the Cinematograph ...t. The agitated producer is now await... the ministry's decision.

...Maficha Sakshidar, a Marathi film ...ed on the gruesome Abhyankar-Joshi ...rders by Rajendra Jakal's gang in ...ne, has been through the grind. The ...e is now being heard in the high court. This is not the first time that producers ...e been up in arms against Singh. ...chchan had earlier crossed swords ...h him for his refusal to clear *Inquilab*, a ...ghtakingly gory film, without cuts ...t would have crippled it at the box-...es. At that time, Bachchan had con...ded that both *Inquilab* and *Ardh Satya*, ...film acclaimed by critics, had the same ...ry line and violence on "comparable ...les", but Singh had been "partial" ...ards *Ardh Satya*. It was Bachchan's ...werful lobbying at the Centre which ...s believed to have cleared *Inquilab*.

However, Singh is fiery in his con...mnation of the "makers of B-movies" ...o want to make a fast buck by showing ...pes and gang-rapes" in the guise of ...emingly feminist films. But the industry ...arges that his concern is largely mis...ced, particularly because he had ...ooked the other way" when both Raj ...poor and Manmohan Desai got away ...h equally prurient scenes in their ...ent block-busters, *Ram Teri Ganga ...ili* and *Mard*. Surprisingly, both the ...ms were awarded "U" certificates.

While the board is under attack by Bombay's film producers for excessive censorship, film critics have been pulling up the censors for displaying too liberal an attitude toward sex and violence. "Already what the censors are allowing is too much," said Iqbal Masud, film critic of the *Indian Express*. "The board should apply stricter standards."

Masud, who had just been to a press preview of Dev Anand's *Hum Naujawan*, granted a "U" certificate, spoke of a scene from the film that would have been "disallowed even in a country like Britain": an attempted rape of a 13-year-old girl is shown, and though the rape fails the camera dwells on the girl's underwear being pulled down slowly. "How can such scenes involving young girls be shown?" Masud asked. "The film producers are only trying to blackmail the Government with this boycott. Let censorship be withdrawn. I am sure a hundred petitions will be filed by people in court against the vulgarity and violence in these films."



Uncensored scenes from *Saagar* and *Ram Teri*; (below, from left) scenes from *Main Chhup*, *Aurat* and *Chameli*

Bombay's film producers, though, are in no mood to listen to the critics. Posters were put up in Bombay recently, attacking the Censor Board: "Censors and cancer both are deadly. Kill delays before you kill films." Nahta said after the meeting with Narasimha Rao that the producers' delegation was assured by the minister that the complaints would be examined and the Government's decision conveyed to them in a week's time. Until then the producers plan to stay away from the Censor Board offices on Bombay's Malabar Hill, and will presumably use the time for actually thinking up many more gory scenes for the continuing saga of sex and violence.

—M. RAHMAN

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Subtle Magic

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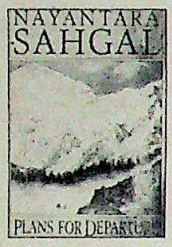
Sahgal: W.W. Norton & Co.
Price: $14.95; Pages: 216



IF YOU take the milieu of *The Jewel in the Crown* back by about three decades, put in a couple of clergymen instead of the surfeit of barrack-room types, and substitute the action in the popular television serial with the right dose of politico-theological debate that one would associate with a Graham Greene in his 70s, you have come pretty close to the mythical Himapur of Nayantara Sahgal's seventh novel. But coming close is not getting right there. For *Plans for Departure*, though purported to blend easily with the burgeoning Raj mania of today, has the reflective hallmark of a novel of ideas so prominently upfront that it will perhaps never make it to the fast-selling shelves of book stores.

Yet this is the most authoritative novel to have come out of Sahgal, certainly more so than her 1985 Sinclair Prize-winning *Rich Like Us*, which bases itself on something as recent as the 1975-77 hiccup in Indian democracy and yet seems little more than dated journalism. On the contrary, *Plans*, which goes back to a British-India on which the First World War had just begun to cast its shadow, somehow retains the unfailing magic by which superior literature always pickles history, never allowing it to go stale. District magistrate Henry Brewster; his estranged wife Stella; American missionary Marlowe Croft and his loudmouthed British wife; Sir Nitin Basu, the botanist; Anna Hansen, the visitor from Denmark—Sahgal's novel is populated, it seems, not just by characters who had once ruled India, or were ruled, but by ideas in constant conversation among themselves or within themselves. If she has sacrificed on drama in the process, she has made up for it with some of the most absorbing depiction of characters in conflict with themselves who disintegrate under their own weights.

Though the backdrop of *Plans* is Indian, its inner moral churnings are all rooted in pre-1914 Europe. The characters are mere fugitives from there, acting out their obsessions in the nowhere district of Himapur, the sylvan tranquillity of which is only occasionally shattered by the distant thunder of terrorist bombings and the news of Khudiram's hanging. But it is no longer the contented world of the early colonisers, heady with the belief that the sun would not set on the empire. Instead, Sahgal draws into her novel two sets of characters—the likes of Brewster, a bureaucrat torn by self-doubt, and Croft, whose Christian faith in a just society gets rudely jolted when it comes into conflict with the policy of "non-interference" on which the noble queen proclaimed to found the empire. At the centre of the mosaic is Anna Hansen, Sahgal's unconventional heroine, a feminist born "ahead of her times".

Sahgal: ringside viewer

The year is 1914, and there are storm signals in the distant Balkans which will before long change the destiny of British India. In dealing with such tempestuous times as in *Plans*, any minor novelist would have unrolled a bonanza of historical allusions. But Sahgal's brush-strokes are gentle, subtle, inward-turned. A report here of Tilak being released from Mandalay jail, a hint there of the Labour Party being born. Sahgal spells out the period in discreet understatements.

She burrows into the soul instead and peels off the genteel facade to capture the irrational instincts buried underneath. And the results of the excavation are revealed largely through the eyes of Anna Hansen, the contemplative Nordic, who chances upon some startling finds in a forest glade that throw a sudden and uncomfortable—almost blinding—light on the mysterious disappearance of Brewster's wife nine months earlier and the accidental death of Croft's termagant wife, Lulu.

The strongly possible murders, and the cover-up, shatter Anna's implicit trust in the other, the more agreeable face of colonialism, and bring to a halt a developing relationship with Brewster, the prime suspect. On that very evening, the wires bring the news of Austria declaring war on Serbia, and a tormented Anna, unable to find the answer to any of her questions, makes plans for departure, to a continent already engulfed in war.

The 58-year-old Sahgal, who as Vijayalakshmi Pandit's daughter and Jawaharlal Nehru's niece often had a ringside view of history, is naturally better equipped than many of her peers in India and elsewhere, to delve into the psyche of the men who ran the empire. But what boggles the mind is her cold, almost surgical wit, and her sleuth-like eye for realistic detail. When her characters bare their souls, they shoot off in wild tangents into the world of Fabian socialists and suffragettes. But, when she has to describe the probable scene of a murder, the details of the faint footprints that lead through berrybushes to the edge of a precipice in a glade come to life as in a police report. No wonder that she studied literature in the United States with Vladimir Nabokov, the supreme craftsman of the novel who once drew pages of diagrams and lectured his students to forcefully prove that the insect in Kafka's story, *Metamorphosis*, was a beetle and not a cockroach.

—SUMIT MITRA

EXCERPT

"So you believe Brewster murdered his wife," he established.

Anna was taken completely unawares by the depth of her distress, and the resilient, haunting power of what Henry had done. Even Sir Nitin had actually not spelt it out in those relentless words. Anna had skirted the horror herself...

Nicholas said with regret, "It's unlikely the law can catch up with him now, more's the pity. Still, bodies don't disappear. Murders have come to light many years after the event. But what happened to your infallible instinct, Anna? Didn't that tell you something about the man?"

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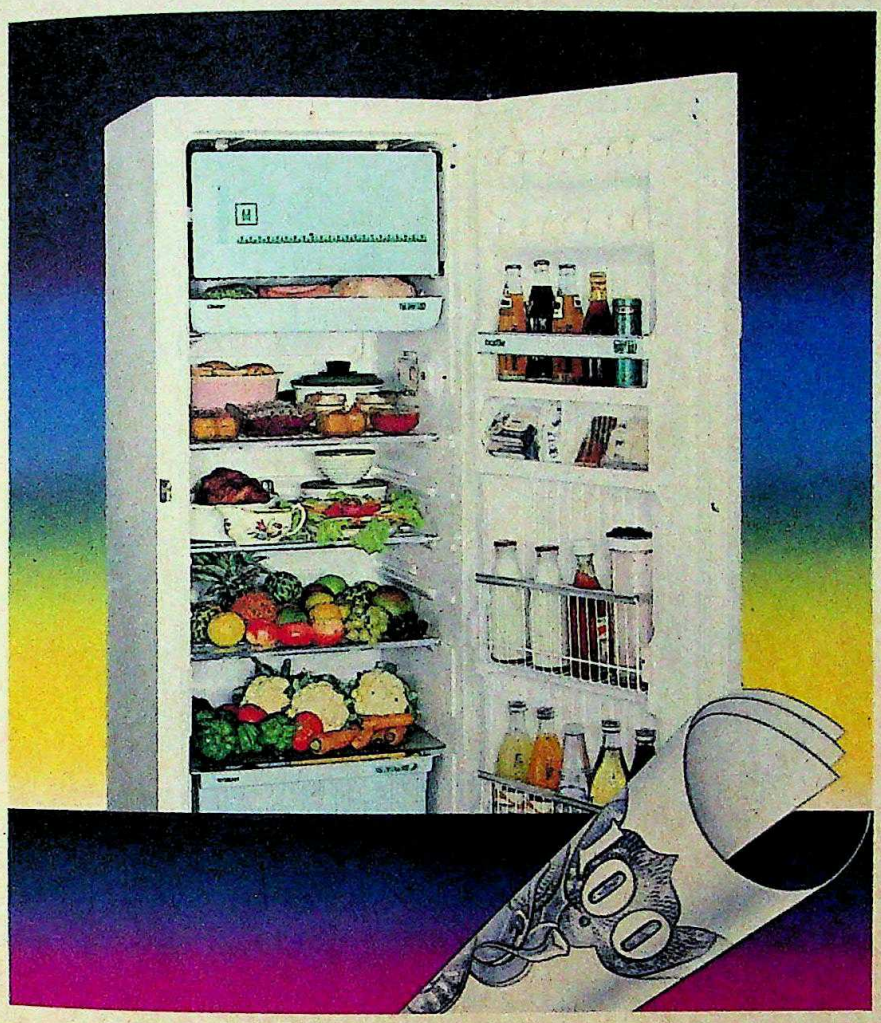
The best things in life are worth a little more



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The equestrian masterpiece by Verrocchio at Venice has been found quietly gazing at the sea 30 kilometres north-east of Puri

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Superbly monumental in its massive strength, vigour and surpassing even the Homeric grandeur of the Elgin marbles in its grace of movement, this horse is just one example of the fire and passion that Indian sculptors brought to the black granite of the Sun Temple at Konarak. Only Verrocchio's masterpiece comes close.

Konarak, even in its ruins, is perhaps one of the grandest achievements of India's temple architecture. Today, architects and engineers the world over wonder how Indian master-masons handled their colossal beams of iron and stone in A.D.1238-64 with as much ease as their modern counterparts put up pine rafters. They wonder how the temple was built with stone blocks without the use of mortar, held together simply by a system of poise and balance. They wonder and so will you.

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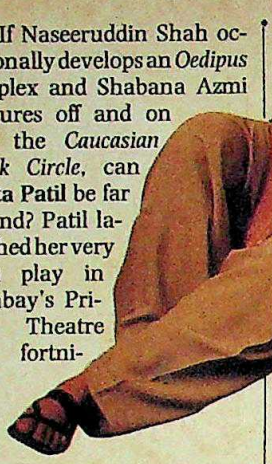
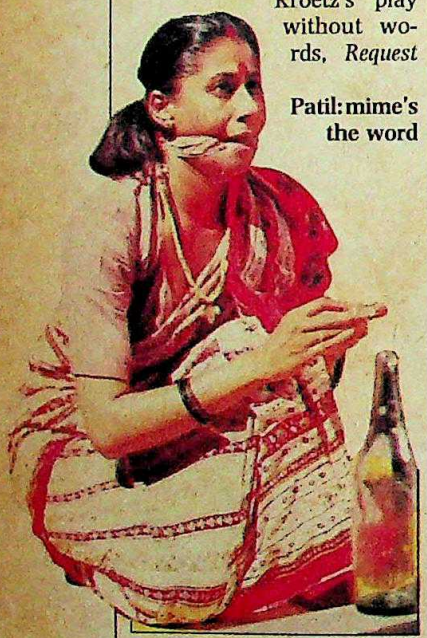
◆ If Naseeruddin Shah occasionally develops an *Oedipus* complex and Shabana Azmi ventures off and on into the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, can **Smita Patil** be far behind? Patil launched her very own play in Bombay's Prithvi Theatre last fortnight, titled *Aap ki Farmaish*. The play, of course, has nothing to do with Jhumritallaiya—or even Vividh Bharati for that matter. It is director Alyque Padamsee's adaptation of German playwright Franz Xaver Kroetz's play without words, *Request Concert*, and is all about the humdrum existence of an average middle class housewife. "I honestly had the guts to take up this play because it is totally experimental theatre," says Patil, who did on stage what she has already done on screen anyway—playing an ornery, next-door Plain Jane. But the actress claims: "To me it didn't feel like theatre; it was the problem I was attracted to. In the play, I'm just communicating." Patil, however, feels



Patil: mime's the word



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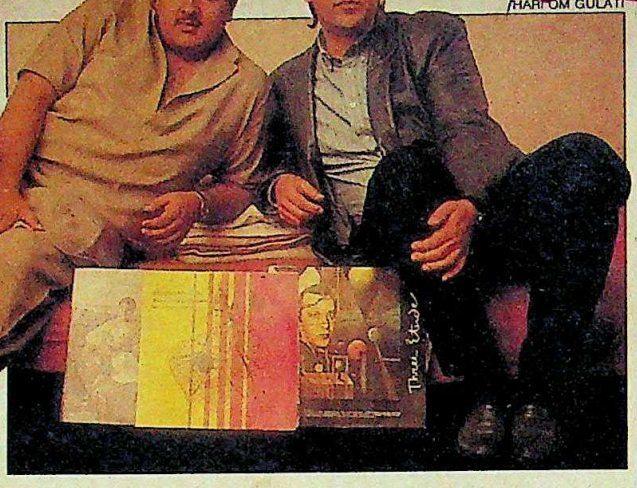
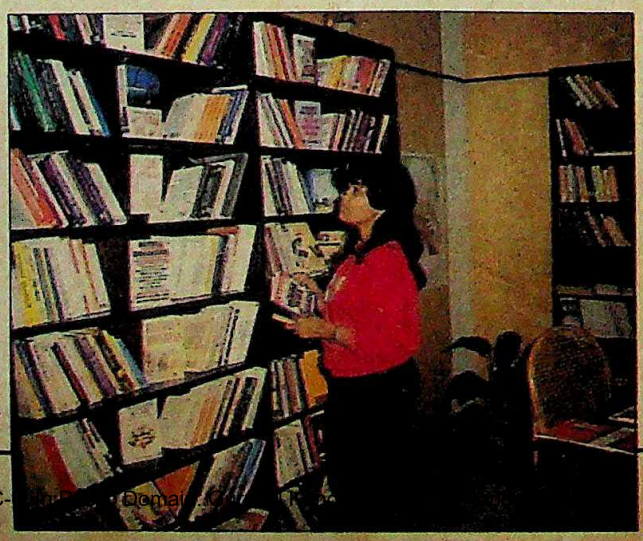


Khan and Kulpowicz: meeting point

the play belongs to the pavements. "It's not meant for a normal audience. It should be performed as a street play."

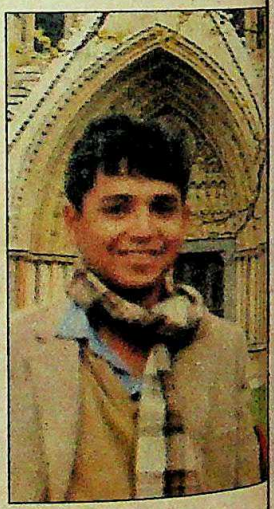
◆ **Shujaat Khan**, 25, dark and chubby, lives in Delhi and **Slawomir Kulpowicz**, 32, lean and light-eyed, lives in Warsaw. And there's perfect tuning between the two. Their meeting point is "the similarity between Indian classical music and jazz", proof of which is the joint disc they released last fortnight and the concerts they'll be giving soon in Delhi. Khan is an established classical sitarist and Kulpowicz is a jazz pianist. They met at the 1978 Jazz Yatra in Bombay, and ever since they have been trying to create "something new, something different—a music that appeals to the masses". It's not fusion and it's not a blend, Khan claims. "We are not trying to bring the two kinds of music together," he says. "We simply play. He does his own thing and I do my own. We work on the theme of the composition and try to make it sound beautiful and harmonious." Kulpowicz prefers to call it "synthesis". "It's both experiment and improvisation," he says, "and all we want is a sound result."

◆ It's a sight to gladden the heart of a Germaine Greer: roof-to-floor shelves lined with fire-breathing titles (*The Hidden Face of Eve*, *The Sceptical Feminist*, etcetera) and a staff and clientele made up of feminists only. Tucked away in Bangalore, **Streelekha**—the nation's first feminist bookshop—is the baby of the Society for Informal Education and Development Studies and it is being midwifed by Donna Fernandes, Judith Morey and six other sisters in the cause. "We thought it wasn't enough to just shout about dowry deaths and all that; so we decided to support the movement with books," says Fernandes, while Morey adds: "And we made it commercially viable." Which indeed is a lot to write home about.



Streelekha: woman's own

◆ He wrote one book and put all midnight's children to shame. And like other Indo-Anglicans, he did not have to walk Hampstead Heath for inspiration either. **Amitav Ghosh**, 30, earthy and boyishly good-looking, simply sat in his bachelor-digs *barsaati* and invented some prose that had all the makings of a contemporary classic. So when *The Circle of Reason*, his first novel, was released last fortnight in London, it made lolling litterateurs sit up and wipe their bi-focals. The technique



Ghosh: pen magic

is new, the metaphors unbelievable, and the pace builds up like a *bara khayal*. The story is about some people who set out to find their earthly Utopia and fail. A lecturer in the Delhi School of Economics, Ghosh is himself surprised at his sudden upward climb on the literary ladder. But as he says in his *Circle*: "No one can reckon for chance."

—Compiled by MOHAMMED ASLAM

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Paying the Price

Recent increases in the price of essential commodities have highlighted the oppressive squeeze of inflation on the common man. People have devised unusual ways of coping, but inflation has taken a heavy toll of the Government and the economy.

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Avoiding A Showdown

The pendulum in Punjab continued to swing between the extremists and the state Government as the success of the sarbat khalsa in Anandpur Sahib was neutralised by the defiant occupation of the Golden Temple by militants.

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The Endangered Accord

The two-month-old AGP Government in Assam finds itself in a mellowed mood, chastened by the difficulties in implementing the accord and extremist challenge that, unless handled properly, could take Assam the way of Punjab.

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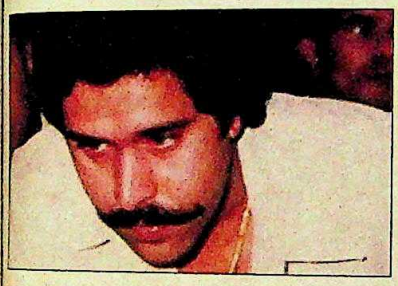

The Mystery Unfolds

Coordinated goverment action has interestingly uncovered vital evidence that could finally start the process of unravelling the mystery surrounding the controversial Shaw Wallace share deal with Vijay Mallya's United Breweries.

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Hitting New Highs

Heroin addiction in India is fast acquiring the dimensions of an epidemic. The dramatic rise in addicts in the last few years is worrying doctors and psychiatrists, faced with an abject lack of facilities for rehabilitation and treatment.

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The New Awakening

Hindustani classical music, after decades of dormancy, is finally breaking through the commercial barrier and gaining popular acceptance. A number of factors have contributed to the new awakening of interest amongst all sections.

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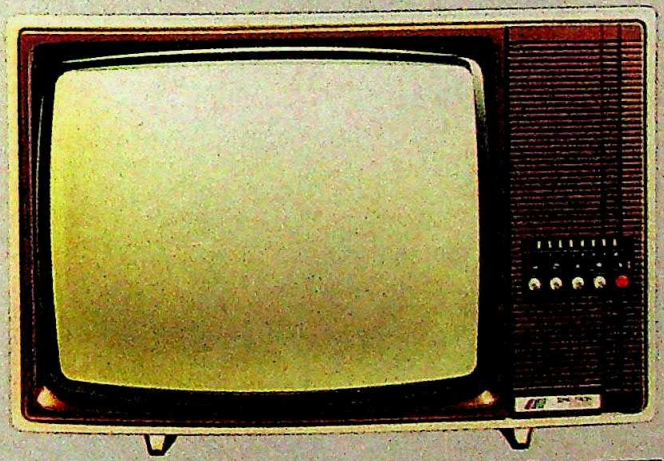

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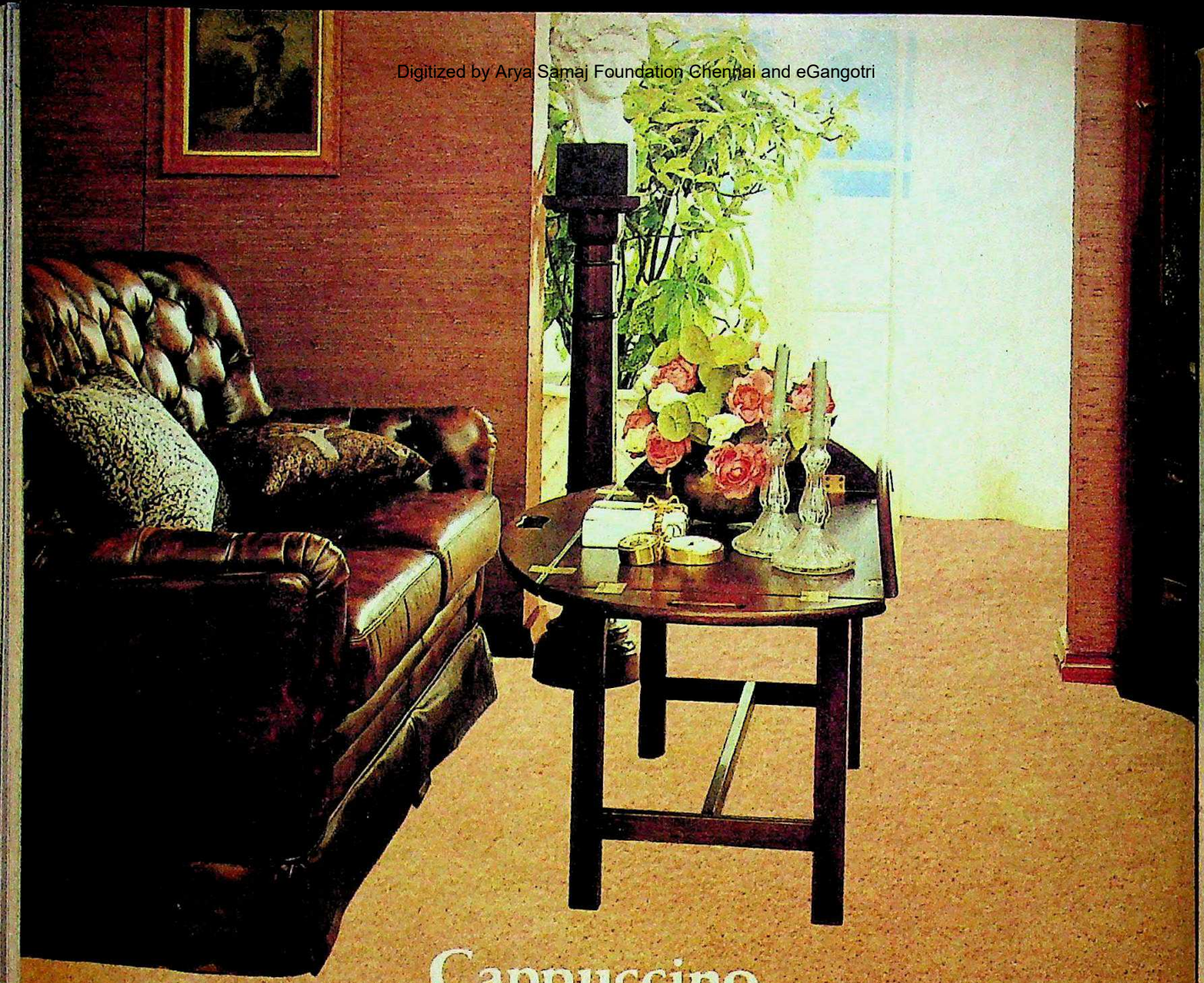

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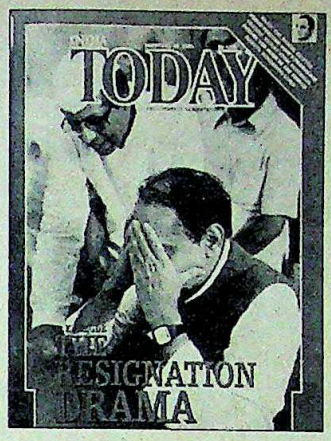

A PRINCIPLED POLITICIAN

The dramatic resignation of Ramakrishna Hegde had indeed jolted the nation ("The Resignation Drama", February 28). It was a magnanimous and statesmanlike gesture on his part to have relinquished office following the Karnataka High Court's judgement regarding the arrack bottling contract case. Would any of our power-hungry politicians do what Hegde has done? This sets him apart from other politicians.

Many may gibe at Hegde's resignation as a pre-planned gimmick, but he only heeded to the appeals of the people and his partymen and decided to continue as the chief minister.

Bangalore — K. CHIDANAND KUMAR

■ The high-level soap opera in Karnataka highlights the shallowness of our political stalwarts. Is the Janata Party like the old Mughal empire where the sudden exit of the emperor was irreplaceable and led to chaos? The sycophants backed by weak leaders of the party have led a docile chief minister back to the chair and they will, in course of time, demand their pound of flesh.

Lucknow — S.K. MUSHRAN

■ Unlike the previous two occasions, Hegde's decision to quit office was, in fact, ill-conceived as no government can actually function if it has to resign every time an executive order is challenged by a court of law. Knowing fully well that the Janata Party has no real alternative, he was re-voted as the leader. The whole episode in Karnataka may prove suicidal if repeated in future.

Noida — J.R. LAROIYA

MATTER OF LUCK?

"Going Down Under" (February 28) provided a good insight into the Benson & Hedges series. It cannot be said that we lost the series due to lack of astute captaincy and high-level coordination. We have depended far too much on luck and the toss, rather than on talent. We have good potential, but what we lack is the calculated and confident approach to the matches.

Bangalore — T.S. SHANKARAN

IN THE DARK

I fully endorse your views made in the Comment ("Projection Perils", February 28) on the Doordarshan's reportage of public response to the recent price hike. The state-controlled medium reproduced the Government's own attitude of wanting to insulate itself from the opinion of the masses. The state believes that the general public save some dissenting groups would given time reconcile themselves to what are momentary hardships. Doordarshan wants to keep the people in the dark and does not want to use the medium to enlighten and discuss.

New Delhi — SUBHAASHINI SHVETAAMBARAN

CAREFUL CHOICE

Rajiv Gandhi's "Formula for Efficiency" (February 28) is welcome. But choosing a new council from those "who have built up considerable reputation in their fields" seems fallacious. Our country has had an abundance of scientific talent which has either been smothered or has taken refuge in the West. Heads of establishments who have achieved pre-eminence have generally done so by repelling all talent and by collecting dwarfs around them. The Government should choose those who attracted good talent below them, and shun those who as scientific heads developed considerable reputations for themselves. Or else we may find delivered into the 21st century, not the country's research, but the council itself!

New Delhi — RAJIV BAJAJ

LENIENT APPROACH

There is no denying the fact that the state Government as well as the Central Government have become too complacent with regard to the extremist presence in the state ("Capture of the Temple", February 15). The SGPC has been truly ousted by the Damdami Taksal and its leader Mohkam Singh seems even more terrifying than the redoubtable Bhindranwale. At this stage

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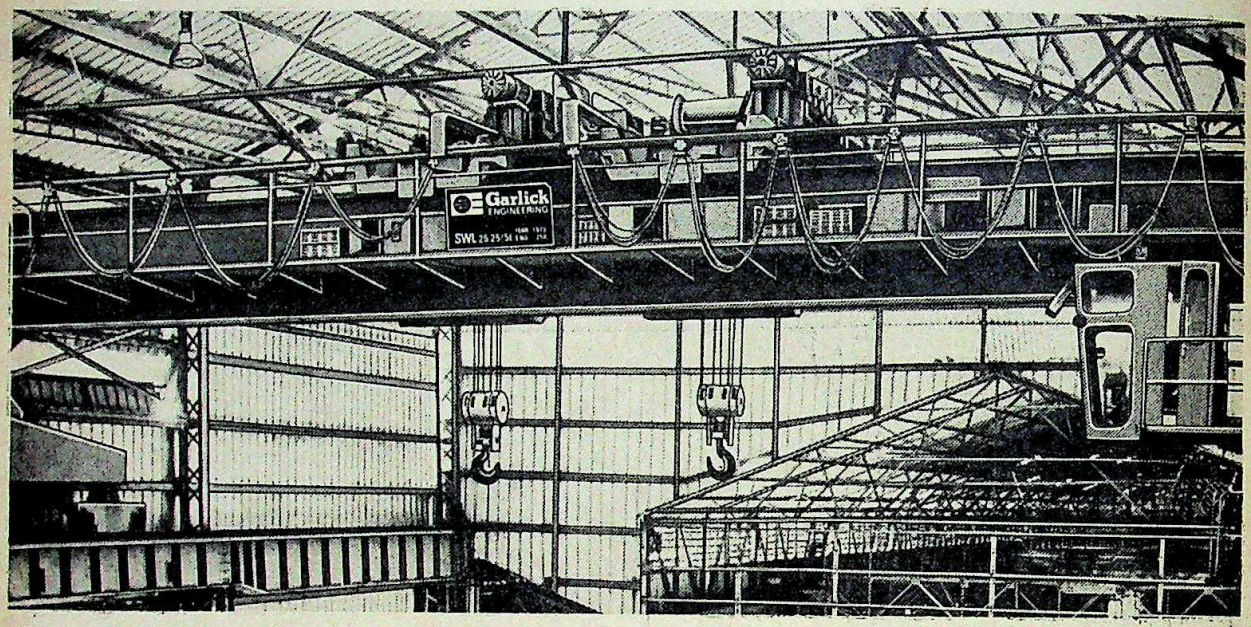

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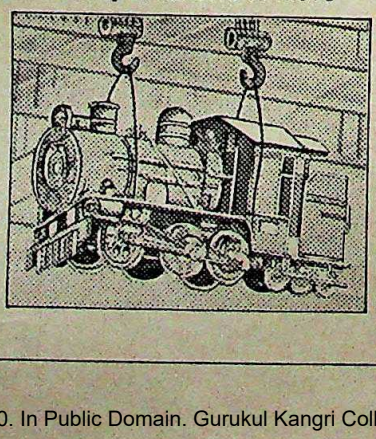

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the Government cannot afford to repose, it must act intelligently and quickly before the situation is blown out of proportion.

SAMEER N. SHAH
Cochin

■ Chief Minister Barnala must be the most worried man today. The people of Punjab gave him a massive mandate against the terrorists and a golden opportunity to isolate and eliminate the extremists, which has been lost due to the Akali Dal's inner contradictions. The ill-advised policy of being soft towards the terrorists has finally boomeranged.

H.K. LOHUMI
Shimla

■ Once again the Golden Temple is under the control of militant elements, triggering off a fresh phase of uncertainty in the already explosive situation of Punjab. The state Government has virtually surrendered the holy precincts to the militants by adopting a weak stance. Had the Centre transferred Chandigarh to Punjab on Republic Day, Barnala's credibility would have soared and it would have been easier for him to contain militant challenge.

RAJVIR GREWAL
Calcutta

CLEAN-UP OPERATION

"Political Immunity" (February 15) has rightly analysed Mr Clean's Government from various angles. But one wishes that the article said more than just the fact that the ministers are not clean enough.

P. LALA
Akra, West Bengal

■ Rajiv Gandhi has done a commendable job in attacking corruption in all its forms in society. But his failure to touch the politicians is a very valid excuse for questioning his Mr Clean image. At a time when the word politician is beginning to have a negative connotation, the prime minister's attack on corrupt lot could go a long way in restoring public confidence in the politician.

SANJAY UPADHYA
Kathmandu

■ In your Comment you say "there is one category of citizens which has been left conspicuously untouched throughout the period—the politicians". But, don't you think to fight a battle, you have to be able to live. Rajiv Gandhi needs to stay in power to be able to perform any reforms. If he starts on the politicians he may have problems staying in power himself. He has, in fact, dealt with some corrupt politicians, they have been moved to insignificant places.

ALOK KAPOOR
Hubli

■ When the Government is bold enough and actually takes the right steps to remove corruption will it pass through the litmus test of a clean government. Only then will the common masses realise that the Mr Clean image that Rajiv Gandhi propagates is true.

VINOD JAKATEY
Gwalior

RIDICULOUS CLAIMS

The very name "Ramkrishna" evidently identifies that Parahamansaji himself was a Hindu and of no other ism ("Odd Claims", February 15). The founder of the mission, Swami Vivekananda, had proudly declared at the historic gathering in Chicago that he was proud to be a Hindu and we now hear the officials making claims of denouncing Hinduism and forming a new religion called Ramkrishnaism.

D.M. VYAS
Rajkot

■ Ramkrishna Mission's submission to the high court that the religion of Sri Ramkrishna is separate from that of Hindus has caused considerable dismay among the aspirants who subscribe to the philosophy and ideologies of Swami Vivekananda. He travelled through the length and breadth of the world as a messenger of Hinduism and never propagated anything like the so-called new religion—Ramkrishnaism.

M.A. SREERAMAN
Trivandrum

■ The claim made by the Ramkrishna Mission shows the ridiculous extent to which a constitutional provision can be stretched. In a secular country like India no educational institution should be allowed to be run by any religious organisation. The Government should have complete control and no institution should be allowed to work with any privilege at all.

D. SRINIVASA RAO
Vijayawada

CHRONIC AFFAIR

The child labour problem ("Wages of Innocence", February 15) has been a chronic one. You have tried hard to bring the malaise into focus, but whether it will cut any ice or not is yet to be seen. Understandably, the poverty-stricken, illiterate parents who force their children to work and are often oblivious of their future.

ASHOK KUMAR PANDEY
Faizabad

■ K.C. Khanna, who makes his profits from carpets, says child labour in carpet making is not his concern because he does not "directly" employ them. He further says that the children should be grateful that they are being trained in such "an intricate art". I applaud his stand, and invite the children from his family to come to Madras for free training in "other crafts".

SUJATHA RANGASWAMI
Madras

GENERAL INTEREST

I read the interview of General Sundarji (February 15) with interest. But a large part of the interview pertains to the tasks ahead of him and his success will be for everyone to see when he relinquishes command.

I do not know how far General Sundarji is right in equating pay with the length of service. For better motivation and morale, pay must be related to performance and the responsibility that the individual carries.

A notable omission on your part in the interview is a question on his role as a member of the Expert Committee which was headed by General Krishna Rao in 1975-76. The committee did look 25 years ahead into the future of the army and its restructuring.

SUNIJ
New Delhi

■ The Government should, by all means, review the compensation package for those brave soldiers who leave their families behind and defend our borders by risking their own lives. A career with the army should be made far more attractive. But there would always be only one general at the top and he can't be paid only on the basis of his length of service and without consideration of the fact that he is the one who has proved himself more competent.

KRISHAN KALRA
New Delhi

OVERALL PERFORMANCE

In your ultimate analysis of Kapil Dev as captain, the conclusion seems to have stemmed more from the belief — "generals are known by the wars they win than by the battles they fought"— than giving due regard to the circumstances in which Kapil had to perform.

No match has ever been won or lost by sheer captaincy (the teams overall performance has always been a crucial and deciding factor in the determination of the ultimate result).

SUMAN PARKER
New Delhi

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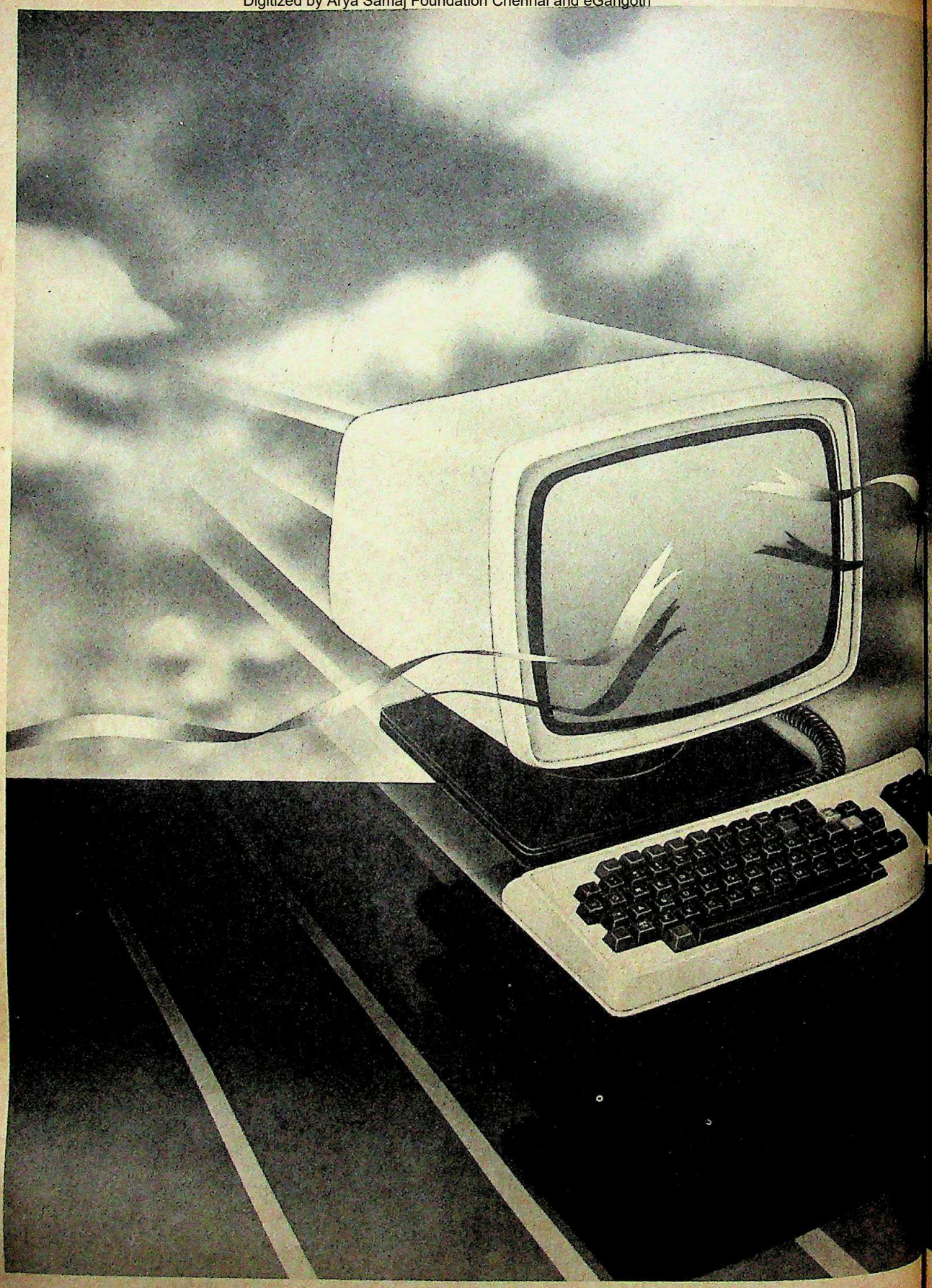

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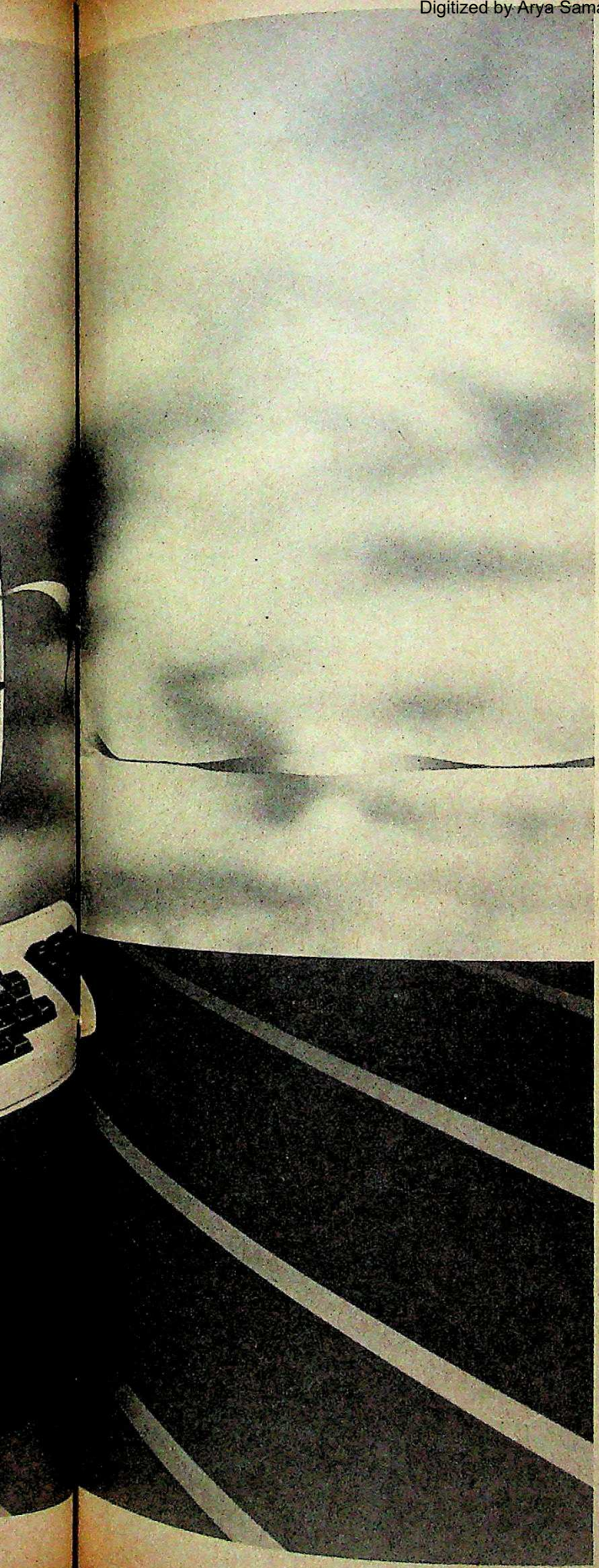

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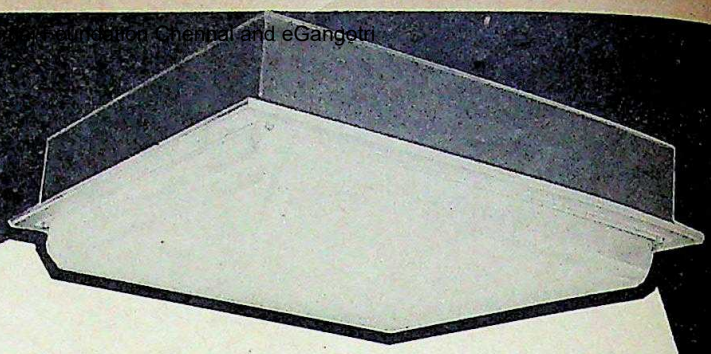

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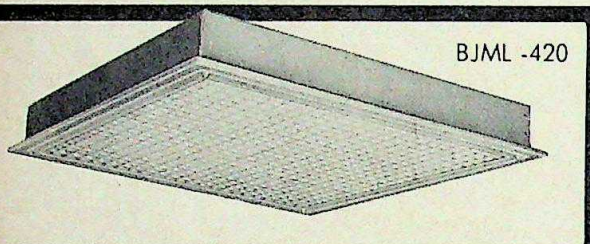

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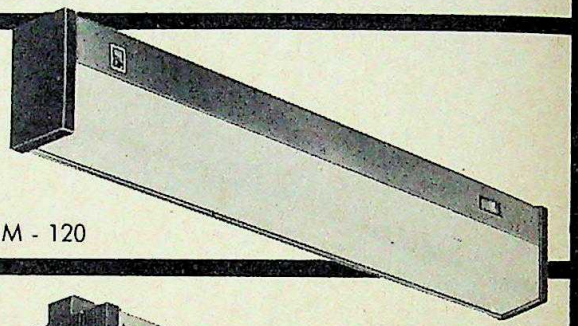

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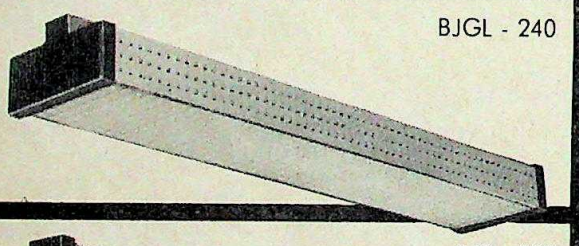

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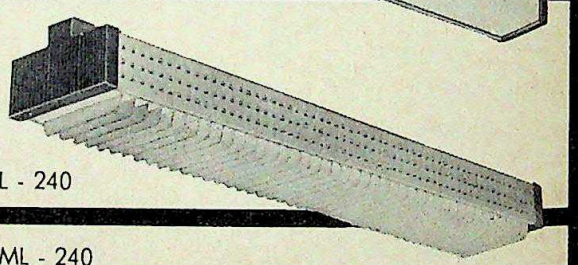

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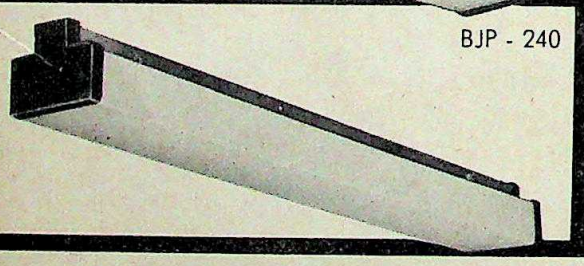

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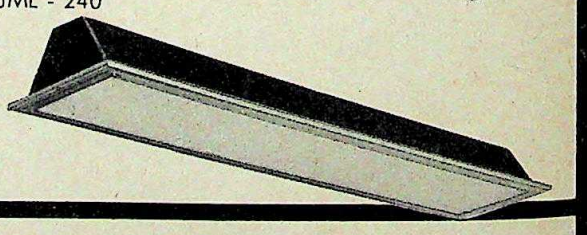

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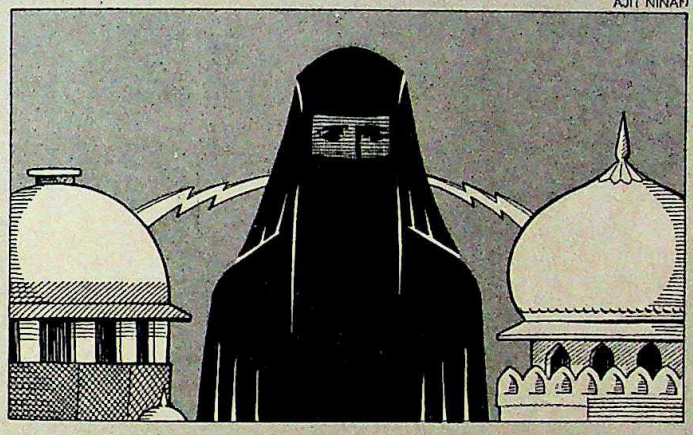
Stepping Backwards

THE INTRODUCTION of the new Muslim personal law legislation in Parliament is an event that cannot be regretted enough. Not only because the Government has been obliged to fall in line, but because it is a sad comment on the mood of a very large part of the Muslim community that it should in this day and age have come out so strongly against progressive change. At a time when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi talks of taking this country into the 21st century, it is a giant step backwards. In an era in which the touchstone is modernism, when the scientific temper and equality for women are the buzzwords, it is a retrograde move. True the Government was caught in a cleft stick, with the Supreme Court verdict on the Shah Bano case forming one limb and the increasingly ugly mood in some sections of the Muslim community the other. But it has yielded to conservatism and done long-term damage to the cause and principle of reform.

AJIT NINAN



Those in the Muslim community who view the bill, which is essentially a compromise to escape from a tight corner, as redemption of their position should pause and think over the implications of what has been achieved in the affirmation that in the event of a divorce. Muslim husbands owe their wives nothing that isn't already in the marriage contract. If the new legislation serves the letter of Islamic Personal Law—and even that isn't clear from the contending views that have been vociferously put forward in the wake of the Shah Bano case—it ignores the spirit of justice—and justice as defined by any but the most obscurantist standpoint.

Consider the direct consequences of the new bill. It undoes at one stroke the interpretation effected in 1973 which said that Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (together with the proviso contained in Section 127) applied to Muslim women. It puts in jeopardy the hundreds of cases for maintenance that are pending in the courts and turns its back on judgements like the one that awarded Shah Bano her maintenance. It is a decisive step away from the eventual evolution of a common civil code, and in affirming that the constitutional right of one group of Muslim women is different from the right of non-Muslim women it only confirms an inequality before the law.

But this is the least of it. In spite of the loud protest that has been organised against the Shah Bano verdict, there is a substantial and growing body of Muslim opinion which does not go along with the conservatives. Delegations have called on the prime minister and there have been enough public statements to indicate that the Muslim community is not united on this issue. If, as has been argued, reform of Muslim Personal Law is a matter that is best left to the Muslims, then those in that community who decry the concept of maintenance owe it to the growing liberal sentiment among the Muslims, to Muslim women whose futures are directly affected, and the rest of the nation to explain how they propose to go about initiating reform.

Indeed, if the practice of Islamic nations around the world is any standard, then Indian Muslims who argue against a change in personal law are either better Muslims for obeying the Shariat so loyally or are simply refusing to accept a basic fact of life that reform is very much part of the evolution of any religion. The experience of Iran between the Shah and the Ayatollah indicates that the pace of change must be controlled, but the experience of so many other Islamic nations shows that modern states and forward-looking societies can exist only with gradual but definite change. After all, if the source of personal law legislation in countries as far apart as Pakistan, Turkey and Tunisia are the same scriptures, then it is natural to ask that if those countries can reform Muslim Personal Law substantially to meet the needs of modern society, then why should Indian Muslims hold back?

It is true, of course, that India is a secular nation and that the Muslims, being in a minority, are sensitive to anything that suggests an intrusion on their religious identity. But if Muslim leaders were upset with the Supreme Court verdict, they should have gone back to the court, to a full bench if necessary, with all the arguments they could muster and sought a reversal or at least a moderation of the original judgement. More important, they should themselves initiate steps that interpret religious tenets in the light of modern thinking the way that Islamic countries and societies have done and continue to do elsewhere so that problems of this kind do not arise. For instance, Section 125 has been in the books long enough for enlightened leadership to have anticipated precisely the kind of problem that Shah Bano seems to have posed for the community. Or is it anybody's case that Muslim Personal Law as it currently stands is in need of no change?

Quite clearly, the ultimate motivation for the compromise is political. The Congress(I) has lost ground among the Muslims, particularly after the Assam accord and the affair in Ayodhya hasn't helped matters either. But if the new legislation encourages the Sikhs to make similar demands—as they have done in the past—or worse, a stiffening of postures among Hindus, it will have served to divide when the need is to emphasise what unites the different communities of this country. And that will ill serve the interests of both the Muslims and the Government.

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Inside Story

● R.K. Dhawan, special assistant to Mrs Gandhi when she was prime minister, continues to be a sensitive subject for the new Government. Last fortnight, when word leaked

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

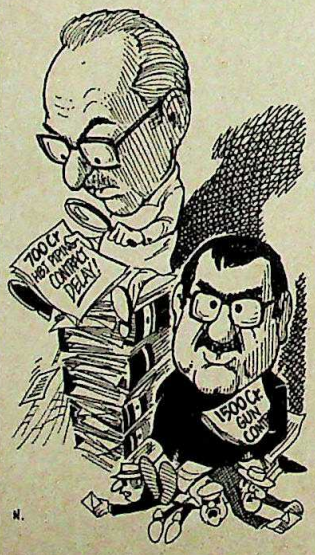
out to people in the Government that *The Statesman* was coming out with an exclusive 'Insight' report on how Dhawan had been asked to take a lie detector test by the Thakkar Commission, which is going into the circumstances of Mrs Gandhi's assassination, the telephone wires began buzzing.

First a cabinet minister telephoned the newspaper office and wanted information on the story in question. Then a senior officer in the prime minister's office got into the act and made a call himself. Later, the Calcutta office of the newspaper got a call from the minister, who issued a summary order that the story should be killed. When nothing seemed to work, yet another call to the newspaper came through demanding the names and telephone numbers of the directors of the company.

Despite these late evening shenanigans, the newspaper carried its report prominently the next morning. But there was no word printed about the Government's attempt at pressurisation and censorship, and the Delhi editor of the paper would not make himself available for comment on the inside story of the 'Insight' story.

Reserved Subject

● The case of the Hazira-Bijaypur-Jagdishpur (HBJ) gas pipeline gets curiouser and curiouser as a final decision is delayed on who should get the Rs 700-crore contract. Meanwhile, observers of the Delhi scene have one pertinent question for which there seems no answer: When the ambassadors of Italy and Canada wrote to the Government expressing their reservations about the manner in which Indian experts were deciding on the awarding of the contract, the immediate response was to set up a committee headed by



Cabinet Secretary P.K.Kaul to review the experts' recommendation.

But in a similar deal involving a Rs 1,500-crore contract for a new field gun for the army, the ambassadors of some of the four countries in the race have similarly written letters. Yet no review committee has been set up to go into the controversial recommendations, and Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh has refused to meet the ambassadors concerned.

Special Effect

● Last fortnight's avidly-watched *Janvani* programme on prices had a surprise for TV viewers. A member of the studio audience grilling V.P. Singh and his ministerial col-

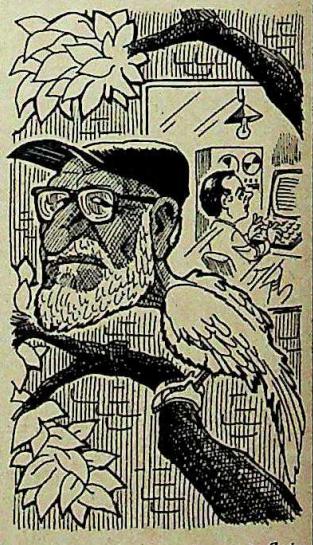
leagues was none other than Singh's wife, Sita. While she asked her husband about little more than *paan masala* and cooking gas, others were naturally asking how she got on to the screen and whether this was no more than a gimmick.

In actual fact, it was not. The original programme was meant to feature Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh. At the last minute, the Finance Ministry decided that because of the storm created by the recent price hikes, V.P.Singh and the other concerned ministers would appear instead. According to Mrs Singh, her decision was an impulsive one in reaction to the announcement of the change in programme a day before. She told Doordarshan boss Harish Khanna that she wanted to take part, and he said she would be welcome. It was only when her husband came home just before leaving for the studios that she informed him of her participation in the programme. Mrs Singh says, however, that she now regrets her decision since she has received numerous calls asking why she let her husband off the hook so easily.

In a Flap

● Getting accommodation in the Rajya Sabha is one thing. But getting accommodation in New Delhi so that one can attend the upper house is quite another, as Dr Salim Ali, 90, the grand old man of Indian ornithology, discovered last fortnight. When Ali was offered the coveted Rajya Sabha nomination last year by Rajiv Gandhi, he declined on grounds of his advancing age, but was persuaded by the prime minister who promised him every facility in Delhi, including accommodation.

But when the birdman flew in from Bombay to attend the budget session and approached the Works and Hou-



sing Ministry for an MP's flat, he was bluntly informed that there were no vacancies. An irate Ali has been forced to stay with his niece till he can get the prime minister's ear.

But that is another chapter in the story. In his attempts to contact the prime minister, Ali has been through a flock of aides and PA's who all give him one stock answer: his request for an appointment has been logged in the computer. Ali is still waiting for the computer to call him back.

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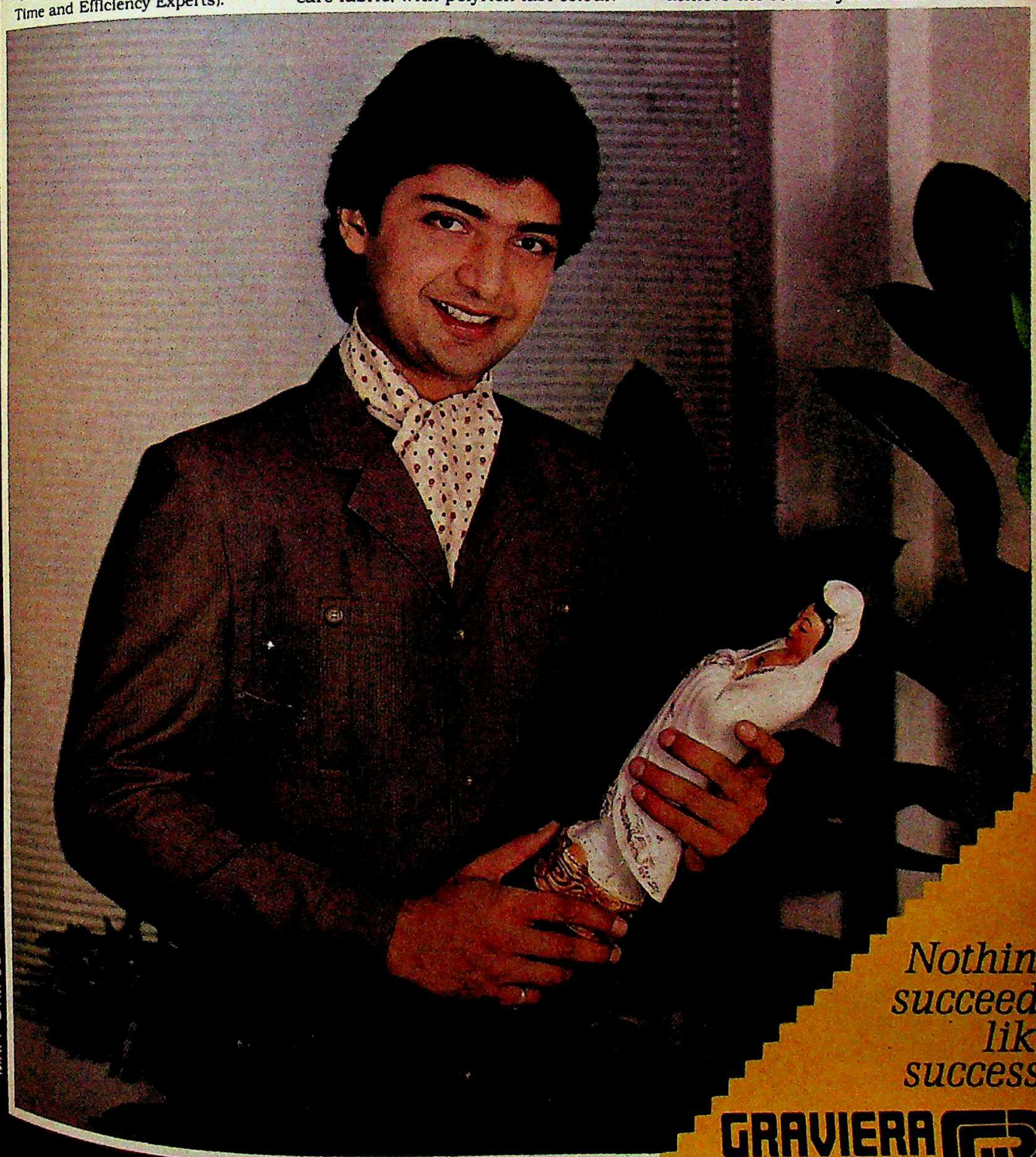

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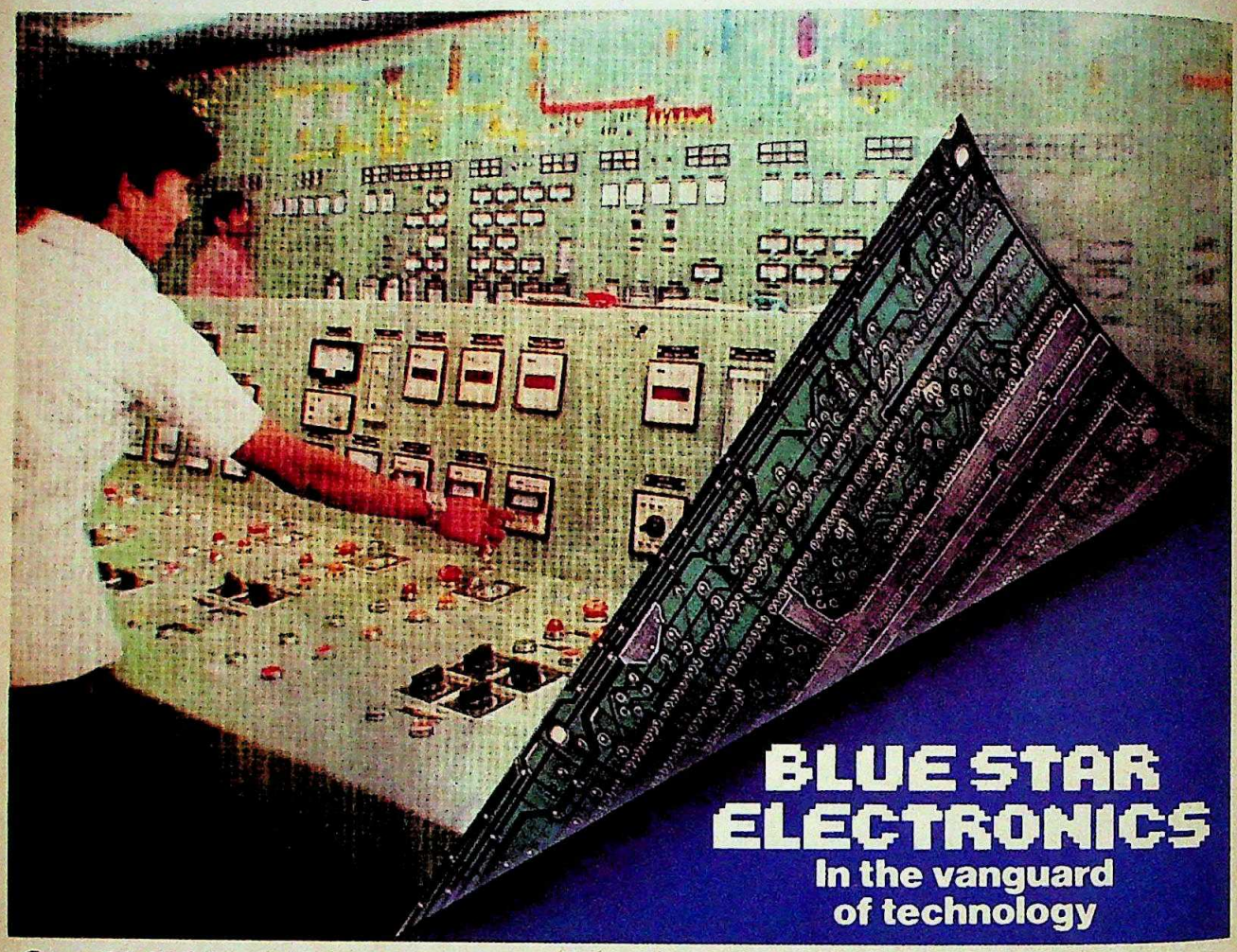

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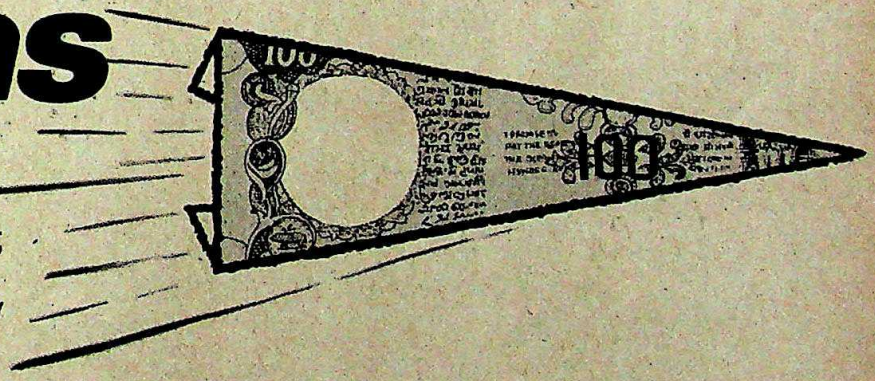

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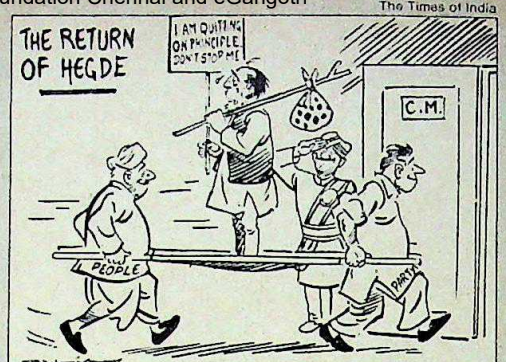
The Times of India



● *Some very tough decisions have to be taken. Unless hard political decisions are taken the future of the country will not be safe.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI on the petroleum price hike, in his address to the national council of the Indian Youth Congress

● *This is my last visit and my only request is please do not deify me. I have no disciples. Do not construct a memorial or build a temple for me. That would nullify all my teachings.*

■ J. KRISHNAMURTI at the last meeting of the Krishnamurti Foundation before his death

● *I think Edwina (Lady Mountbatten) was a great friend of my brother's. A man and a woman can be great friends. I have had many good men friends but I have not been to bed with them.*

■ VIJAY LAKSHMI PANDIT in *The Washington Post*

● *This is not my last supper. I am coming back.*

■ POPE JOHN PAUL II shortly before his departure from India

● *If Gavaskar or some other cricketer scores a century then it's front page news—they're given television sets, houses, what have you. What of the artistes?... What about them? No, there's nothing for them.*

■ BIRJU MAHARAJ, Padma Vibhushan recipient, in *The Hindustan Times Sunday Magazine*

● *It is you people from the press who tell us what could have been done and what should not have been done; and when something goes wrong with the plan, you are the first to start blasting the captain.*

■ KAPIL DEV in *The Sunday Observer*

● *What sort of secrets can an Indian journalist possibly pass on? Every bit of military purchase we make is known to outsiders anyway. Every square inch of our land—including our seas and ports—has been mapped by spy satellites. Russian and American.... Does one have to go to Taiwan to spill the beans?*

■ M.V. KAMATH in *Express Magazine*

● *If children grow up watching* Chhayageet, *we'll have a nation of nitwits.*

■ HRISHIKESH MUKHERJEE in *Filmfare*

● *We want India to attack us. We would love that. Because that would seal and decide matters for ever.*

■ SARDAR QAYYUM KHAN, president, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, in *Sunday*

● *Pakistan is training our people. I must do something. I can't sit on my bed and say 'come, take over the country'.*

■ J.R. JAYEWARDENE, Sri Lanka president, quoted in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

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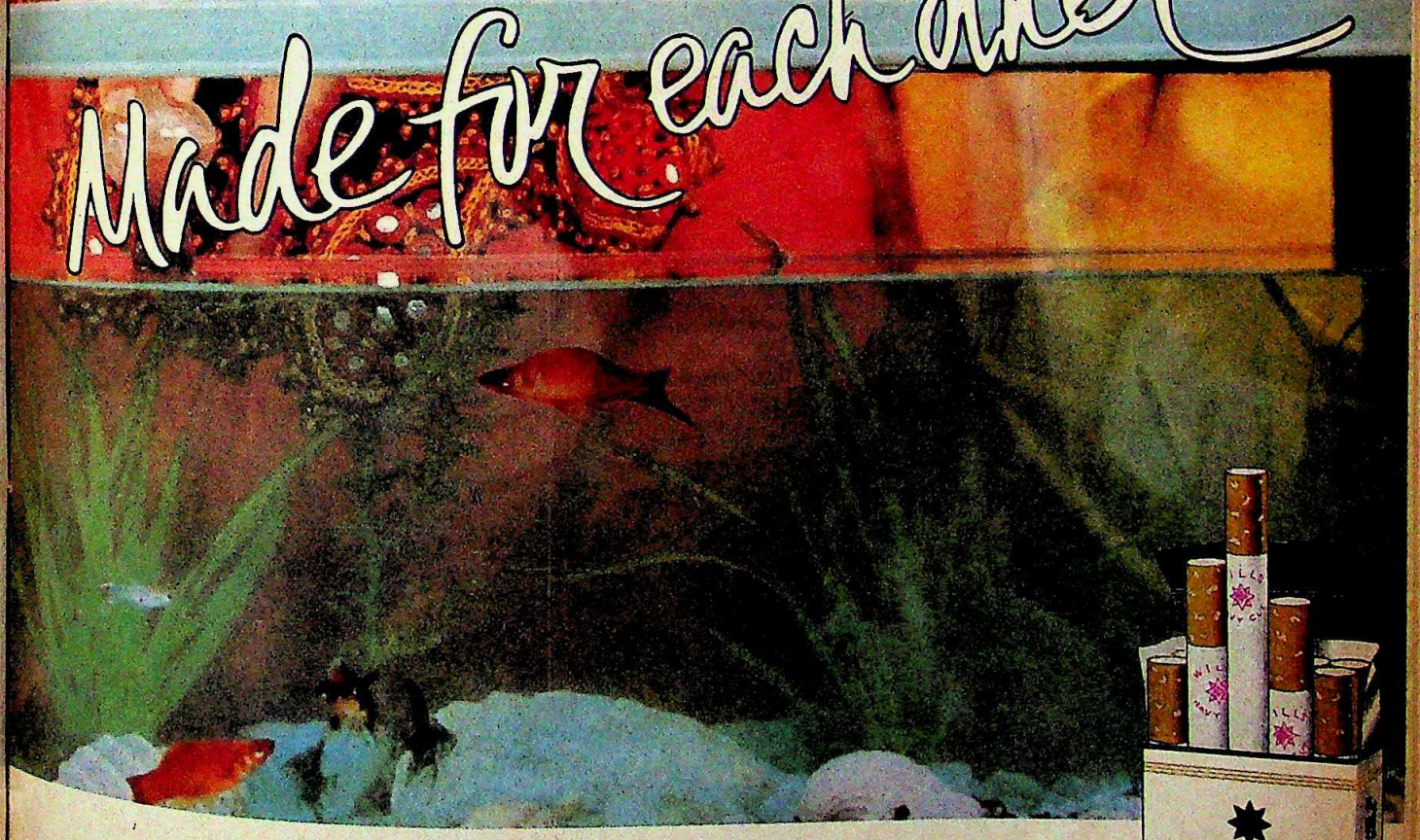

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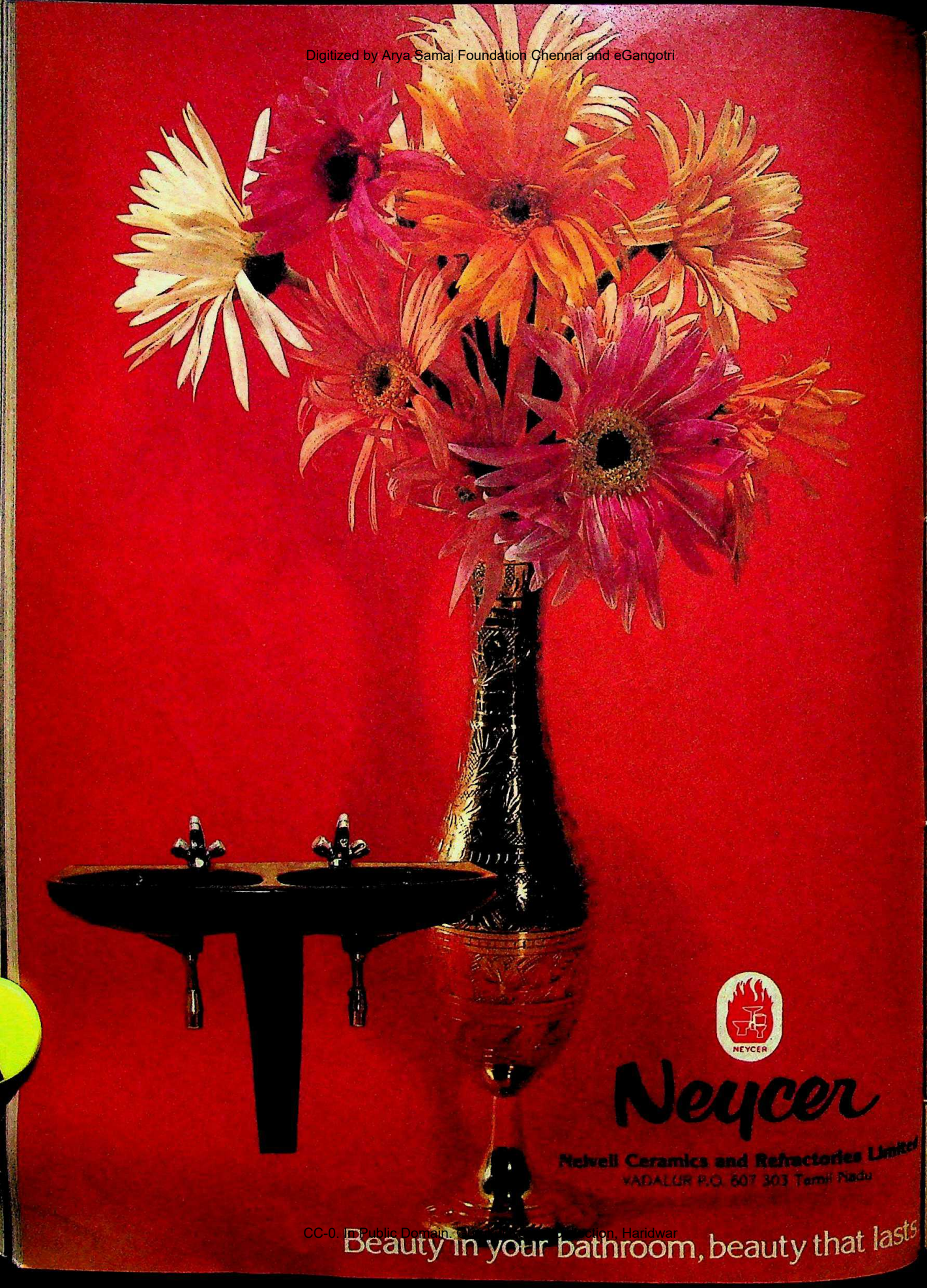

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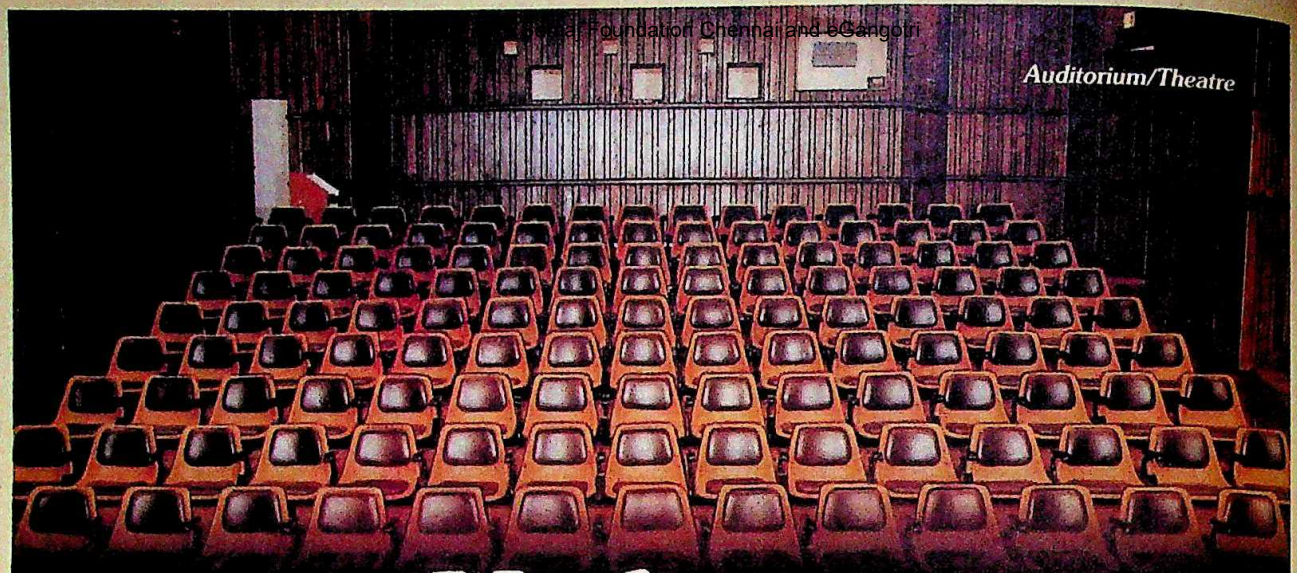

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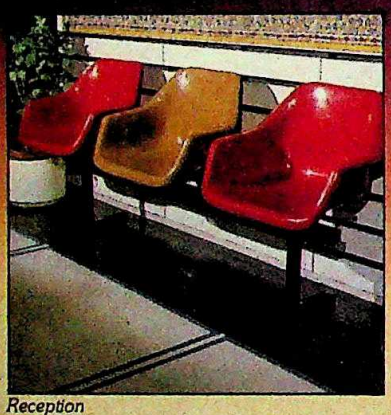
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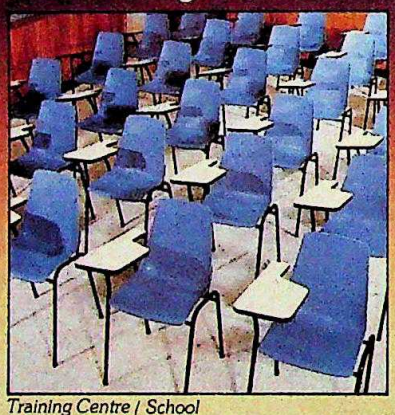
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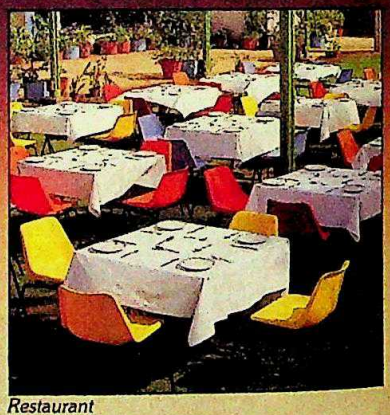
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NUPTIAL KNOT

■ When it comes to indomitable women, there's no place like Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu. There's one who goes by the docile-sounding name of Premlata, and she is a Christian. A few months ago, Premlata fell in love with a young Hindu bank clerk called Gunasekharan and, to cut a long story short, they decided to marry.

Unfortunately, even as the ceremonies continued their musical way, Guna noticed that Prema was a bit out of sorts. Hoping he hadn't set a world record in family quarrels so quickly after the nuptials, he turned to her and asked her falteringly what the matter was. She turned her beautiful eyes to him, fingered the *mangalsutra* that dangled round her neck and said: "Why don't you wear a *mangalsutra* given by me?" If a wife could wear a *mangalsutra*, she reasoned, why couldn't a husband?

Why not, indeed, responded Guna hastily. So she produced a pretty little chain and locket and opened the locket coyly and showed it to him. And inside was a picture of herself, lovely as a rose. And she tied it around his neck and both of them drove away into the sunset, each realising that they were now in it for good, up to their necks.

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST

■ The Royal Canadian Mounted Police always get their man. And, it appears now that a lady in Bangalore has taken their motto to heart. She is called Jayamma and her story is instructive.

Jayamma gave her heart to police constable Rangaiah and he gave her his, and the Jaya-Ranga duo were all set for a wedding and happily ever after. But alas, Rangaiah had second thoughts and one evening when the moon was taking a break, he told her he couldn't marry her. Violins. Tears.

However, and more power to her, Jayamma was not about to take this jilting-wilting lying down. She raved and ranted and finally the two of them were brought before a deputy commissioner of police for a compromise.

But accords are not all that easy to make these days and a few minutes later policemen strolling in the vicinity were brushed rudely aside by a flustered Rangaiah racing down the corridor followed by a tearful Jayamma. Apparently, according to the DCP, Rangaiah was very reluctant to plight his troth with his former beloved, hence her current plight of love's labour being lost.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

■ When one is in the mood for a little fun and laughter, there's nothing more refreshing than the Indore Municipal Corporation. One of the elders of this august body was hanging around on the streets and, in the midst of meditating on the amount of votes he would get in the municipal elections, suddenly noticed a dreadful sight. Dozens of children—

they seemed like thousands to his fevered mind—were sitting on the pavements performing what the Victorian writers used to call ablutions and what the Indian writers call morning chores. The elder was aghast—peculiar, but he'd never seen such a sight before—and went off post-haste to the corporation where he stood up and demanded that something be done about this awful thing.

The corporation did, and its action will go down in history when someone writes a book on the Futility of Public Assemblies. It made out *panchnamas* against five selected offenders, gravely listing the charges against them, and asking each of them to sign. The five, with innocent looks on their faces, signed the *panchnamas*. The corporation also ticked off 25 other children and sternly told them "not to indulge in such acts in future".

HIGH STAKES

■ India is a country where, if Hindi films are anything to go by, husband proposes and wife meekly carries it out. Sometimes, however, the traditional roles are reversed and then things can get very hot. Take the couple in Porbandar, Gujarat, the hometown of the father of India. The lady of the house was smitten, not so much with her husband but with gambling. It appeared to the husband, as he morosely chewed on the dry bread and raw onions, that his wife was never at home, never tending the home fires as she should have learnt by now from watching Nirupa Roy groaning on the screen.

He spat the dry bread out and went to the police, lodging a complaint on the lines set out above. The police set

out on the trail of the errant wife. They came to one small house near the station and there she was, of course, along with four others, a pack of dog-eared playing cards and Rs 225 in cash. The records are silent on whether she fell at her hubby's feet and begged for forgiveness, but Manmohan Desai and his ilk have enough scope in the story for another tear-jerker.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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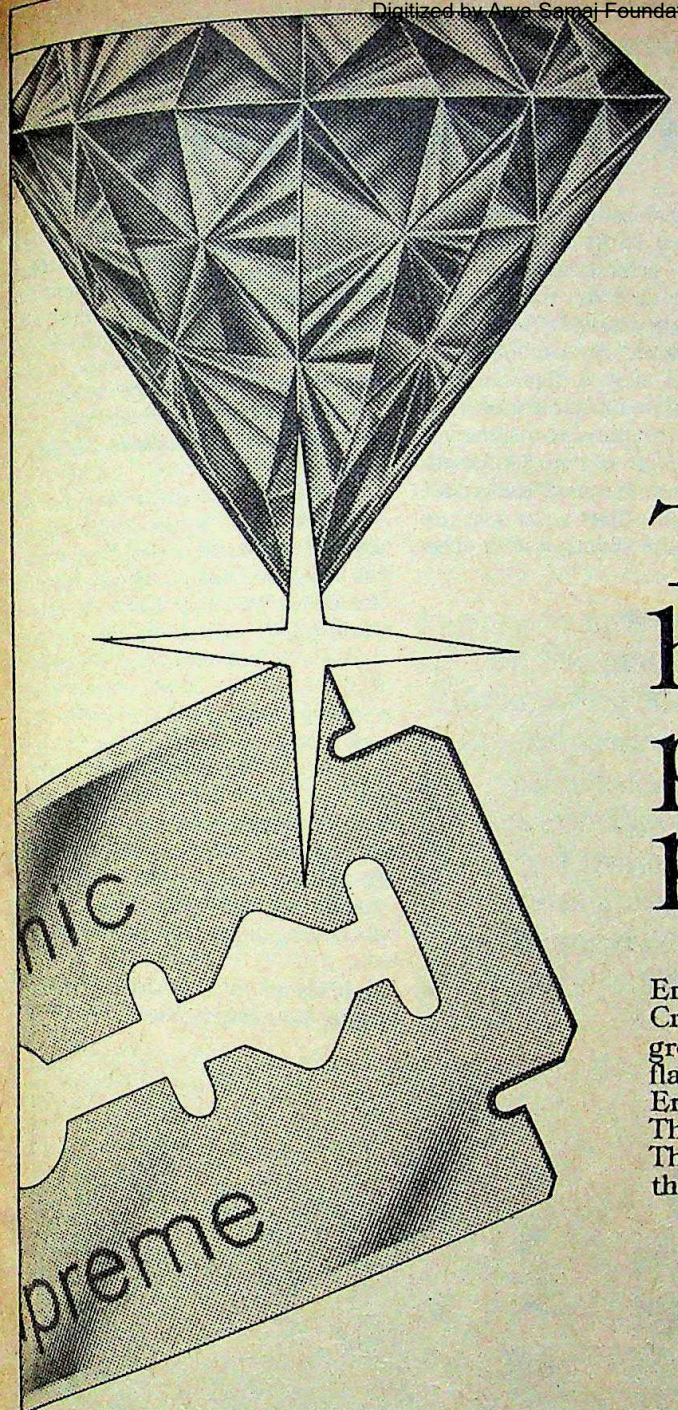

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PUNJAB

Avoiding a Showdown

IN PUNJAB's pendulous politics, highs and lows come with monotonous regularity. One day it is the relief of an accord, another day the triumph of an election and a third day the gloom of an insurrection. Last fortnight's tale of two cities, the *sarbat khalsa* in Anandpur Sahib organised by the Akalis and the *kar seva* of the militants in Amritsar, saw the pendulum swing again as violence reached new heights.

On the face of it, the fortnight opened with the Akalis regaining some of the ground. The *sarbat khalsa* (gathering of the whole community) at Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib in Anandpur drew followers from all over the state, helped no doubt by the deployment of 6,000-odd police and paramilitary forces. And as thousands of hands went up the call was loud and clear: "This congregation directs the SGPC and the Akali Dal to end the illegal interference in Darbar Sahib and restore the Sikh traditions which have been usurped. Whatever steps are taken in this direction will have the support and acceptance of all the Sikhs."

Applying balm to Barnala's morale was a three-page resolution read out by no less than Akal Takht jathedar, Giani Kirpal Singh, which accused the Damdami Taksal and the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) "of turning the gurus' places of worship into battlefields" and alleged that "non-believers and naxalites had infiltrated these bodies to implement the old conspiracy of finishing off the Sikh religion. Sikh youth are being killed and the Akali leaders are their special target. They want to usurp the SGPC which the Sikhs got after great sacrifices."

While there was no denying the propaganda mileage gained through the *sarbat khalsa*, the Akalis were dragging their feet in translating this into action which would see the militants out.

Adding more than a touch of drama, the SGPC's controversial chief, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, dramatically announced his resignation. The SGPC is scheduled to meet on March 1 to consider the resignation, and discussions have been under way in the Akali Dal as well as with some Taksal leaders to see if a candidate for the SGPC presidency acceptable to all can be found.

But discordant voices were also heard with Prakash Singh Badal warning against any move to send the police into the temple complex. "The day you send the police into the Golden Temple the Akali party will be finished for ever." Barnala disagreed and made no secret of it. "The rod is the only answer now for these spoiled boys. If we don't send the police in now, tomorrow the army will have to go." The familiar diatribes against the Centre for failing to implement the Punjab accord, however, drew better response but the fact that listed speakers like Finance Minister Balwant Singh, Sukhjinder Singh and Amrinder Singh did not speak was indication enough that

BHAWAN SINGH

Sikh leaders at the *sarbat khalsa*; and (right) the congregation: strong support

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the Akalis had to stand united if they were to survive. CPI(M) politburo member Harkishan Singh Surjeet put their dilemma succintly: "The Akalis will have to take control of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takht. For a theocratic party, the loss of its religious citadel means loss of the leadership of the Sikhs."

While there was no denying the propaganda mileage gained through the *sarbat khalsa*, it was obvious to discerning political observers that the Akalis were dragging their feet in translating this into urgent positive action which would see the militants out of the Golden Temple. But to be fair, their options here are limited. Police action in the Golden Temple or even sending in troops will completely inflame Sikh opinion in the state and probably result in the fall of the Barnala Government. In fact the Taksal and the AISSF had planned massive morchas to take control over various gurudwaras in case of precisely such an eventuality. As Tohra remarked: "Taking up arms is easy—but against your own people it is counterproductive."

Another option put forward by Sikhs like Lieutenant-General Jagjit Singh Aurora (retd), was to send peaceful jathas chanting *satnam wahe guru* to take control of the complex. Says Aurora: "These jathas should go every day and stay there till the complex swells with men and women and thereby end the Taksal's supremacy." But the Taksal was playing its cards shrewdly. Said Mohkam Singh, acting chief of the Taksal: "We are only doing *kar seva* here and except for some rooms where the *kar seva* offices are located, we interfere in no other matter."

However, AISSF convenor Harinder Singh Kahlon expressed the attitude of the Taksal when he said: "We shall never let the dirty hands of Tohra, Kirpal Singh and Sahib Singh touch the *kar seva*. There shall be no compromise on the positions of the Akal Takht chief and the head priest of the Golden Temple."

Till late last fortnight there were no indications whether a new proposal—that the two priests appointed by the Taksal and five by the SGPC would quit and a common committee take over the seat of Sikh power—had got anywhere but it is clear that the militants have mellowed towards the Barnala Government. It is also disturbing.

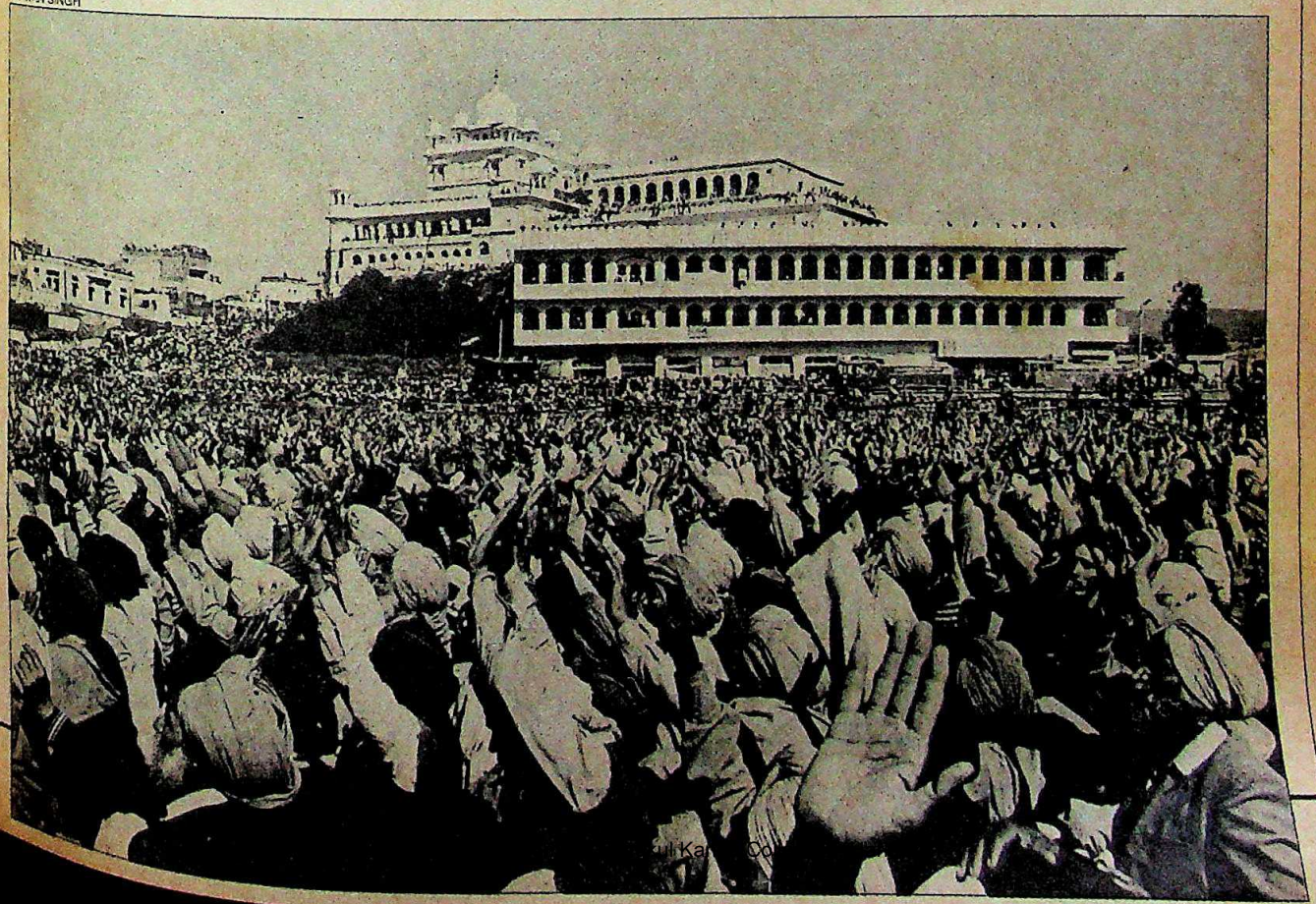
There were no indications whether a new proposal—that the two priests appointed by the Taksal and five by the SGPC would quit and a common committee take over—had got anywhere.

The spiral of violence has lent a hard edge to the situation. Gun-toting terrorists clad in police uniforms looted an armoury of the Government Railway Police in Tarn Taran taking away 16 rifles and 440 rounds of ammunition. Said an angry Jalandhar Range DIG P.C.Dogra: "It is an apology for an armoury. How can disabled and weak home guards take care of an armoury. The terrorists coolly woke up the sleeping guards, got the keys of the wooden box and escaped in a stolen jeep." In Ghuman village near Batala, terrorists gunned down Makhan Singh, a known police informer, and Des Raj, the third police officer to die in Gurdaspur district. Barnala reacted quickly. "We have launched a man-hunt and are hopeful of good results. We must restore peace at all costs," he declared.

Adding to Barnala's woes, the Centre is considering a second commission on the transfer of Hindi-speaking areas to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh. State Finance Minister Balwant Singh, who met Congress(I) Vice-President Arjun Singh, has conveyed the Akali readiness to accept a second commission which, the Akalis feel, should identify areas on the basis of contiguity, language affinity and the basic unit of a village as contained in the accord. They also want the task to be completed by March 31 at the latest.

Worst of all, rising communal ten-

BHAWAN SINGH



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sions in Batala saw angry Shiv Sena activists clash with AISSF youths. Timely police intervention prevented matters from getting out of hand and district police chief J.P. Birdi told INDIA TODAY: "Both sides were fully prepared and the city would have been in flames but for imposition of curfew." Sensing the mood among the Hindus—who had threatened to go on a *trishul* march from Amritsar to Chandigarh—Akali minister Surjit Singh Virk was despatched to soothe tempers and he conceded some of the demands put forward by the Shiv Sena leader Rama Kant Jalota. These included treating Hindu victims of terrorism on par with Sikhs by giving them government jobs, compensation and interest-free loans. The *trishul* march to Chandigarh was cancelled but the acceptance of the demands was a shot in the arm for the Shiv Sena which is now

RAVI-BEAS WATERS

Rivers of Ire

IT IS now dawning on all the midwives who produced the Punjab accord that it was a hasty document with more pitfalls than they could possibly have perceived. The snags that cropped up with the first part of the accord, the failure to transfer Chandigarh by the stipulated date of January 26, could well pale into comparison with the problems that the pact's more substantive part, the distribution of the Ravi-Beas waters, could run into. Already any number of doubts have surfaced about the task of the one-man tribunal set up by a presidential ordinance on January 24.

On the face of it, the terms of the tribunal under the sitting Supreme Court Judge V. Balakrishna Eradi look straightforward. "The tribunal will verify the quantum of usage of water claimed by the farmers of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan from the Ravi-Beas system as on July 1, 1985, and the waters used for consumptive purposes and for the adjudication of the claims of Punjab and Haryana regarding the shares in their remaining waters. Paragraph 9.1 of the Punjab Settlement provides that the farmers of the states of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan will continue to get water not less than what they were using from the Ravi-Beas system on July 1, 1985, and that waters used for consumptive purposes will also remain unaffected and the quantum of usage so claimed shall be verified by a tribunal, referred to in paragraph 9.2 of the settlement." Not a word away from the terms of the accord.

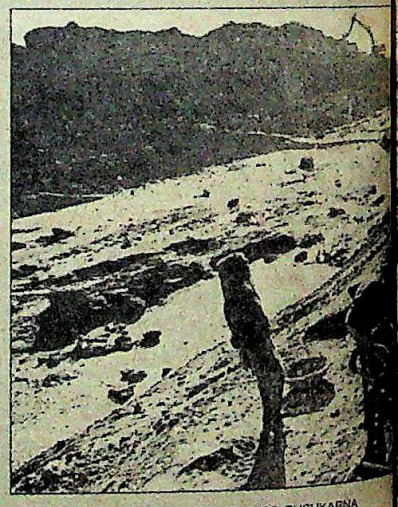
In fact, the tribunal's job is forbidding. The first problem which will crop up is: is Rajasthan's share also to be adjudicated? Or, is Eradi to distribute between Punjab and Haryana what is left after Rajasthan is given its share? Rajasthan has got 8.6 million acre feet (MAF) out of 17.17 MAF in all the four accords between 1954 and 1981. But, asks Punjab, if Rajasthan's share is not to be affected then why determine how much it was using on July 1, 1985? However, Rajasthan Chief Minister Harideo Joshi asserts: "Though our use as on July 1 is to be determined the tribunal will adjudicate the claim of Punjab and Haryana in their remaining waters. The crucial word in the accord is 'their'."

Punjab's Attorney-General Gurdarshan Singh Grewal says the confusion arises out of the use of the words "the" and "their". Finance Minister Balwant Singh, one of the architects of the accord, says that the word "their" was added later. "Originally, in the memorandum of settlement the words were 'the remaining water' and not 'their remaining', which means Rajasthan gets only what it was using on July 1 and the remaining water is to be divided between Punjab and Haryana." Even now Punjab's Law Department maintains that the words "their waters", refers to the waters left after the flow to the three states on July 1, is measured. If, however, the Eradi panel accepts Rajasthan's point, then there will be very little water left to adjudicate. Bhakra and Beas board management sources say that there will be hardly 1.5 MAF left, after the Rs 1,200 crore Thein Dam is completed, to be shared between Punjab and Haryana.

How the tribunal, whose decision will be binding on all parties and beyond the purview of the courts, will actually apportion the remaining waters is also not clearly spelt out. Is it to go by the existing laws or can it apply its own yardstick to sort out this two decades old problem? Laments Prakash Singh Badal: "We have all along maintained that the river waters dispute should be settled as per the riparian or river valley law as applied earlier in the cases of Narbada and Kaveri river waters dispute either by a tribunal set up under the River Waters Dispute Act, or by the Supreme Court. Here a one-judge tribunal with arbitrary powers is provided."

What piques Punjab is that nobody seems to be worried about the state of its land water resources. Says Punjab Irrigation and Power Commissioner S.S. Boparai: "Out of the 33 MAF waters available in the three Punjab rivers,

The link canal: political wedge



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

"Punjab will become a place where the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, and the dry stone no sound of water."

S.S. BARNALA
chief minister, Punjab

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sprouting all over Punjab.

But the chief minister will be hard put to explain away the rise in terrorism. Even more, his own partymen will not spare him since he has yet to make good on his promise of filling important vacancies in boards and corporations. But most of all remains the disturbing fact that with force ruled out, the Akali Government hadn't come up with a workable solution to the take-over of the Golden Temple by the militants. Prior to the *sarbat khalsa*, Amarinder Singh had several rounds of talks with the Taksal and AISSF people in a bid to defuse the mounting crisis. Nothing came of it, and if nothing now comes of the behind-the-scenes negotiations believed to be under way between the militants and the state authorities, the outlook for Barnala and Punjab is grim.

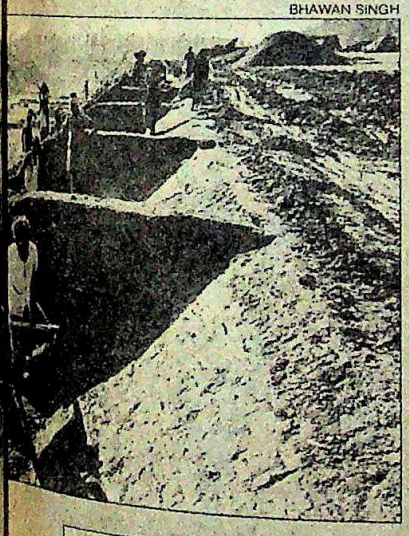
—GOBIND THUKRAL

about 20 MAF already flows to other states. All the main rivers have been dammed up and their waters distributed. There is a critical situation in the state. The water table has fallen in half of the state: in some areas it has gone down by 10 metres in the years 1975 to 1984. As many as 60 out of the state's 118 blocks are black areas where no tube-wells can be allowed. Twenty-two blocks falling in grey areas are turning fast black. Another 14 have saline water. There are only 22 white blocks—one fifth of the total."

In a related study, the water resources cell of the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, pointed out that while south-west Punjab, where sub-soil water is turning saline and the water table rising, is becoming uncultivable (five lakh acres have already become waterlogged), in the central districts, where the table has been falling, the state is turning into a desert.

"We should be declared a no-further-exploitation-by-transfer area," pleads Boparai. Says Chief Minister S.S. Barnala: "We have been generous all along and now fear, in the words of T.S. Eliot, that Punjab will become 'a place where the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, and the dry stone no sound of water.' Let any other state show even half the generosity." He quotes the Narbada waters award, that deprived Rajasthan of any water since it is not a riparian state, as a precedent that should be applied here also.

BHAWAN SINGH



Five weeks have passed since the ordinance was issued but the Akalis have yet to make their stand on it public. "We are studying it," says Barnala evasively. Privately, the Akalis fear that the vast powers available to Justice Eradi could threaten the accord as it happened in the case of the K.M. Matthew Commission. Privately the ministers fear that the findings of this tribunal could be more shocking than Matthew's. The judge should have been provided with a clear guideline, they feel. "We have never got any justice from these commissions and tribunals so far," warns Badal, now threatening to stop the digging of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link(SYL) canal.

This is one issue on which Badal and the All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF) are in agreement. Says the AISSF leader Harinder Singh Kahlon: "There should be only bilateral agreements between Punjab and Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana for the supply of waters for a limited period and that too for a consideration." And asks: "Why is the Centre running away from the law of the land in case of Punjab"; threatening to fill the dug out portions of the SYL. "If there is no justice on waters, we shall even stop the existing flows and we know how to do it."

Haryana has been equally vexed on the issue. "Our basic share of 3.5 MAF allotted in 1981 should not be disturbed at any cost," warns Haryana Pradesh Congress Committee(I) President Birender Singh. Says State Power and Irrigation Minister Shamsher Singh Surjewala: "The water issue is a matter of life and death for us." In fact, most Haryana Congress(I) politicians say privately that Chandigarh and Abohar and Fazilka are no issues. "Let Punjab have all the territory and give us the water," they say. This explains their repeated demand for the timely completion of the SYL canal. Only if the Centre takes over its construction will it be ready by August 15, they chorus. The AISSF and the Badal faction in the Akali Dal are equally determined to do everything to stop its construction.

As to the determination of the water inflow from Ravi and Beas on July 1, the figures being put across by Punjab and Haryana are at great variance, threatening to make Justice Eradi's job that much more daunting. Punjab Irrigation Department maintains that it was using 4.867 MAF, Haryana 1.135 MAF and Rajasthan 4.630 MAF out of a total availability of 10.05 MAF. But Haryana maintains that Punjab and Haryana were using the same amount of water on July 1. Says Surjewala: "Punjab's claims is false. Our records show that we were using 1.7 MAF and Punjab 1.9 MAF."

There is an urgent need to depoliticise the whole issue, independently assess the need of the three states, and settle the water dispute once and for all before more blood spills into Punjab's rivers and canals.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

"Our basic share (in the waters) of 3.5 million acre feet allotted in 1981 should not be disturbed at any cost."

BIRENDER SINGH
president, Haryana, PCCI

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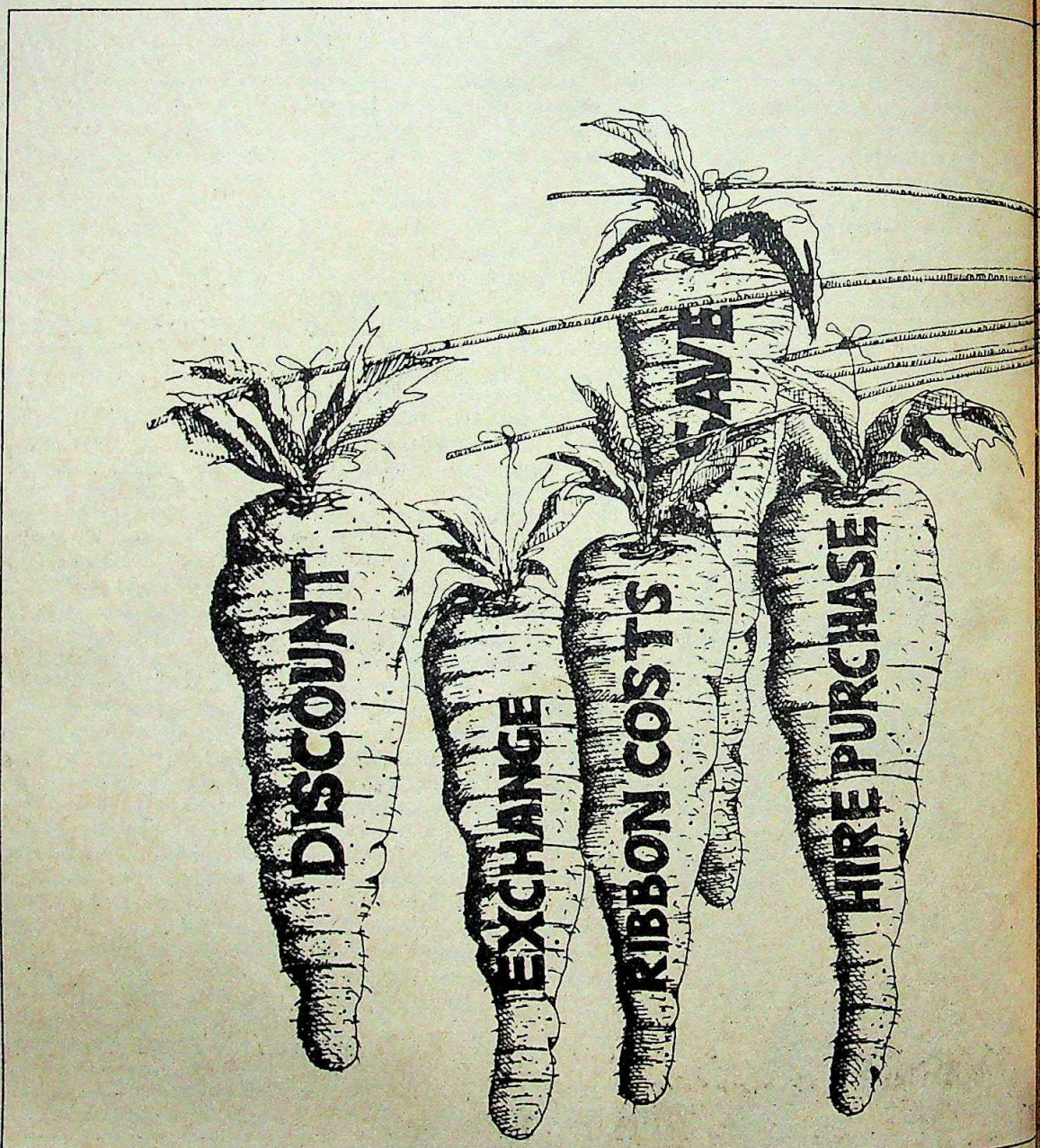

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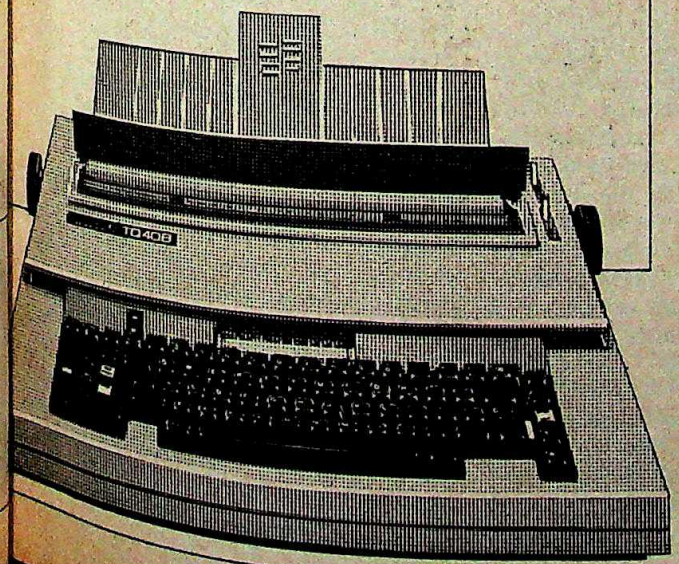

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TAMIL NADU

Reversal of Roles

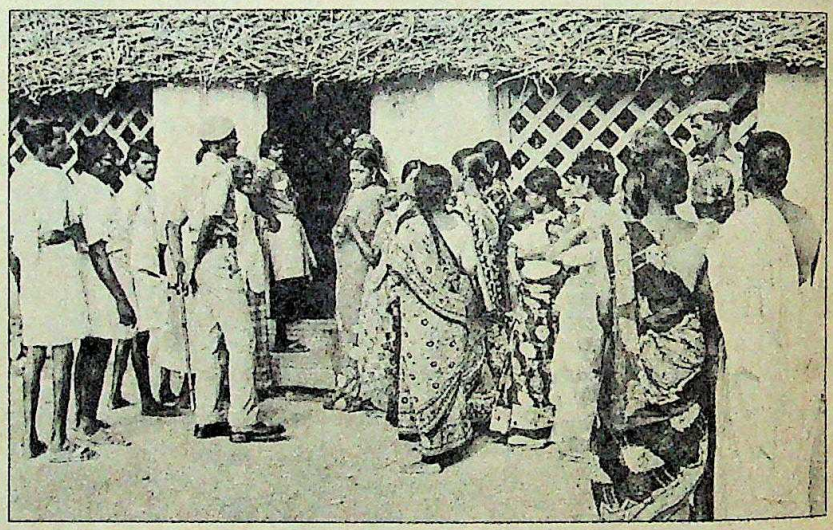
FOR THE first time since the charismatic M.G. Ramachandran blazoned his way into the chief minister's chair nine years ago, his larger than life image has been deflated to more life-like proportions. As his All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) stared wide-eyed at an unprecedented electoral defeat last week, the stunning realisation was slowly dawning on the party that the magical hold their demi-god patriarch had on Tamil Nadu's three crore voters was now beginning to fade.

The rout could not have been more devastating. In elections to 97 municipalities, AIADMK candidates won in only 11 even though it contested in 58. In contrast, its arch-rivals, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) romped home in 64, emerging a clear winner in what was widely labelled as a mini general election in the state. Said Karunanidhi, DMK leader, with a confidence that had been lacking hitherto: "The people are fed up with this immobilised government."

The only consolation the ruling party could draw from the elections to the local bodies, held after a long lapse of 16 years, was its good showing in the election of president of panchayat unions, where the AIADMK-Congress(I) combine finished with over 50 per cent of the total seats. Said an AIADMK minister who did not want to be quoted: "The election results prove that our party and chief minister continue to retain their hold over the rural people who constitute the majority.

But the brave words could not hide the fact that after three successive triumphs in the Assembly elections, the gloss was finally gone. With MGR still clearly unable to end the bitter war of succession between the state Information Minister R.M. Veerappan and the party's Propaganda Secretary Jayalalitha Jayaram, it was clearly a time for introspection. Said an AIADMK minister known to be close to Jayalalitha: "The poor performance of the AIADMK shows the need for MGR to evolve a second line of ownership."

The AIADMK-Congress(I) citadels crumbled one by one. In the four southern districts of Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari, which are largely rural and have long been the AIADMK's strongholds, the DMK-led opposition combine made a virtual sweep. In seven municipalities in Madurai district, the AIADMK and the Congress(I) could only take one each while the DMK won convincingly in the other five. In four municipalities in Kanyakumari, the DMK took two and the CPI(M) the other two. But the most startling result came from North Arcot district, in the normally non-aligned north of the state. Here the DMK made a clean sweep, taking all 12 municipalities.



Voters outside a booth in Alandur

Such is the undoubted popularity of the Puratchi Thalaivar (Revolutionary Hero)—the honorific that MGR is better known by—that the AIADMK's wipeout came as a total surprise. Cho Ramaswamy, senior Janata Party leader was so overwhelmed by the victory of two partymen (who contested as independents) in the municipal elections that the normally quick-on-repartee editor of *Tughlak* could only say: "I cannot rightaway tell you what were the factors responsible for the Opposition's victory."

But perhaps the most mystified were the AIADMK workers. After the party's triumph in the Cheyyar by-elections in January, where too neither MGR nor Jayalalitha went to campaign, the AIADMK leaders were so sure they would win in the local bodies' elections that they continued to be complacent in the face of gathering stormclouds. P. Kannan, Jayalalitha's lieutenant and MP from Salem, was expelled from the party a week before the elections for his open defiance of MGR's directive to disband the Jayalalitha Fans Association. This was followed by the suspension of a few other followers.

The result was that many of Jayalalitha's followers turned rebels and contested the polls as independents when they were denied the party ticket. According to one reliable estimate, there were 20 AIADMK rebel candidates in the fray. The case of Varadarajan, known to be close to Kannan, who successfully contested the elections to the Salem constituency was typical. Kannan and others openly campaigned for the rebels. The results, not surprisingly, favoured the Opposition. Of eight municipalities, the DMK took seven while the Congress won in Edapaddi; the AIADMK drew a blank.

The Congress(I) too paid for infighting between the groups led by Congress(I) General Secretary G.K.Moopanar and matinee idol and Rajya Sabha MP Sivaji Ganesan. As has been the trend, the Ganesan faction was given the short shrift in the distribution of tickets. Ganesan's fans in North Arcot decided enough was enough and in Arkonam, for instance, some of Ganesan's followers openly campaigned for an independent candidate against the party's official candidate. In the last assembly elections the DMK had been routed in North Arcot; this time it swept

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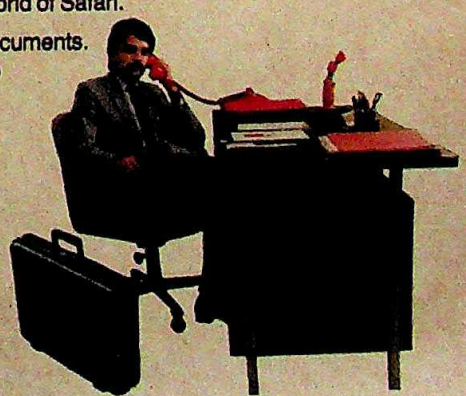

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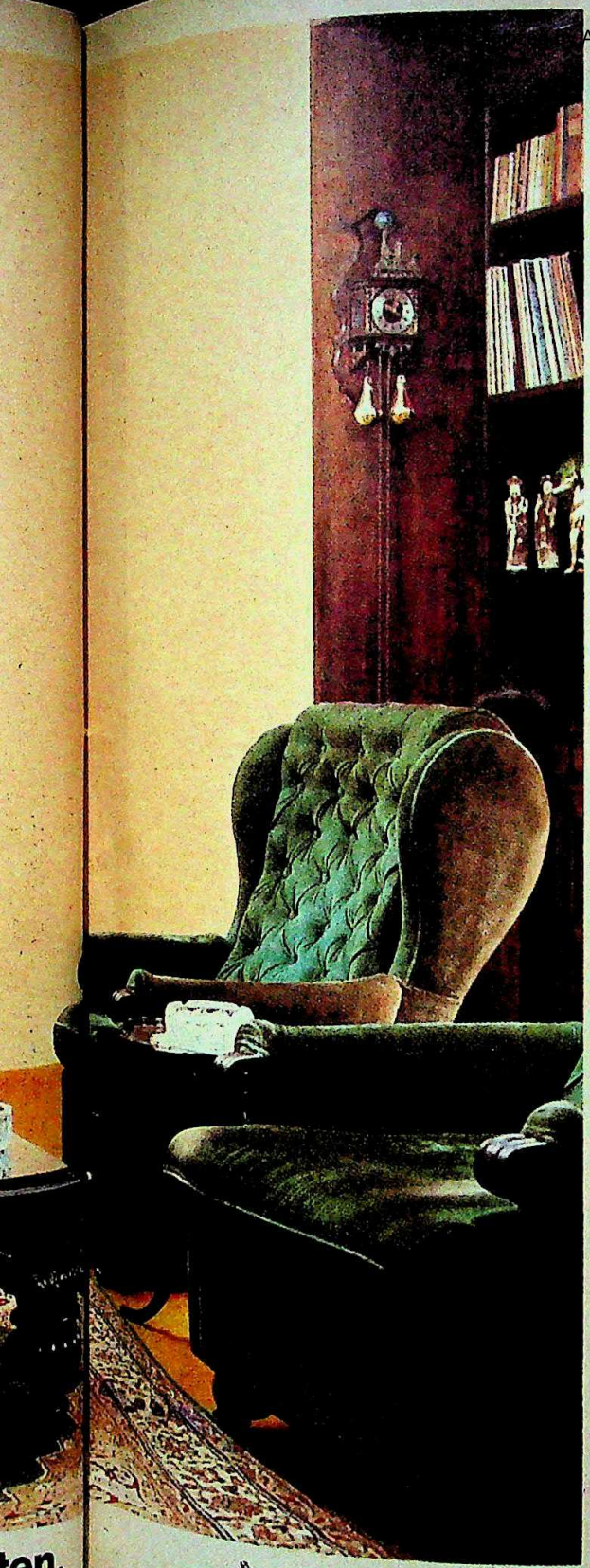

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the board.

The infighting in both the parties also told on the quality of the candidates they put up. Since both parties had to perform delicate balancing acts between the feuding factions, the reputation of the candidate was not given the importance it deserves in local body elections. Admitted a Congress(I) leader close to Ganesan: "The DMK did a very clever thing by invariably picking people with a good reputation. The policy paid rich dividends."

But perhaps the biggest handicap that the AIADMK-Congress(I) combine faced was the absence of MGR and Jayalalitha from the campaigning. It has always been the rousing oratory of MGR and his undoubted charisma, or in his absence the glamorous appeal of Jayalalitha that has swayed the Tamil masses. This time around, both were absent; MGR is still not able to speak fluently enough to address public meetings and Jayalalitha, sulking from the snub in January, was at home in her Madras residence. Said E.R. Kumaraswamy, a marginal farmer of Periyar district: "We poor farmers have a lot of affection for MGR but we are not able to see or hear him. So we can only vote for people who come to us and promise to look into our problems." It is now expected that Jayalalitha may stage her second comeback. Said an AIADMK minister: "These elections have proved that Jayalalitha is indispensable for elections."

The AIADMK's only hope now is the Supreme Court, where a petition filed by a former Madras mayor has challenged the elections itself. But whatever the fate of the petition, the outcome of the local bodies elections has confirmed the AIADMK leaders' apprehensions about the quality of its grassroot support. Nominally, it has a 30 lakh cadre, but since they are all primarily members of MGR fan clubs their political commitment cannot match that of the 15-lakh DMK cadre.

As AIADMK leaders licked their electoral wounds, DMK leaders could barely rein in their soaring hopes. Said K. Manoharan, assistant general secretary of the party: "The election results show a qualitative change in the thinking of the people. Our victory will give us a base on which we can come back to power in the Assembly." It did seem that Tweedledee's time was finally coming to an end and Tweedledum's hour was very near.

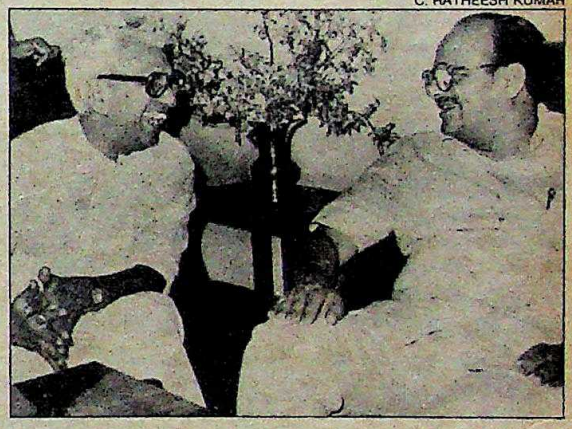
—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

KERALA

In Limbo

KERALA Chief Minister K. Karunakaran's toils last month were reminiscent of the ordeal of Sisyphus, the Greek mythology hero who was forced to roll a boulder uphill. Karunakaran has not hidden his resolve to have a mid-term poll, or at the very least a ministerial reshuffle. But with the biggest coalition partner Kerala Congress steadfastly opposed to either move and the high command unwilling to let Karunakaran ride roughshod over them, even though ostensibly the Congress(I) Parliamentary Board left the decision to him, the stalemate continued. As Kerala Congress leaders K.M. Mani and P.J. Joseph parked themselves in Delhi for consultations with Congress(I) Vice-President Arjun Singh, the final decision on the ticklish issue was postponed till Singh came back from Moscow on March 3.

C. RATHEESH KUMAR



Karunakaran with Arjun Singh: inconclusive discussions

As the political uncertainty dragged on, the administration came to a virtual standstill. Admitted a top bureaucrat: "It is a rudderless government because the important ministers and the chief minister are away most of the time in Delhi or conducting talks in hide-outs." Confessed Pandalam Sudhakaran, a Congress(I) MLA close to the chief minister: "Never before in the history of the state has there been such political uncertainty."

Karunakaran, between half a dozen trips to Delhi and back, asserted: "Either I will have my way or I will resign this time." But the Kerala Congress, which has long been a thorn in the chief minister's flesh, was unwilling to agree to even a reshuffle, let alone a mid-term poll. Mani the finance minister and Kerala Congress strongman, was as determined to present his eighth budget as Karunakaran was to prevent him. Said he: "In coalition politics there is a lot of give and take but we will not allow our party to be bulldozed by others even if we have to quit the Government."

Added Dr K.C. Joseph, MLA and party strategist: "If we are stripped off our present portfolios and still continue in the Government it would be political harakiri." The party's leaders argue that related issues—like seat allocation and, if UDF wins the election, of the portfolios it would get—must be sorted out before they give their consent to any change.

Even though the Muslim League was dragging its feet, it may finally go along. Some of its top leaders are known to be close to Karunakaran. Last week state Muslim League President S. Thangal met Karunakaran in Calicut and reportedly assured him that the League would support him at the right time.

Karunakaran was also kept busy trying to outmanoeuvre his detractors inside the party. He is known to be keen to take the home portfolio away from Vayalar Ravi, who leads the dissidents in the state. Last fortnight when the CPI(M) state General Secretary Achuthanandan demanded an inquiry into Ravi's alleged links with CIA agent Rama Swarup, Karunakaran sprang a surprise by expressing his readiness to inquire into the allegation if definite evidence was provided. Said Ravi: "I was a little surprised by the chief minister's statement as I had made it clear that I was consulting my lawyers for a defamation suit against Achuthanandan."

Time is fast running out. The budget has not merely to be introduced, it has also to be debated and passed before the month-end. With Karunakaran and the Kerala Congress leaders not even exchanging a word even though they were together in Delhi's Kerala House for three days, the portents for a rapprochement were not good. Even for Kerala's mercurial politics, last month's tension and uncertainty was extraordinary.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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CONGRESS (I)

Salvage Operation

NOW IS the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. That was the inherent message that Congress(I) President and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sent out last fortnight as he participated in an unusual flurry of party activity. With the Opposition's attack becoming increasingly vehement, the fervent appeal to his men both in the party and the Government to join hands against the enemy went out none too soon. And though the party rallied around him, there was some doubt if the urgency of the appeal had gone home.

Rajiv sat through an eight-hour-long Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting, participated in businesslike deliberations of the nine-member Congress Parliamentary Board (CPB), attended a meeting of the 570-member Congress Parliamentary Party and held a series of discussions with his senior political aides.For the better part of the deliberations, Rajiv heard his partymen devise ways and means to counter the political snarl-ups ranging from the hike in prices to the growing alienation of the Muslims.

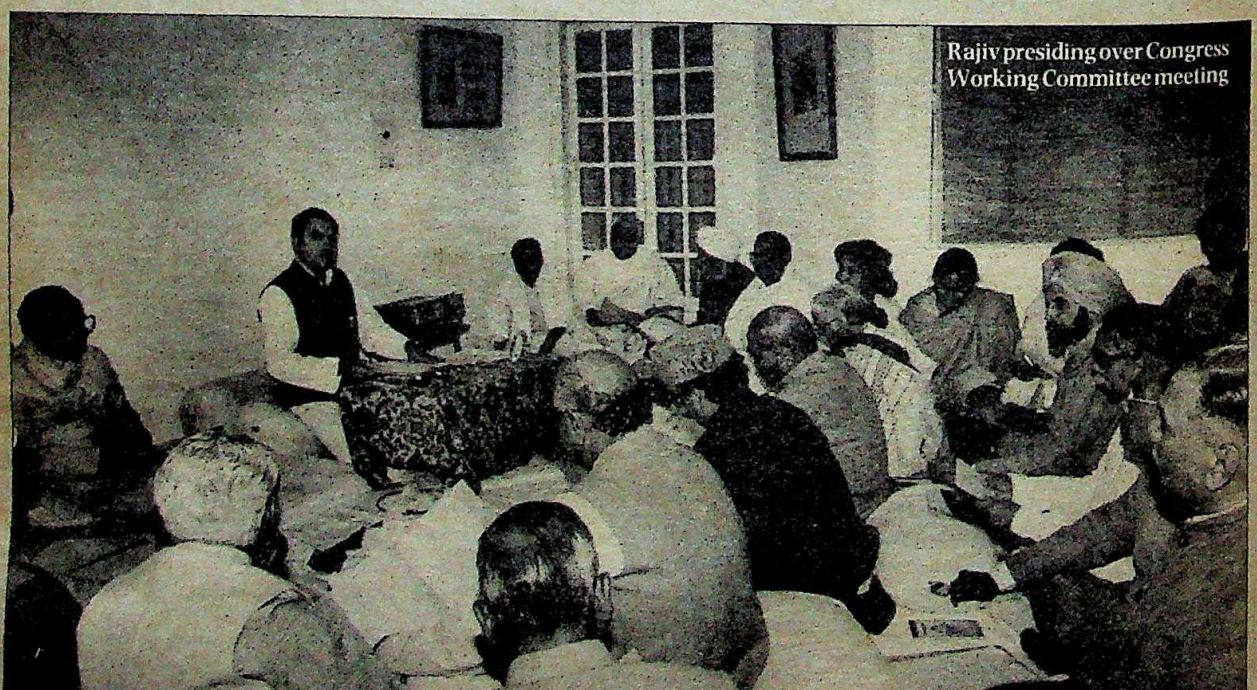
Various party forums worked out their strategy for stemming the growing unpopularity of the party and its president. In the end, the party president's word prevailed. Barely a fortnight ago the CWC had censured the Government by asking it to reduce the price increases: this time it expressed satisfaction that its word had been honoured and decided to support the decisions. Said All-India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) General Secretary Najma Heptullah: "The CWC has asked the Government to deal with anti-national and communal forces firmly and we have decided to support the Government on its administrative decisions."

Though the exercise was ostensibly aimed at demarcating the party and the Government, never was it more evident that the party was only a reflection of the Government. Anxious to involve each important functionary in both the Government and the party in the decision-making process, Rajiv invited many leaders to the CWC meeting who are not its members. These included all Congress(I) chief ministers, all PCC(I) chiefs and important cabinet ministers.

Predictably, the major preoccupation at all the meetings was the fast eroding credibility of the party and its government at the Centre. One of the major worries was the poor showing of public sector units, with many members demanding strict monitoring of the corporations. Said Anand Sharma, a CWC member and president of the Indian Youth Congress(I): "The country can't be forced to pay for the extravagant expenditure and the rampant corruption in the public sector. Why should the efficient sector of the economy pay for the inefficiency?"

Finance Minister Singh went a step further when he told the CWC that he was willing to allow the various ministries to reduce the prices to their original level, but only on the condition that they cut down unnecessary expenses and complete their development projects without any cost and time overruns. Averred Ahmad Patel, the Gujarat PCC(I) president: "We must explain to the people the context in which various fiscal measures are finally taken in the overall interest of

The major preoccupation at all the meetings was the fast eroding credibility of the party and Rajiv's Government at the Centre.



Rajiv presiding over Congress Working Committee meeting

Photographs by CHHAYA KENDRA

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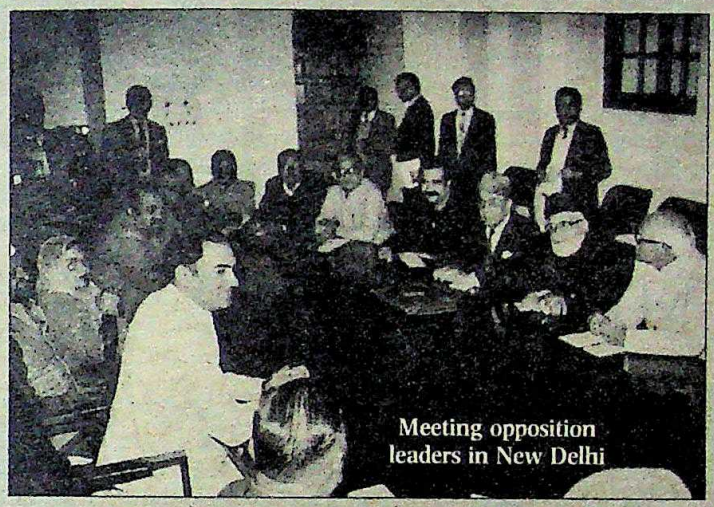
the nation. But the Congressmen have to go out and establish their rapport with the people. There is no other short cut to recover the lost ground."

Not everybody was in agreement at the meeting and Rajiv had to intervene on more than one occasion. A senior cabinet minister made a determined appeal to all Congressmen to file annual details of their assets, as well as of their family members', to the party office, to pay their taxes regularly and honestly to the Government, to observe the prohibition rules and not to violate laws like the Urban Land Ceiling Act. Referring to the last request, a senior MP asked: "Shouldn't a Congressman challenge a law which is discriminatory in nature?" Others said they could not compel their relations to disclose their assets to a party with which they have no direct dealings. But Rajiv said this was necessary for the party to re-establish its credibility.

And, inevitably, there was an attempt, though disguised in nobler motives, to have the party elections postponed. A section of the party felt that the existing state and district units should be activised to fight the Opposition, but others doubted if the current party bosses, all nominated, could effectively mobilise the party cadres. Finally it was decided to hold the party elections as scheduled in July.

BUT RAJIV also made some concessions to the party. He conceded the demand to drastically alter the proposed code of conduct which had asked the near-impossible of Congressmen: not to use imported electronic gadgets, or sell liquor, or attend dinners thrown by affluent businessmen and foreigners. He appointed a committee to come out with a feasible code of conduct. Chuckled a senior member of the CWC later: "This minor concession made all the difference to the debate on other issues."

The party's about-turn on the issue of prices came close on the heels of the Opposition-sponsored bandh in Delhi, West Bengal and Tripura, opposition boycott of the presidential address to the joint session of Parliament, followed by its call for a nation-wide stir on the issue. The party's earlier attempts at taking the wind out of the Opposition's sails by partially withdrawing the price rise boomeranged when the bandh in two states and Delhi received a massive response. Said BJP General Secretary L.K. Advani: "Even we never expected such a response to a call which had been given at such a short notice. It was a reflection of the accumulated anger against the Congress(I) Government." Added the Janata Party's leader in the Lok Sabha, Madhu Dandavate, who moved an adjournment motion on the price rise: "This elitist government can't identify with the aspirations of the poor. The Government can't decide whether to import computers or cut down imports to protect the indigenous industry. The Congress(I) is trapped in its own web of indecision and confusion and the country is being forced to pay the price for its mismanagement."



Meeting opposition leaders in New Delhi

The Opposition refused to give in to the Government's request to allow it to introduce a bill on the rights of Muslim women.

The Opposition's new-found confidence gave it the courage to even reject an invitation from the prime minister for a meeting on the eve of the Parliament session. They stuck to their guns two days later when they refused to give in to the Government's request to allow it to introduce a bill on the rights of Muslim women on the first day itself. Said K.P. Unnikrishnan, the aggressive Congress(S) member of the Lok Sabha: "We can't be treated like his majesty's opposition. The Government wanted our consent for a subject which had very serious ramifications for the country. What baffles us is the Government's attitude towards national problems. It is casual and betrays any sense of commitment to the basic economic issues."

All the opposition leaders were particularly annoyed with the manner in which the prime minister tried to hustle through the bill: they were given copies of the bill only a few minutes before the meeting. Asked an angry Dandavate: "What was the hurry to push through such a sensitive legislation?"

The answer was not far to seek. Initially Rajiv, during his meetings with Congressmen and Muslim leaders, had promised that his government would bring about a comprehensive bill to assuage the hurt feelings of the community. However, he did not fix any deadline because the whole question was to be thrown open to a nation-wide debate. But eventually, he succumbed to the Muslim lobby within his party, which made it clear that it would not support the party unless the fears about Muslim women's rights were removed by amending Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

The party itself was divided on the issue and at least two chief ministers spoke about the dangers of yielding to the pressure of hard core communalists. But Rajiv was advised that any prolonged confrontation with a minority community would cut into the party's vote bank.

Even at the CWC meeting, Rajiv gave instructions to all the chief ministers to deal firmly with communal problems. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Vir Bahadur Singh, who is facing violent communal clashes in the state, said that no concessions should be granted under duress to any community but his point of view was ignored as more reports of communal clashes filtered in from all over the country (*see page 40*). And by the time the party leaders returned to their respective states, they seemed to have made up their minds on one thing: that it is the prime minister who needs to come to the aid of the party.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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THE MUSLIMS

Anger and Hurt

FOR THE country's 77 million Muslims, the trials and tribulations continue. For the Central Government, anxious to assuage the hurt of the Muslims and win back its one-time vote bank, nothing seems to be going right. At the end of a momentous month for the country's largest minority, the community was back where it began: its leadership split between the conservatives and the liberal and its members hurt, angry, divided and confused.

The climax of a traumatic series of events came with the resignation of the Union Minister of State for Energy, Arif Mohammed Khan, in protest against the Government's decision to introduce a bill taking Muslim divorcees out of the provisions of Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The bill came at the end of a protracted agitation launched by one section of the community's leadership against the Supreme Court's Shah Bano judgement. Khan, 35, had strongly opposed moves to scuttle the court's directive to give maintenance in excess of the provisions in the Shariat. He submitted his resignation the night the Government introduced the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, calling the controversial bill a "surrender before the conservative leaders of the community".

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sought to justify the bill by saying they had consulted a wide spectrum of Muslim opinion "not all obscurantists". But it was clear that the community's leadership was split. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), which had spearheaded the agitation against the court judgement, welcomed it. Najma Heptullah, Congress(I) general secretary, had at one stage met its president, Maulana Ali Hussain Naqvi, to sort out last minute problems.

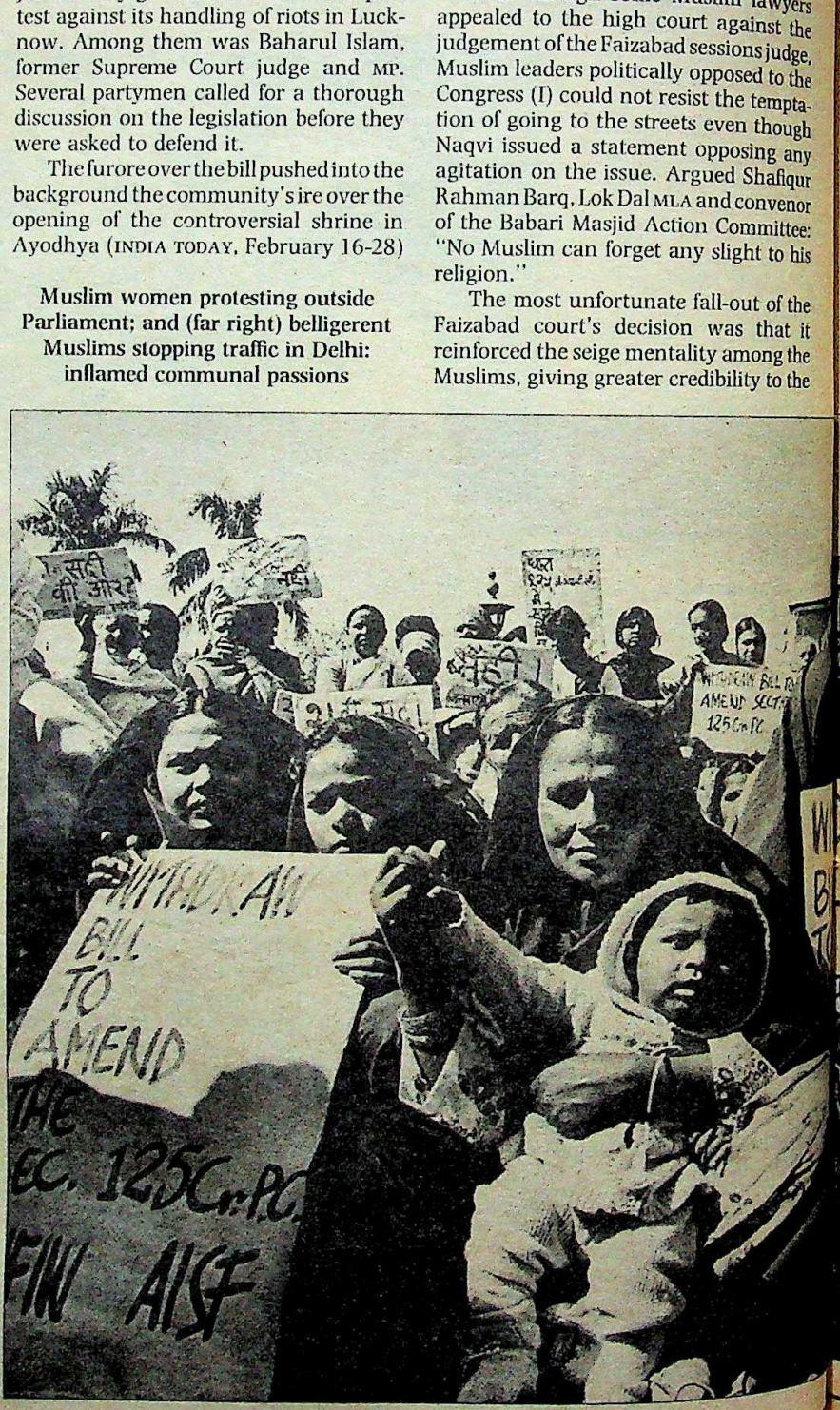
But opposition to the bill was widespread and snowballing. Some 125 prominent Muslims sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in support of the court's judgement. Four opposition parties—the CPI(M), CPI, Janata Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party—criticised it in Parliament calling it a retrograde step. Dubbing it a "black bill", CPI(M) MP Saifuddin Chowdhury said: "This bill will throw Muslim women to the wolves."

It was also evident that opinion in the Congress(I) was divided. Many partymen openly congratulated Khan, who had also quit office as a deputy minister in the Janata Paty government in 1978 in protest against its handling of riots in Lucknow. Among them was Baharul Islam, former Supreme Court judge and MP. Several partymen called for a thorough discussion on the legislation before they were asked to defend it.

The furore over the bill pushed into the background the community's ire over the opening of the controversial shrine in Ayodhya (INDIA TODAY, February 16-28) which they claim is the Babari Masjid and the Hindus say is the Ram Janmabhoomi temple. The Muslim anger and the Hindu jubilation led to fatal communal conflicts in six towns across four northern states and the Union territory of Delhi in which 20 people died. Related trouble erupted in five towns in Jammu and Kashmir.

Even though some Muslim lawyers appealed to the high court against the judgement of the Faizabad sessions judge, Muslim leaders politically opposed to the Congress (I) could not resist the temptation of going to the streets even though Naqvi issued a statement opposing any agitation on the issue. Argued Shafiqur Rahman Barq, Lok Dal MLA and convenor of the Babari Masjid Action Committee: "No Muslim can forget any slight to his religion."

The most unfortunate fall-out of the Faizabad court's decision was that it reinforced the seige mentality among the Muslims, giving greater credibility to the


WITHDRAW ALL BILL TO AMEND THE Cr. P.C.
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AIMPLB

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section of the community's leadership that has been arguing that the Congress(I) Government is only paying lip service to its commitment to secularism. In Delhi, Syed Shahabuddin, Janata MP and acting president of the overtly non-political apex body of Muslims, the Majlis-e-Mushawrat, gave a call for observing February 14 as a "mourning day". After prayers the same day the Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid, Syed Abdullah Bukhari, addressing an unusually large congregation, called for a "jihad" against a "government conspiracy". The crowd leaving the masjid turned violent, pointedly reserving their ire mostly for government buses and policemen. In the police firing that followed, two Muslim youths lost their lives.

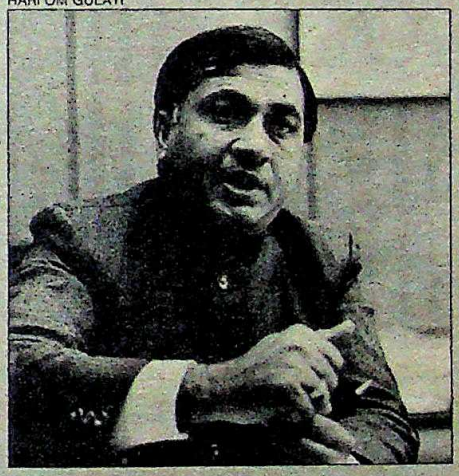
IN LUCKNOW, Maulana Muzaffar Hussain Kichachvi, former Congress(I) MP and president of the Babari Masjid Action Committee, was even more categorical: "I am convinced that this (Central) government does not care for Muslims. Such a thing never happened in the time of Nehru, Shastri or Indira. Why should it happen now?" The action committee called for a state bandh on the same day as the Mushawrat's "mourning day". Not only was the bandh observed in toto by the Muslims, the Muslim hurt was all too apparent. At Lucknow's Teeley Wali Masjid, where normally 150-odd collect for the Friday namaz, 25,000 turned up. At the Asafi Imambara, Shias and Sunnis prayed together. Said Javed Hussain, a Kichachvi disciple: "On the question of the *mazhab* we are all united."

Amazingly, the Uttar Pradesh Government underestimated the intensity of the feelings aroused. Six Ram Janaki *rathyatras* sponsored by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) were allowed to continue on their way to Ayodhya for 17 days after the lock was opened, passing through flashpoints like Meerut and Aligarh. Luckily nothing happened in those two cities but Musafirkhana, a small town (pop: 15,000) in the Amethi constituency was not so lucky.

The Ram Janaki *rathyatra* had halted for the night at Musafirkhana, which straddles the two sides of the Lucknow-Varanasi road and has a mixed population. Barely had it set out for Ayodhya in the morning when violence erupted. A vanload of Muslims headed for Rae Bareli for a meeting to be addressed by Maulana Naqvi was asked by the police to take a route away from that of the *rath*. Soon a row of 30 shops, mostly of Hindus, was aflame. In the communal mayhem that followed, one Hindu was stabbed and a Muslim died of bomb injuries. Two days after the violence, feelings were still raw and resentment and bitterness was pervasive. The families of Sampurnanand Srivastava and Mohammed Hussain Khan have lived for generations in Bhanauli, a medium-sized village (pop:

HARI OM GULATI

HARI OM GULATI



Arif Mohammed Khan submitted his resignation calling the controversial bill a surrender before the conservative leaders of the community.

MANOJ MISHRA

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2,500) separated from Musafirkhana by a railway line. Bhanauli was untouched by the nearby imbroglio but the Ayodhya controversy has had its echo. Khan kept quiet as Srivastava traced the origin of the shrine case and maintained that the Babari Masjid had been constructed over a temple. Asked later if he agreed with Srivastava's version of history, Khan said with a barely concealed sadness: "What is there to say? We built the masjid when we were in power. Now that they are in power they have made it into a *mandir*."

In Kashmir, the decision inflamed communal passions. Jammu was already tense over the construction of a mosque in the secretariat premises which, the Shiv Sena, a fundamentalist outfit, protested against. The tension spilled over when Shiv Sena workers brandishing swords and firing gunshots in the air took out a procession to celebrate the "liberation" of the Ayodhya shrine. Shiv Sena workers were joined by die-hards from the Jammu-based Vishwa Hindu Raksha Samiti, shouting provocative slogans. The Muslims took out a counter procession lamenting the "handing over of the Babari Masjid to the Hindus" in both Srinagar and Jammu a few days later.

FROM the next day, Jammu was in turmoil with mobs on the rampage. When exaggerated reports of the violence reached the valley the next day, Srinagar too erupted with rampaging mobs raising anti-Hindu and pro-Pakistan slogans. Anantnag, 50 km away, was next, where along with the local Congress(I) office, two temples were also set on fire. However, the Kashmir violence was not entirely spontaneous. Said the *Kashmir Times:* "The communal tension ...is the accumulated effect of the policies pursued by the present state Government to encourage communal polarisation to meet its own political exigencies."

The maximum number of deaths—eight—came about in Sehore, a district town (pop: 100,000) 35 km from Bhopal, where a Hindu "victory" procession sparked off rioting which raged for two days. Stray violence continued for two days more in spite of a total curfew. It turned out the district administration had ignored two "alerts" from the state capital. But the state Government was not entirely blameless: its notification banning religious processions came only after the riot had erupted.

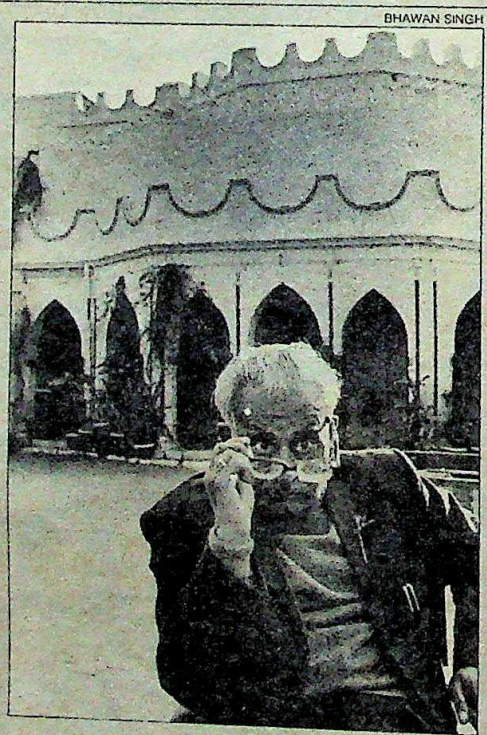
SOCIAL STATUS

Questions of Parity

THE RAM Janmabhoomi issue has revived among Muslims a chronic, deep-seated feeling of persecution. The disenchantment runs deep. Peasants, politicians, lawyers and shopkeepers recently interviewed at random in the Rohilkhand area—the Muslim heart of north India—spoke as if with one voice. While there was no indication that they are ready to plunge into precipitous radical action they are clearly a bitter, despairing lot who readily lay their misfortunes—whether real or imagined—squarely at the doorstep of communalism and discrimination. Their demands are not for the creation of a utopian holy land or for a new political party but for things far simpler—jobs, equality, better police protection, more graveyard land to bury their dead.

One senior Muslim government official explained: "In order to escape from the harshness of everyday life which they find degrading, Muslims by and large have retreated into what they consider to be an impenetrable shell of their own religion and personal laws. But now they see even this last bastion of protection crumbling under what they consider to be orchestrated assaults. They feel cornered."

BHAWAN SINGH



"Wherever the Muslims have prospered, like in Azamgarh and Tanda, there have been riots."
FAKRE-E-ALAM

Even though Muslims constitute 11 per cent of the population, their representation in all areas of government is disproportionately low. They form less than 5 per cent of the IAS and less than 0.5 per cent of high court judges. Their representation in the police has slipped from an all-time high of 33 per cent to less than 8 per cent. And there is a growing awareness among the Muslims that they have begun to slide disastrously from even the traditionally secure economic footholds on which they had once perched.

Moradabad is a city of about 11 lakh inhabitants, more than half of them Muslims. It was a relatively prosperous Muslim community with about 75 per cent of them involved in the brass and *bartan* trade as manufacturers, artisans and exporters boasting of a Rs 100-crore export business. But in the last few years business has fallen by more than 75 per cent. One major reason was the 1980 riots in which about 400 people were killed. The curfews and disturbances that followed led to stoppages in production and cancellation of export orders.

Today, thousands of Muslim artisans, once proud craftsmen, are driving rickshaws. It is also true that most riots have oc-

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The disquiet among Muslims has taken very ominous tones. Kichachvi's criticism of his own party's government could be dismissed as a frustrated politician's anger but Congress(I) MLA's in Uttar Pradesh, who met Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh in groups and individually to voice their concern, agreed privately that the Faizabad court's decision was the result of a "government-inspired conspiracy". Singh, however, refused to comment on the issue, saying that the matter was sub judice.

TRIUMPHANT Hindu leaders moved quickly to consolidate their gains. VHP president Shiva Nath Katju asked that the temple be handed over to the Ramacharya trust so that the VHP's plans to construct a Rs 25-crore temple could move ahead. Sitting in his son's flat in Kaiserbagh colony in Lucknow, Shrish Chandra Dikshit, 60, former director-general of Uttar Pradesh police and now a VHP bigwig, said aggressively: "We feel what we are doing is for the good of the country. After all, what is good for 82 per cent of the country is good for the rest of the country, isn't it ?"

In all the din, some rational arguments got lost. In an impassioned note to the prime minister, Shahabuddin pointed out that in the controversy, a crucial point had been totally ignored. While the Hindus' claim that the shrine was the Ram Janmabhomi temple was disputed, there was no dispute about a raised platform, outside the disputed area, which was claimed to be the real *janmasthan* (birth-place) of Lord Rama. Quiet attempts, it was learnt, had been initiated between Hindu and Muslim leaders to work out a *modus vivendi* over the disputed property.

But some things may have changed irrevocably. Mushtaq Ahmed Siddiqui is a Faizabad lawyer who has five Hindu assistants. Admits Siddiqui, who is contesting the order for his client, Mohammed Hashim, in the high court: "There is an awkwardness between us that was never there. They feel conscious when somebody raises the issue of the 'Ram Janmabhoomi temple' in my presence; I am awkward when visitors mention my involvement in the Babari Masjid case." It is the strains on this trust at the one to one level that may take the longest to restore.

—AJAY KUMAR with S. PREMI in Lucknow and GHULAM NABI KHAYAL in Srinagar

curred in areas of relative Muslim prosperity, providing ammunition to politicians peddling sinister theories. Dr S. Shamim, Moradabad-based president of the state Muslim League, still continues to denounce the riots as a "conspiracy" aimed at "crushing Muslims and their independence in areas where they have greater economic strength and cannot be taken for granted as vote banks for the Congress." Adds Fakr-e-Alam, a lawyer from Bareilly and also a Lok Dal party leader: "Wherever the Ansari (weaver) Muslims have prospered, like in Azamgarh and Tanda, there have been riots."

Time was when Budaun buzzed with Muslim cloth merchants, timber merchants, and bicycle store owners. No more. The Muslims in the area have been gradually pauperised. More than 70 per cent of them are now casual labourers, weavers and mechanics. Ali Mohammed is 105 years old. He lives with his six sons, 15 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren in a crowded urban ghetto in Budaun. The family—all uneducated—ekes out a living grazing cattle. He is a bitter man: "Some people went from here to Pakistan. I said, let them go. When Allah gives, he will give us here. But we're treated worse than dogs. If a Muslim wants a job, he has to give a bribe. If we complain to a thana they refuse to write our reports and give us a few kicks for good measure."

Muslim peasants, rooted to their soil for millenia, may be no worse off than their Hindu counterparts but their resentment is coloured by a siege mentality. No five-year plan or 20-point programme has ever touched Manikpur village, once part of the Shekhupur Jaidad. Here live about 3,000 Muslims who collectively own less than 900 bighas of land much of it unworkable because it is waterlogged. Where not a soul from Manikpur left for Pakistan after Partition, its youngsters are now leaving in droves to look for work in Delhi and Bombay.

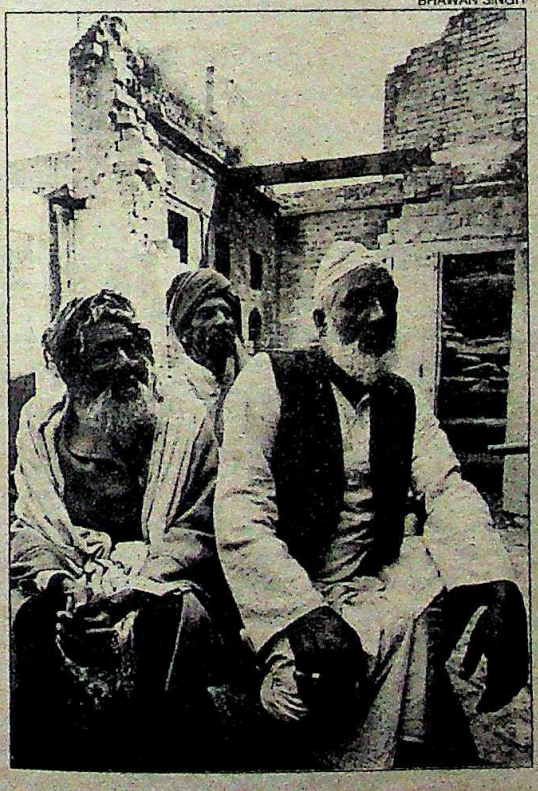
The disappearance of graveyard land has hit the village so hard that the residents are forced to bury their dead in small portions of their already cultivated fields. Says Mohammad Isaq, village contractor: "There is really nothing for us here any more. My younger brother has a high school certificate, the first to be educated in our family. But he has to do *mazdoori* in town just to be able to eat. Even our Muslim leaders have not helped us."

The mood of degradation and despair was summed up by Bismillah Jaan, a widow, who labours for Rs 5 a day. "The fact is we are a fallen people," she says. "If a Hindu falls down, another Hindu helps pick him up. We are left to our own devices. The Hindu community must try and understand us and pick us up."

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

Ali Mohammed (left): shattered dreams

BHAWAN SINGH



"If a Muslim wants a job, he has to bribe. If we complain to a thana they refuse to write our reports."

ALI MOHAMMED

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G. PARTHASARATHI

The Resignation Story

IF THE actions of the Rajiv Gandhi Government in recent weeks have acquired overtones of a French bedroom farce, with the left hand not knowing what the right one is doing, there appears to be some justification. The most prominent pointer to the current affairs of state is the confusion caused over the fate of Gopalaswami Parthasarathi, chairman of the Policy Planning Committee in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Last fortnight, the soft-spoken, veteran diplomat, better known to friend and foe as 'GP', was where he least likes to be—on the front-page of national dailies following an agency report that he had sent in his resignation to the prime minister.

The Government tried to salvage face by putting out a hasty denial through the rival agency, the Press Trust of India (PTI). But for those familiar with bureaucratic doublespeak, the denial only served to confirm the report. Instead of the normal usage of "official sources", the denial, as issued by PTI, read "according to official circles" which indicated that the issue was still questionable. The official spokesman for the ministry later stated that "the report is mere speculation" but by then the official line was more a case of wishful thinking.

INDIA TODAY has learnt that the agency (UNI) report is based on solid foundations. Parthasarati sent in his letter of resignation to the prime minister around February 11. The one-page letter, couched in polite language, requests that he be relieved of his duties. The operative paragraph reads: "I was temporarily appointed after the tragic demise of Madame Indira Gandhi. I now feel that my services should be dispensed with. However, I shall be at your disposal should you require my services."

In the event, the Government did require his services—but only to delay his resignation till the present storm rocking the Government over various recent issues, blows over. Parthasarathi himself made sure he was unavailable for comment by secluding himself in Trivandrum immediately after the UNI story appeared. But even more tragic than the Government's clumsy attempts to erect a smoke screen around the issue is the actual reasons for his resignation.

According to sources close to him, the Policy Planning Committee had been reduced to a valueless, inactive appendage of the MEA over the last six months. Parthasarathi himself, as chairman holding ministerial status, has been increasingly kept out in the cold regarding foreign policy issues. He has, for instance, not met the prime minister once in the last four months. To add insult to injury, he was not kept informed of vital foreign policy issues, particularly in matters relating to his area of expertise, Sri Lanka.

For those familiar with bureaucratic doublespeak, the denial that GP had not sent in his resignation only served to confirm the report.

The final straw came when he was informed about Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari's aborted visit to Colombo in the newspapers. As he reportedly confided to a friend: "What is the use of carrying on if I read about foreign policy decisions in the newspapers over my morning cup of coffee." Certainly, there were enough indications that Parthasarathi and the other senior members of the Policy Planning Committee, R.N.Kao, former head of the Research and Analysis Wing, and A.K.Damodaran, former secretary in the MEA, had been reappointed merely to give the impression of continuity—and reward for services rendered—when the Rajiv Gandhi Government swept into power, rather than play any major and active role in matters of policy decisions. But the shabby manner in which they were eventually sidelined hardly speaks well for the Government.

Parthasarathi, for instance, had not been sent a single file on foreign policy decisions for the last six weeks before his resignation. MEA sources say that he was never consulted, even on the telephone, on issues like Sri Lanka. He had in fact been originally removed from the negotiation process at the request of the Sri Lankan Government. In fact, it was evident that Parthasarathi was unhappy with the way the Indian Government was painting itself into a corner in its dealings with the Jayewardene Government. His advice, which was largely ignored, was that India should be dealing with its neighbour from a position of greater strength.

Initially, the Government made an attempt to squash the story. UNI's Chairman, G.G.Mirchandani, received a call from the prime minister's office asking that the resignation story be spiked. Mirchandani checked with the writer who confirmed that he had seen the letter and was standing by his story. Mirchandani then gave instructions for the item to be put out on the wires and informed the prime minister's office accordingly. Subsequently, the Government resorted to PTI to issue a denial.

The Government's intention is to link the Parthasarathi issue with the appointment of the new foreign secretary and the rumours that Bhandari may take over as chairman of the Policy Planning Committee. But Bhandari himself has gone on record as saying that he does not approve of the Policy Planning Committee and its "interference" in the running of the MEA. There is, however, a possibility that Bhandari might be retained as an advisor to the MEA, particularly since Rajiv is reportedly keen that Bhandari continues to represent the Government in finding a solution to the Sri Lankan problem.

There is thus considerable pressure being applied on Parthasarathi to withhold his resignation, at least till such time when it will cause less damage to the image of the Government. Being the quintessential bureaucrat, Parthasarathi might well be forced to comply, though it is clearly only a matter of time before his resignation is eventually accepted. But what is of more concern is the shabby treatment he has received at the hands of the government.

—DILIP BOBB

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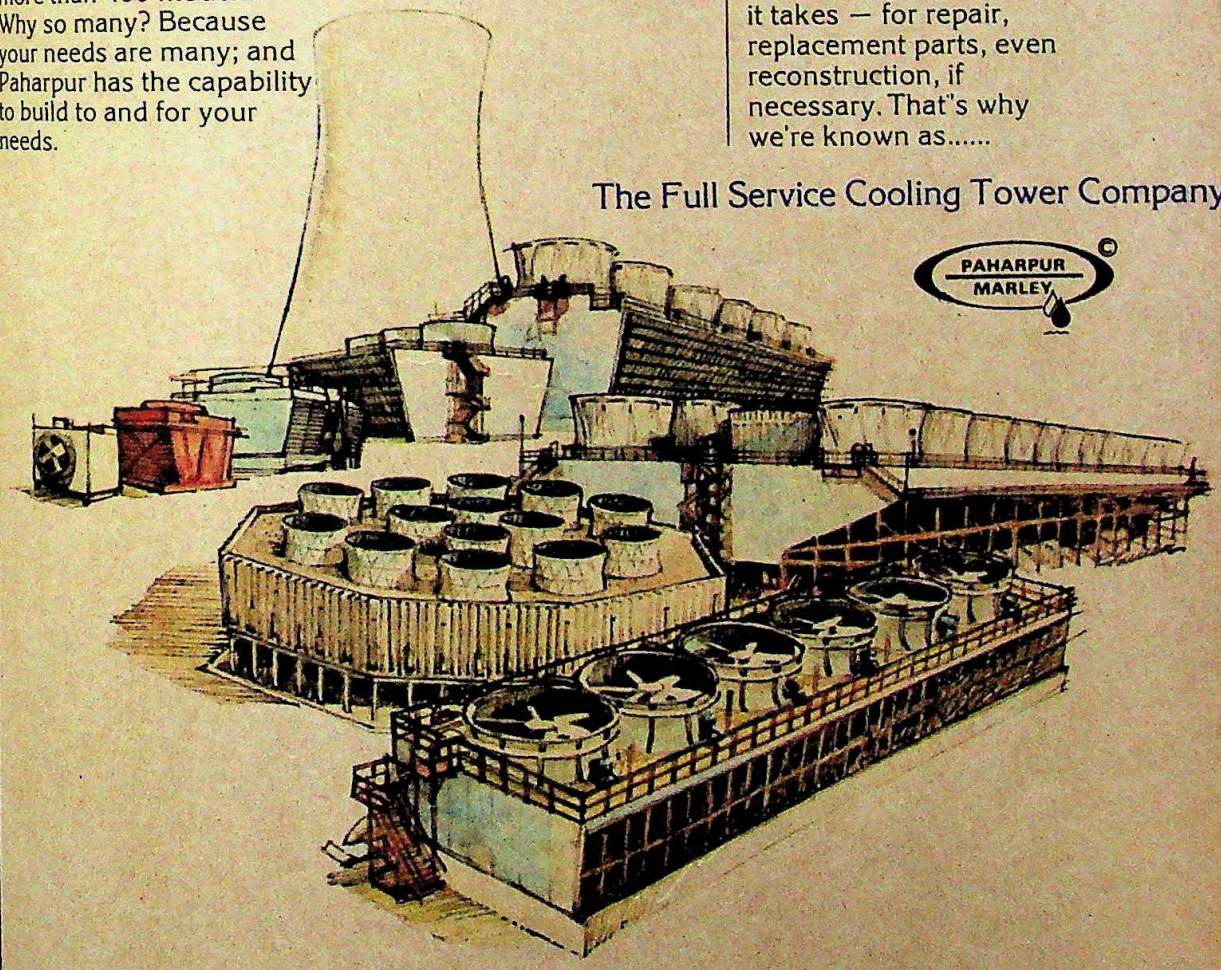

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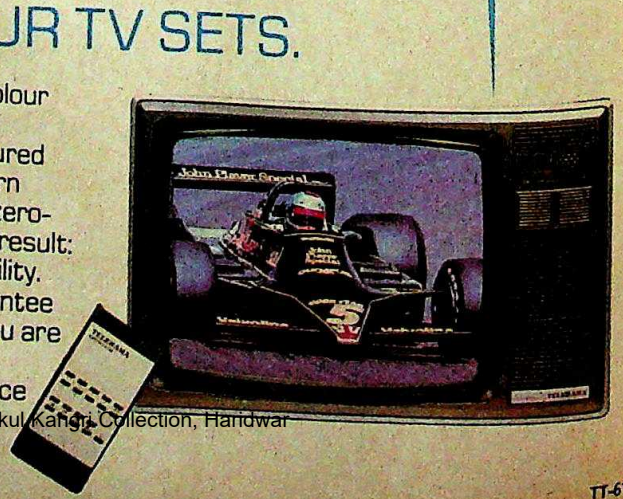

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HYDERABAD

Divisive Poll

AT ONE level, the elections to the 100-seat Hyderabad Municipal Corporation went along expected lines. At another, ominously unexpected events threatened the very elections itself. The expected part was the triumph of the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM) (League for the Unity of Muslims), which finished with the highest tally of 38 seats. The unexpected part was the blatant attempt by the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) to capture the corporation by impersonation.

The consequent furore, in which the city's police came out with flying colours, even compelled Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao to offer a repoll and even set up an inquiry commission, but the face-saving gestures came too late. To add insult to injury, the Congress(I) which has trailed the TDP in every election since the party's rise three years ago, finished with an identical 24 seats.

After the MIM chief Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi won the Hyderabad Lok Sabha seat—which covers 33 municipal seats—the MIM's triumph could have been predicted. But Rama Rao and party General Secretary Chandrababu Naidu made the elections a prestige fight.

Rama Rao skipped work at the state secretariat for four days to don saffron trousers and shirt and *rumi topi* (fur cap) to woo the 15.15-lakh-strong electorate. Naidu drew up a master plan by which thousands of party workers from outside were brought to Hyderabad. The reason given was that they were needed for electioneering but when they stayed on till polling day, zooming around in cars, jeeps and buses with registration numbers of districts suspicions were aroused. When four partymen—two MLA's and two candidates—were arrested in suspicious circumstances, suspicions about the TDP's intentions were confirmed.

Legislator P.Siva Reddy was nabbed by the police after a bomb was lobbed at a gathering of voters in the Charmahal subdivision. The other MLA, Nooka Raju, was caught by the police with a group of men carrying bombs and guns. He tried to hide his identity initially but then disclosed it, fearing police brutality.

NTR campaigning; and Salahuddin Owaisi after victory: rigging drama

Ashok Yadav, the party's candidate for Himayatnagar division, tried to run away with a ballot-box and whipped out a knife when challenged by a constable. He was overpowered after the constable fired in the air. Rathod was caught when a man whom the police were chasing ran into his house, where the cops found a store of countrymade bombs.

The police were not through yet. Minor boys attempting to vote and people from outside the city with no convincing reason for their presence were rounded up. Two policemen found impersonating were promptly suspended. When state BJP Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu alleged that both Home Minister Vasantha Nageshwara Rao and Naidu had misused the police wireless network to send out instructions to partymen, Police Commissioner Prabhakar Rao went on leave.

The post-poll drama was equally interesting. As parties traded charges of rigging and demanded a repoll, the Corporation's Special Officer and Election Authority, C. Arjun Rao, convened a meeting before the counting began the next morning. In less than 16 hours the Congress(I), BJP, Janata and CPI withdrew their demand while the TDP said it was willing if other parties were interested. But the Majlis, confident of its position, remained silent.

When the results were announced, Naidu expectedly claimed that the other parties had recanted because they were guilty of rigging the poll. "Our MLA's, polling agents and candidates were beaten up but this did not get any publicity while we were projected as villains and this harmed our chances."

The 50 per cent decline in the BJP's voting percentage—from 20.79 last March to 14.30 this time—was the only real surprise of the results. The MIM's win in the Muslim-dominated areas of the old city was expected. Its successful forays into the newer parts of the city came about more because the non-Muslim vote was divided among the candidates of the BJP, Congress(I), TDP and the CPI-Janata team.

The Majlis, however, is dogged by its past. In the 1940s, members of its paramilitary shock brigade called Razakars, were instrumental in fomenting anti-Hindu terror, for which its leader, Kasim Rizvi, was arrested. When Rizvi came out of jail in 1957, he revived the party and nominated Abdul Wahed Owaisi, father of the present MIM chief Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi, as the president and left for Pakistan. It is now difficult for the party to shake off its obscurantist image.

Says Owaisi: "The MIM's task as city fathers is unenviable especially when it does not have a clear majority. We are committed to the all-round development of Hyderabad and the neglect of the old city will now end." The MIM election manifesto makes several tall promises, which might be difficult to implement in the absence of a majority, though the MIM and the Congress(I) have agreed on a working arrangement. Should the MIM fail to live up to the promise of its slogan of *"Sheher hamara, mayor hamara"*, it could see a run on its vote bank the next time around. The TDP might yet find that its inability to win the poll was a blessing in disguise.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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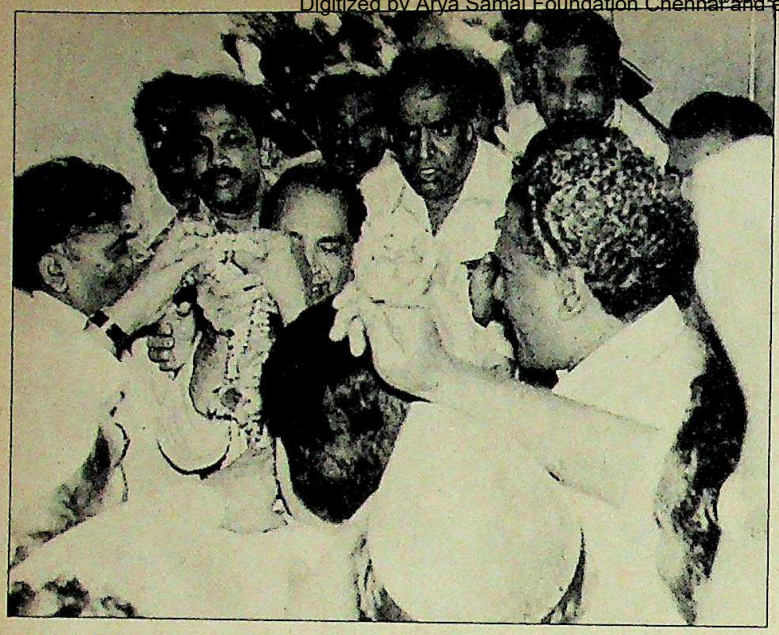

Supporters mob Hegde: self-preservation

KARNATAKA

Back to Business

EVEN as Karnataka Governor A.N. Bannerji laboured to read out the oath of office and secrecy in Kannada, written for him in Bengali, for the swearing-in of the Ramakrishna Hegde-led Janata Party cabinet last fortnight, he didn't have too much difficulty with the pronunciation: it was the third time he was performing the ritual in three years. Bannerji, who shed his usual suit and donned a pyjama, kurta and shawl, couldn't help making the audience guffaw when he told the would-be ministers in his usual schoolmasterish way: "All of you first say your names and repeat what I say." The ceremony, held on the lush lawns of the Raj Bhavan, brought to an end the five-day Hegde resignation drama that had all the histrionics of a third grade Kannada movie.

The return of Hegde with the same 14 cabinet ministers and 15 ministers of state with the same portfolios prompted ex-chief minister Gundu Rao to comment that it was "old arrack in the old bottle". But once the curtain went down on the drama, the high court judgement criticising the arrack bottling contracts took the backseat. The question up front was: did Hegde really resign in deference to his avowed "value-based" politics or had he "stage-managed" the entire show to transform an adversity into a triumph? Considering the crafty chief minister's past record in political wizardry, it was difficult to rule out either.

Hegde's justification for his return to his third-floor office of the Vidhana Soudha, that it was an "order" from his party and that he had "no alternative", found few buyers. While Gundu Rao dismissed the whole episode as "the best joke of the year", opposition leader in the Assembly, S. Bangarappa asked: "If the same ministry was to be sworn in again, what was the need for enacting this drama and crippling the administration for a few days?"

Hegde's response to the Opposition's barbs was a lesson in demagogic politics. Initially, he was defensive, telling a puzzled questioner during his press conference: "I have every right to change my mind." But when the Congress(I)'s criticism was brought up, he shouted at the top of his voice, much against the advice of the doctors who are treating his throat ailment: "Who are these people? I will face them either in the legislature or outside. Let them come out." Later, at a well-attended public meeting in his Basavangudi assembly constituency in Bangalore, Hegde took the fight to the Opposition's camp, charging: "I know who finances Bangarappa's Delhi trips, I know who all have financed his daughter's marriage and I know how he has swallowed land belonging to Harijans. And I also know about the land Subbaiah (A.K. Subbaiah, associate member of the Congress(I) and noted Hegde baiter) has bought in his wife's name. They have no business to talk about corruption."

While most ministers and legislators don't agree that Hegde's return to power will leave a dent in his 'Mr Clean' image, a cabinet minister close to him admitted that Hegde would have to pay a price. Conceding that Hegde's credibility would go down a few notches, he said: "If Hegde had not yielded to pressure brought on him to continue, he would have become another Jayaprakash Narayan."

Self-preservation lay at the bottom of the unprecedented pressure the Janata men brought on Hegde. They realise that the intra-party rivalry between the two dominant Vokkaliga and Lingayat communities is so virulent that only a shrewd leader who doesn't belong to either of the communities can contain and balance them in the party. No one can do this better than the Brahmin Hegde. The Public Works Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, a powerful Vokkaliga aspirant for the chief minister's chair, said significantly at the Basavangudi meeting: "Hegde has been persuaded to continue so that all suspicions that Janata's break-up in 1978 at the Centre could be repeated in the state are removed."

The chief minister went quickly back to work, showing all his old savvy. Presenting a rosy picture of the state's economy in the budget which has an uncovered deficit of Rs 38.9 crore even after Rs 40 crore of fresh levies, he boasted: "In the first year of the seventh plan, Karnataka was one of the few states to raise resources by more than Rs 100 crore."

But with the Congress(I) boycotting the budget presentation, saying that Hegde had no "moral right" to continue in power, it was back to business as usual. However, there has been one significant change. When Hegde now says that he is not keen on continuing till the end of his term and he would like to leave the post for someone else ("there are some more capable than me in the cabinet"), very few people believe him.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD

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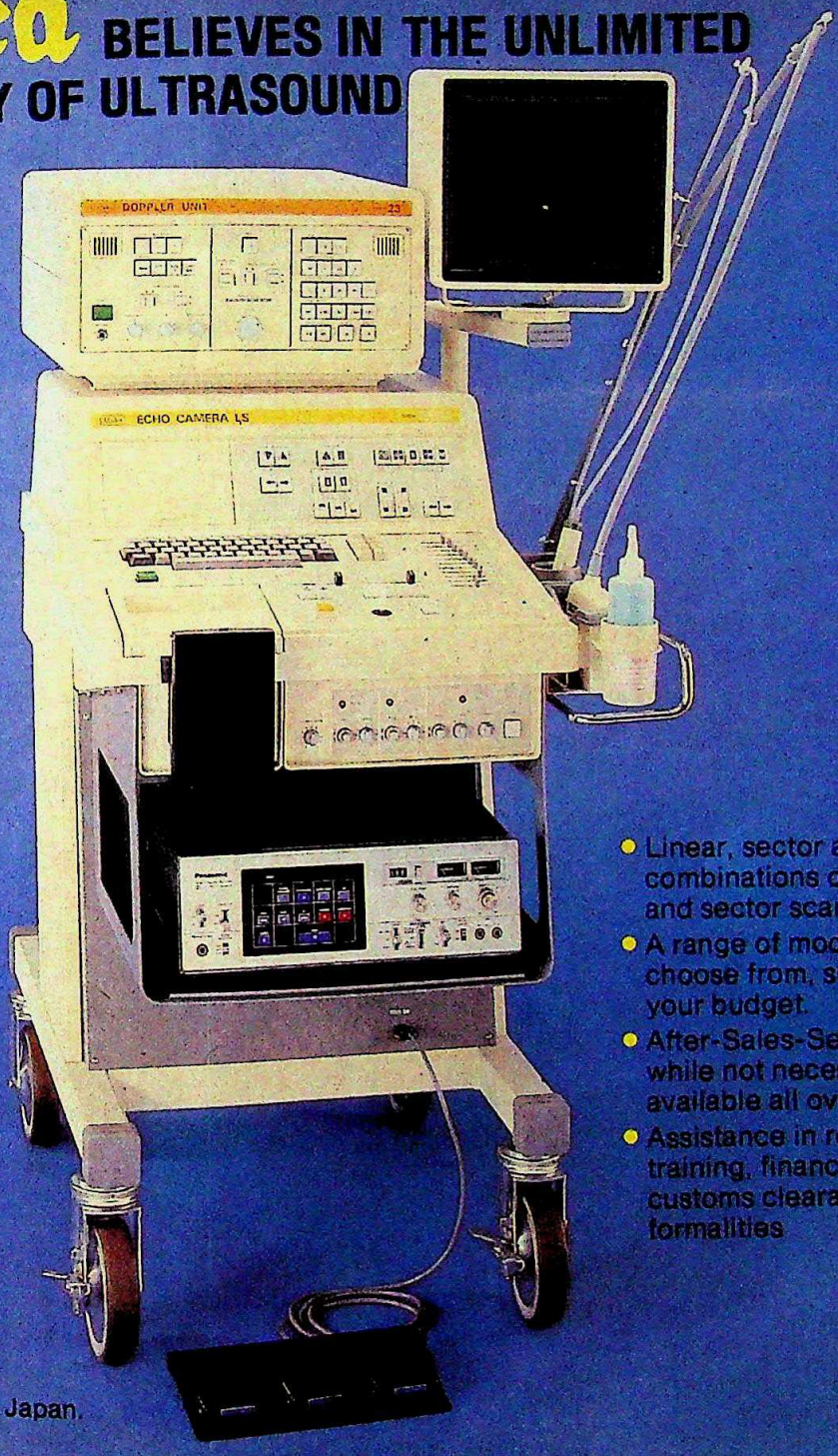

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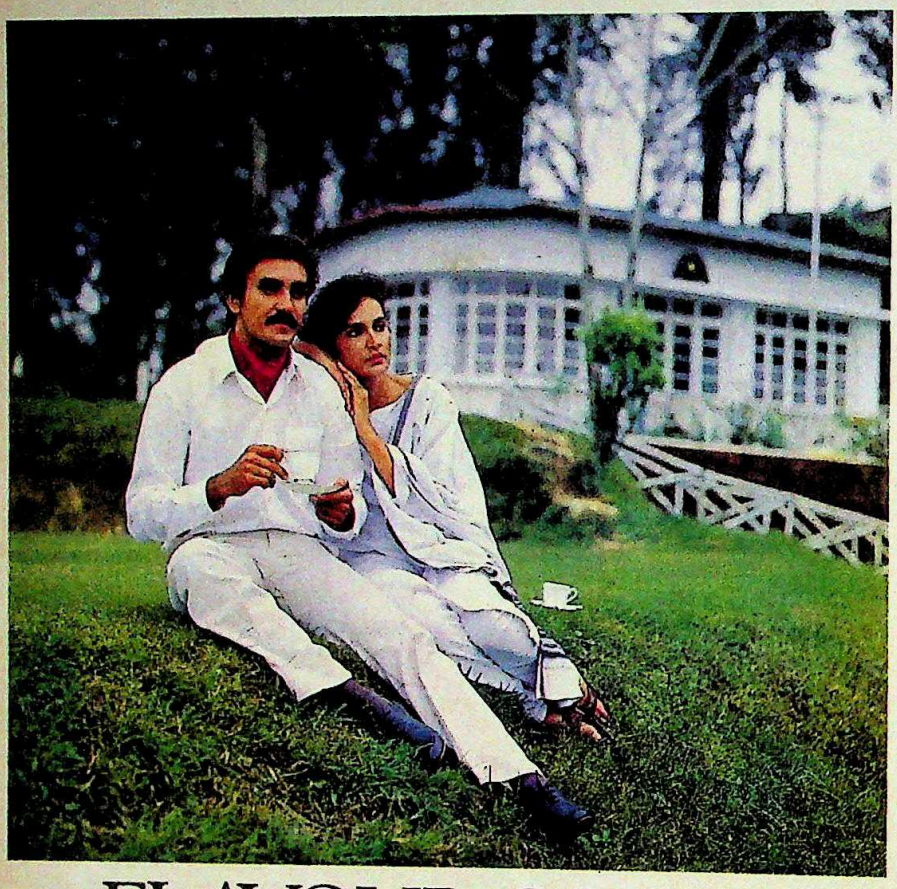

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BIHAR

Dissident Drama

IT WAS as sudden as it was premature. As Bihar Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey prepared to face the Assembly for the budget session last fortnight, and his ministry inched towards its twelfth month, open dissidence surfaced for the first time against his government. With one dissident even challenging Dubey to prove his majority in the legislature party, matters were threatening to go out of hand when state party chief Dumar Lal Baitha finally cracked down, issuing show cause notices to three dissidents. The dissidents were in retreat but their time may still come.

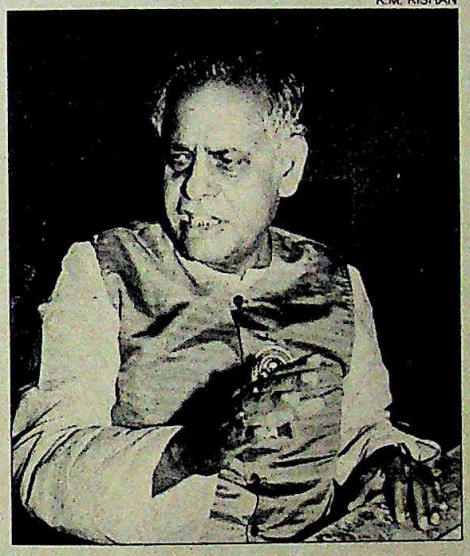
A seemingly unfazed Dubey asserted: "There is no dissidence within the party and I enjoy the confidence of the majority." But his actions showed that nervousness lurked under the facade of confidence. Party Vice-President Arjun Singh was expected to proceed to Patna from Ranchi but was apparently persuaded to skip the capital to avoid embarrassment over the Aslam Sher Khan fiasco. Looming behind it all was the figure of Jagannath Mishra, suspected by the Dubey loyalists to be behind the mini-revolt, but denying it.

The dissidents, although split into four groups owing loyalty to different leaders, made the common demand that anybody would be preferable to Dubey as he had proved to be a singularly ineffective administrator. Former minister and Harijan legislator Bilat Paswan Bihagnam, a known Mishra follower, openly challenged Dubey's claim of a majority and said: "If Dubey thinks so, he should call a meeting of the Congress(I) Legislature Party and seek a vote of confidence."

Dissident activities had first surfaced as a fallout of the February 4 ministerial expansion and reshuffle (INDIA TODAY, February 28) but once it started, it snowballed. Eventually, 127 of 240 Congress(I) MLA's and MLC's signed two sets of memoranda accusing the Dubey Ministry of corruption and nepotism and inefficiency in the implementation of the 20-point programme. One of the three ministers dropped sent a five-page letter to Rajiv Gandhi, Arjun Singh and Arun Nehru, saying that law and order had collapsed and development work had become a farce.

Bihangam called a meeting of some 50 legislators, and Jaikumer Palit, who is known to be close to AICC(I) Treasurer Sitaram Kesari, had a score of legislators over at his residence. And their demand was the same—Dubey must go.

K.M. KISHAN



Although split into four groups the dissidents made the common demand that anybody would be preferable to Dubey.

In contrast, Shyam Sunder Dhiraj, state Youth Congress(I) chief, who also invited his young colleagues to express resentment over the Government's non-performance, said later: "We are not dissidents but we have decided to launch an anti-corruption crusade at the call of the prime minister. We will highlight our grievances through the proper channels instead of going to the press." A similar rationalisation was offered by Shakil-uz-Zaman, a former secretary of the National Students' Union of India, but the two leaders were only trying to hide the fact that most of the 60-odd MLA's were sore that none of them was considered in the last reshuffle.

In the face of all these developments, the change in Arjun Singh's plans came as no surprise. Before Singh's visit, MP and former hockey hero Aslam Sher Khan, who is known to be close to Singh, was sent on a "secret mission" to assess the political situation. Explained an MP, known to have access to the party bigwigs: "Before the decision was taken to remove Jagannath Mishra in 1983, several teams of faceless MP's were sent to gauge the public mood. The Khan visit was in the same mould."

But the move backfired when young MLA's and partymen started flocking to Khan's hotel room in droves. Dubey then rang up Singh and other leaders in Delhi and got Khan recalled in a hurry, but by then he had gathered his impressions. But, Singh declared in Ranchi that he had no complaints against Dubey nor was there any plan to remove him.

Dubey's supporters charge that Mishra is orchestrating the dissidence from the shadows. Denying the charge, Mishra asserted: "I will never do anything which will either weaken the party or the Government. I am much too busy with the *Jana Jagran* (public awareness) campaign." But legislators owing allegiance to Mishra sent a memorandum to Central leaders listing specific charges against the Dubey Ministry.

Going on the offensive, Dubey flew to Delhi with a list of legislators creating trouble for him and Baitha issued notices seeking explanations from the three legislators—Bihangam, Jogeshwar Jha and Gunanand Jha—who had openly challenged Dubey. And while a group of legislators assured Dubey of their continued confidence in his leadership, Dubey also received assurances of support from Union Minister of State for Petroleum Chandrashekhar Singh and influential Rajput MP L.P.Sahi. But Union Minister for Urban Development Abdul Ghafoor is still known to be upset with Dubey.

Dubey's seat is safe so long as the party high command continues to back him and as yet, there is no indication that the Central leadership has lost faith in him. But once that happens the dissidents will have all the advantages.

—FARZAND AHMED

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BIHAR

Plateau of Terror

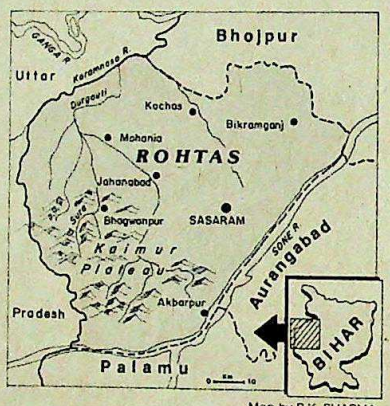
ITS MURDER-to-population ratio would put any town in the wild west to shame. The Kaimur plateau in Rohtas district, a Chambal look-alike with three rivers etching deep ravines over its mostly forested area, has only 40,000 residents but in the last 12 months as many as 183 people have been brutally murdered here.

Kaimur has long been known as a terror zone but it seems to be getting beyond control. In the last 10 months, the Bihar Government has sent two companies of the Bihar Military Police to smash the five gangs which spread terror but the crime graph has only climbed. Just as the Government prepared to launch yet another operation, three members of a gang were abducted and killed in broad daylight in Bandha village last fortnight, taking the death toll way above the 1984 figure of 142. Says a disgusted Rajeshwar Singh, college lecturer of Sasaram: "Blood is cheaper than water here and the police is either indifferent or an accomplice."

The bitterness is understandable. Last year in April the Bindeshwari Dubey Government had launched 'Operation Black Panther-II' intended to wipe out the criminal menace, with great fanfare. Coincidentally, the dreaded dacoit and uncrowned king of the Kaimur range, Mohan Bind, was killed by an accomplice around the same time. The initial operation was followed by three more operations in which 20 dacoits were killed in six "encounters" but none of the five gang leaders—Ramashis Koeri alias Dada, Ghamari Karwar, Rambachan Yadav, Triveni Kahar and Gaurik—was among them.

Official statistics concede that 199 dacoities were committed in 1985 against 134 in 1984. Says district Congress(I) vice-president Durga Prasad Singh: "The failure of the police operations has spread panic in the area. Nobody ventures out after sunset. In villages in the hills, they don't even come out in the day." Said a local resident: "How do you expect us to feel safe when the rule here is one murder and rape every alternate day?"

But the district administration does not share the pessimism. Says ex-Rohtas District police superintendent Arun Choudhary: "We don't believe that the operations have failed. Kaimur is a very tough terrain where even normal policing is very difficult. Rohtas has always been crime-infested; people kill on the slightest provocation here." Back-up statistics of the police's achievements in the last year follow: 892 criminals rounded up in the whole district, properties worth over Rs 2 lakh recovered and a big arms haul effected, including 18 rifles, 25 guns, 65 country-made guns and 60 country-made pistols. But obviously the Government was not too impressed: Choudhary was transferred last fortnight after having been here for less than a year.



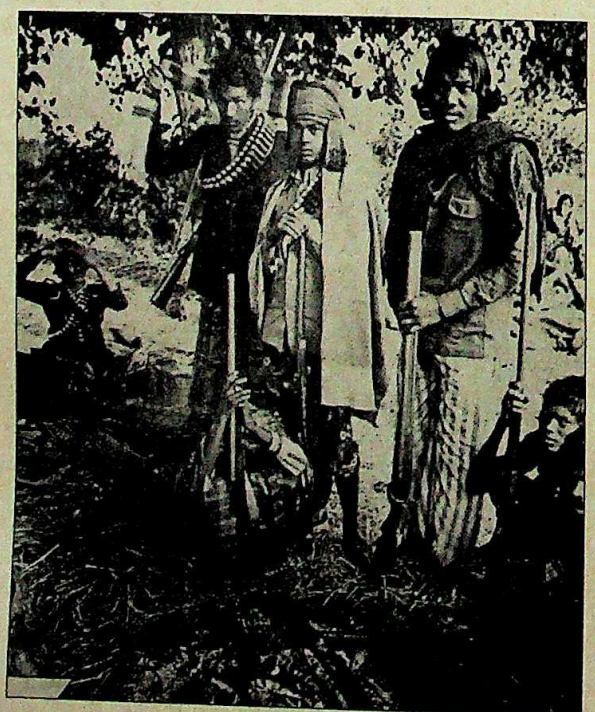
Map by B.K. SHARMA

The fact is police has had little to show. Operation Black Panther-II, which was spread over the adjoining Bhojpur district also, was followed by the more intensive "Operation Kaimur" in which the whole area was divided into six zones and not just the criminals but those who gave them shelter were made the target. Two short operations followed but the result was pitiable: only one known criminal, Nagina, killed.

Kaimur's problems, not surprisingly, stem from its extreme poverty. A lot of the people live on just salt and water for numerous days. The Government has done next to nothing: there is not an inch of paved road, no industry and no irrigation. Caste rivalries have further complicated the issue, with the neo-rich Yadavs ranged against the feudal Rajputs on the one side and the tribals on the other. Mohan Bind, with his Robin Hood image, was emerging as a rough and ready lawmaker when his murder brought back the days of internecine warfare.

Dada, the new leader, proceeded to hunt all Yadav-led gangs. The police has only looked on helplessly as the gang warfare has raged. Criminals continue to get help from forest contractors, who supply them both money and firearms, and from politicians who give them protection in return for help at election time. Till this deep-lying nexus is snapped, there is little hope for Kaimur. Says Durga Prasad: "The day when the rule of law is established here is still far away." In Kaimur 200-odd dacoits still hold sway over the might of the state.

—FARZAND AHMED



Gang of armed criminals in Kaimur: hair-trigger tension

K.M. KISHAN

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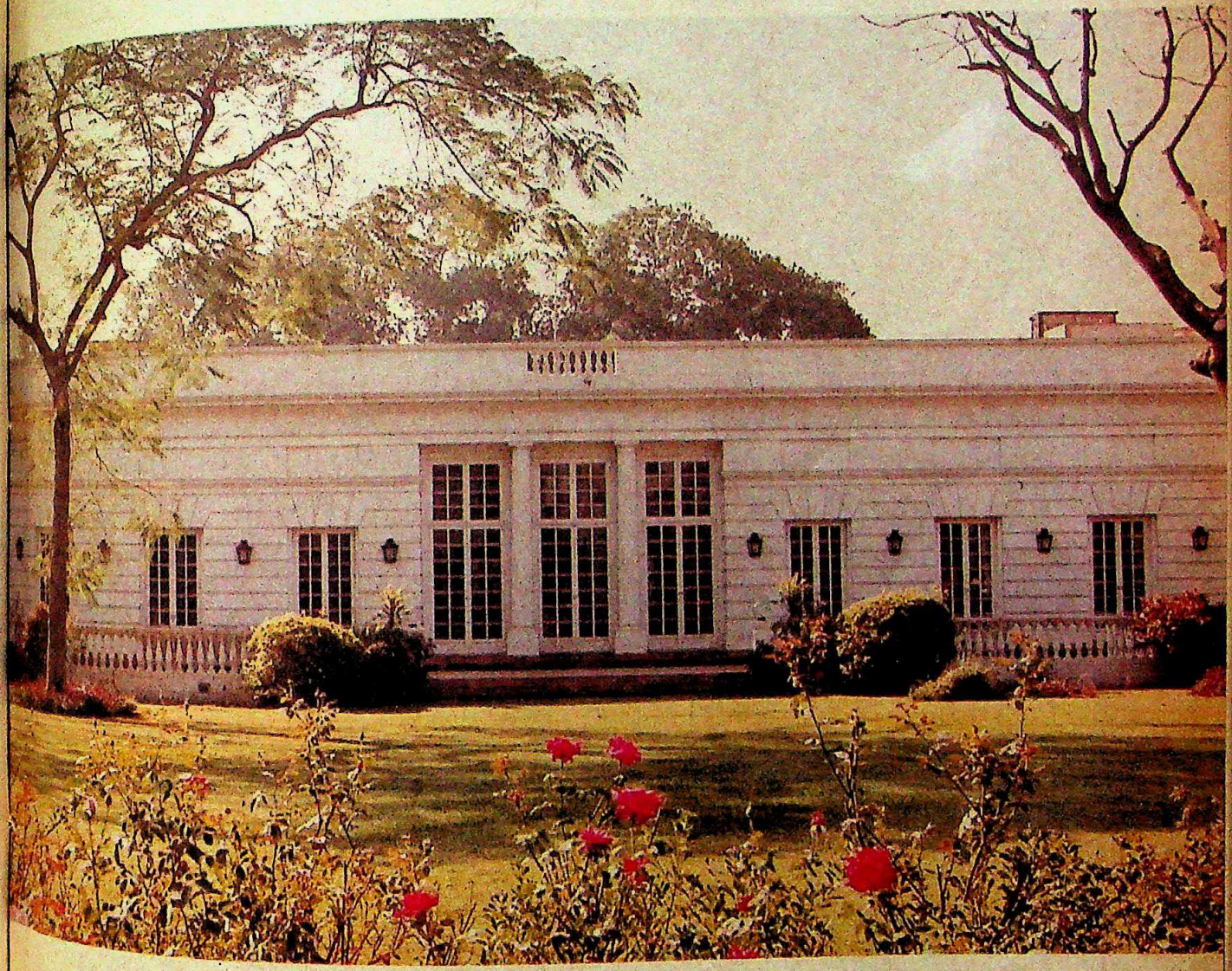

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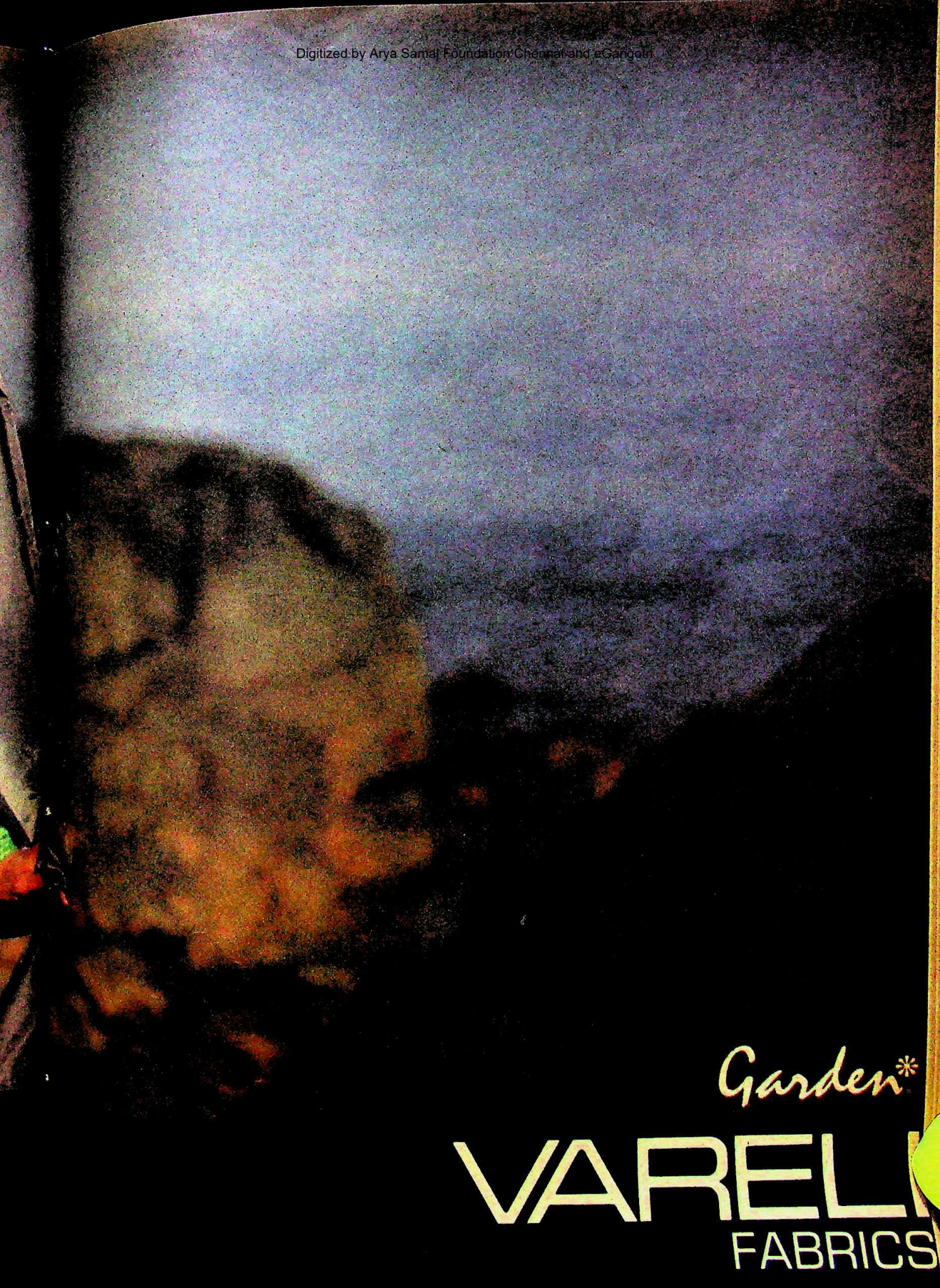

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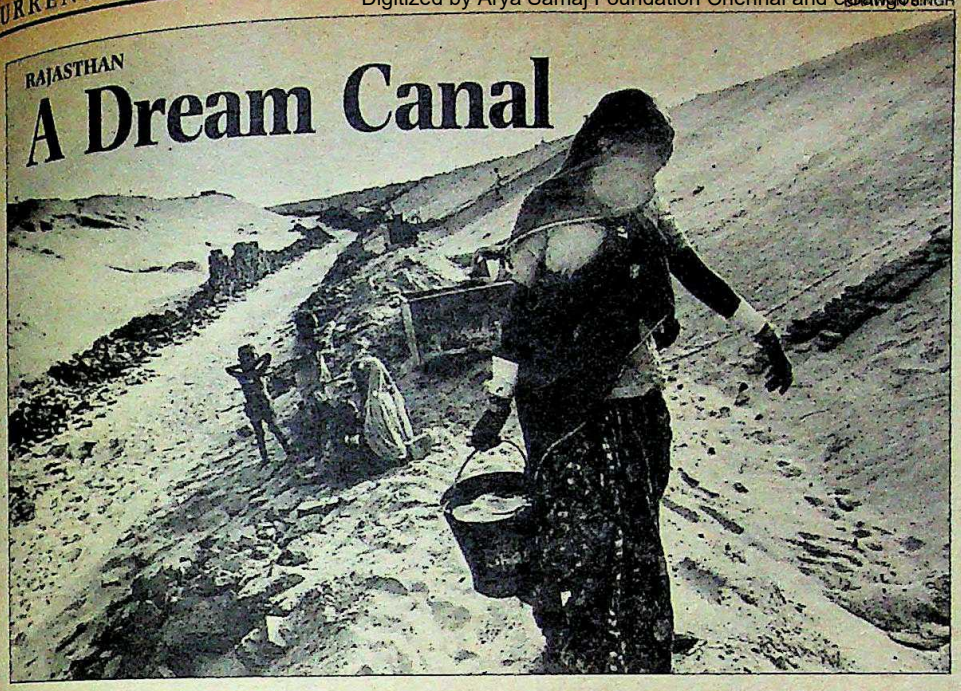
A Dream Canal



Workers along the canal: snail's pace

LAST month, when Rajasthan Chief Minister Harideo Joshi pleaded with Dr Manmohan Singh, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, for major Central assistance to the Indira Gandhi Canal Project, he wasn't the first chief minister to have done so. If the massive canal is an incredible dream in this backward desert state, it is also one that has caused immense financial frustration.

Sometime in 1986, work on the 445 km-long main canal will be finished but in the absence of the subsidiary network of canals, that milestone will be little more than a propaganda victory. Officially, talk continues of completing the entire project by 1995. However, the unpalatable truth—as senior officials admit privately—is that at existing levels of funding, the project, begun in 1958, cannot be finished before 2005.

To the Rajasthani, the deadline for completing the work finally can only seem to be receding. At the outset, it was to be wrapped up by 1965 at a cost of just Rs 60 crore. But planners and political leaders have continuously increased its size and scope. For instance, the original scheme to have an earth-lined canal was dropped in favour of brick lining—this reduces water losses through seepage to a seventh but also multiplies costs manifold. In another move last year, justifiable alterations were ordered hiking the cost of the project's stage II from Rs 944 crore to Rs 1,331 crore.

The state's requests for heavy Central funding are more than two decades old. Indeed, at one point, in 1967-68 Delhi did offer to not only fund but also execute the project when the state exhibited its empty pockets. But the Centre in turn wanted the right to allot lands in the command area as it chose—and this the state Government was unwilling to concede. Since then, the entire money has come from state resources, except for Rs 40 crore from the Centre.

While it is true that when completed the project will alter the economic fortunes of vast areas of the desert (already, the irrigated area of stage I yields crops worth well over Rs 250 crore annually), there have been others who have felt that "the state has mortgaged its future to a single project".

Perhaps nothing illustrates better the awesome task that this economically backward state faces in finding money than a recent official calculation. According to it, at 1985 prices, were the entire system to be built today, it would require between Rs 3,000 crore and Rs 3,500 crore. It is an impossible sum for Rajasthan, the seventh plan size of which is just Rs 3,000 crore. More than a thousand crore still has to be spent on stage II and at an average allocation of Rs 50 crore annually, it is bound to take another 20 years.

In the late '70s and until the early '80s the pace had been slow in large part due to the erratic supply of raw materials. The task of lining suffered because the enormous quantities of cement (average annual consumption: 50,000 tonnes) and coal (40,000 tonnes) were not always available. While that problem has now been sorted out, the problem of cash remains.

Says a top-level state official: "The canal has become a back-breaking burden for Rajasthan, considering our poor resources position. Although it is the second largest state in the country area-wise, our plan size is nominally larger than tiny Haryana and smaller than Punjab. Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra's allocations are three and a half times bigger and even Gujarat's plan size at Rs 6,000 crore is twice ours." Over the last seven years, roughly 10 per cent of the state's annual outlay has been devoted to this single project. In the outlay for 1986-87, recently announced, the canal has been allotted Rs 45 crore out of a total of Rs 525 crore or 8.57 per cent. In the current year it is Rs 50 crore of Rs 430 crore or 11.63 per cent. And in 1982-83, the percentage was 12.50—which meant that every eighth rupee spent went into the canal.

This contribution could be made only at the cost of other important programmes. In 1985-86, the amount spent on the Indira Gandhi Canal was 60 per cent of the amount spent in Rajasthan on social services: health services, providing drinking water, education, social welfare and the nutrition programme. And in 1986-87 as much will be spent on the canal as on transport, mining and industry put together.

But if the Rajasthan Government is unwilling to reduce its commitment to the canal, it is because the benefits of the first stage are all too visible. In an area where nearly nothing grew until a few decades ago, 26,000 tonnes of gram, 23,000 tonnes of groundnut, 40,000 tonnes of paddy, 68,000 tonnes of mustard, and 100,000 tonnes of cotton are now produced annually, among other things. The pot at the end of the rainbow is all too alluring; it is only the end of the rainbow that is not in sight.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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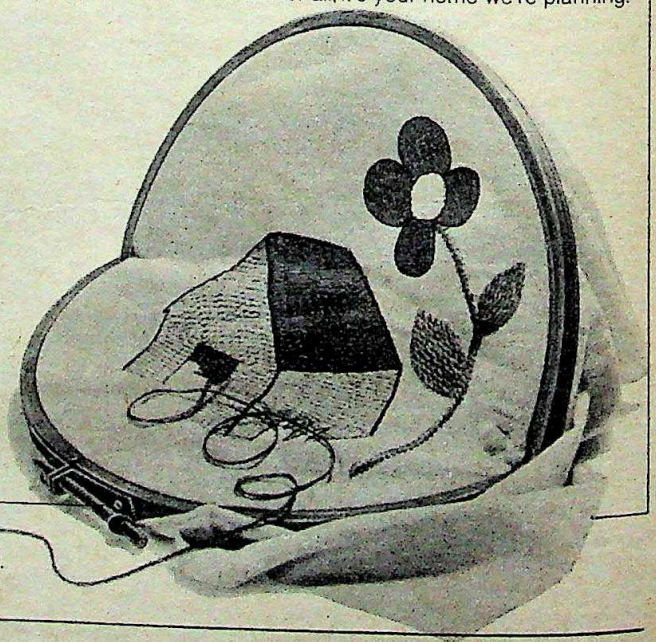

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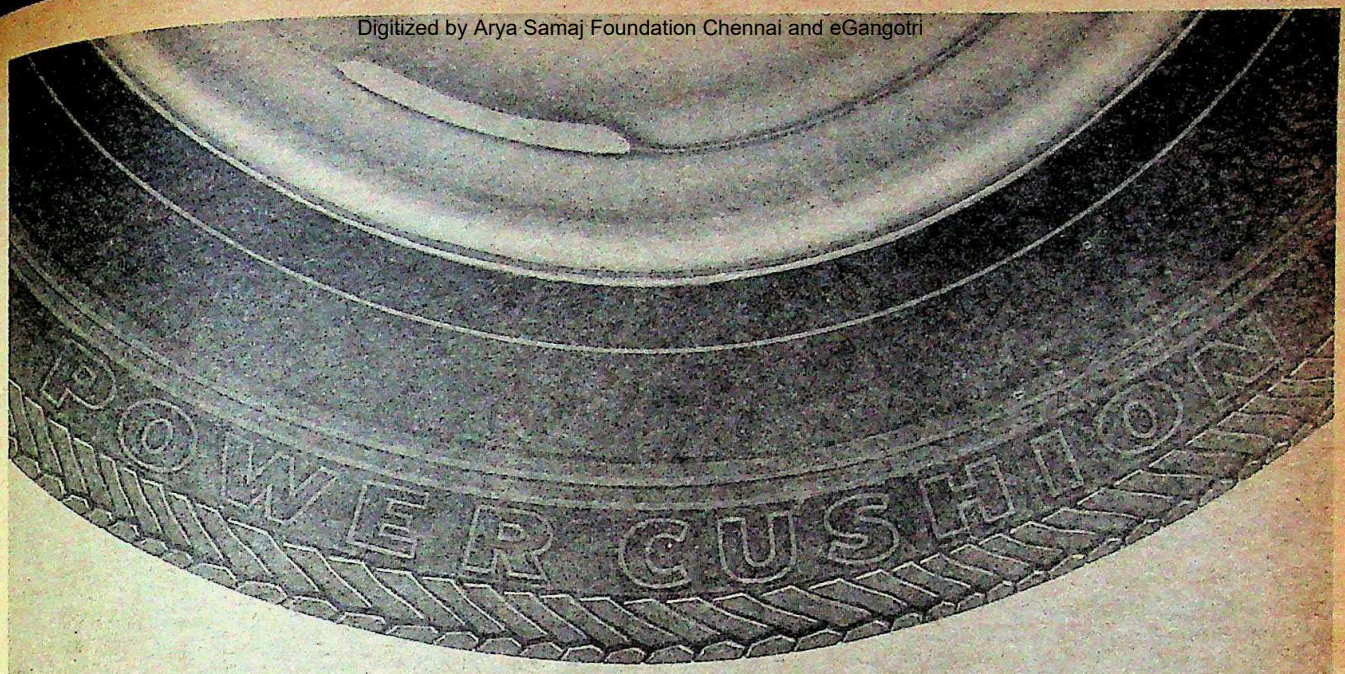

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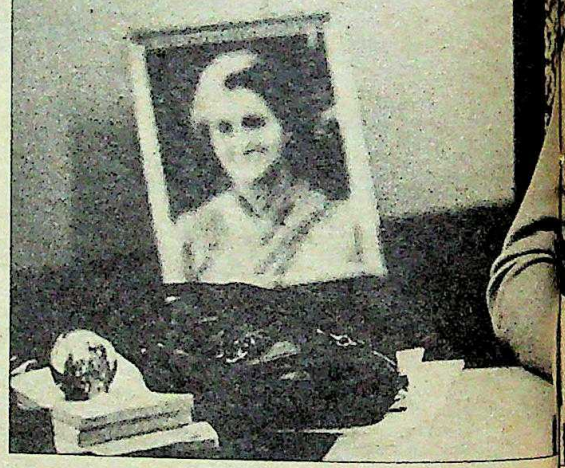
ASSAM

The Endangered Accord

TWO MONTHS is too short a period for political debutantes to learn statecraft. But in Assam, the two months since the new, youthful Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government took over, the political scene has changed profoundly. The ebullience of new-found power has ebbed just a little as the rulers have become rapidly aware of the price they have to pay for it. It was one thing to shout slogans; it's quite another to give them administrative shape. The historic Independence day accord that promised so much presents particularly difficult challenges.. With the Punjab precedent at the back of their minds the AGP leadership today is mellowed, and aware that neither confrontation with the Centre nor any short-cuts can help prevent the accord going sour or solve the ethnic, linguistic and political problems as Principal Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA found out in the course of a six-day visit to the state. His report:

"It is so tough, tougher than we had thought. People want us to do much, much more than we can do."
PRAFULLA MAHANTA
chief minister of Assam



IN THE dark, humid plywood corridors of power in the Janata Bhawan at Dispur there is a new official nameplate that invariably catches visitors' attention. It reads: "A.K. Saikia, secretary, department of Assam accord implementation". In comparison, the others appear unimportant because nothing that the new government does today matters more than the implementation of the accord they signed with the prime minister, followed by a cathartic victory in the December 1985 poll and the new mood of euphoria and optimism not seen in Assam's contempory history. "The only reason we came to power was to implement the accord. We just cannot afford to fail the people there," says Home Minister Bhrigu Phukan, the most articulate of the AGP leaders.

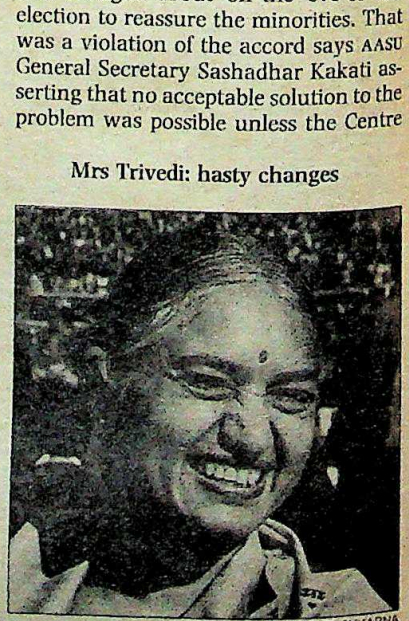
The creation of a new full-fledged department to oversee the implementation of the accord was an innovative administrative step. And the priority the Government accords to the issue is evident from the fact that it summoned from Delhi Achyut Kumar Saikia, the first-ever Assamese to be selected directly into the IAS to head the department. But more than anyone else, Saikia himself is aware of the problems that lie ahead. "I want to be an optimist. But it is not an easy thing to implement," he says, adding, "my job is to coordinate between various departments implementing the accord, set time schedules and if they fail, to catch them."

The cabinet members mark this out as the example of their downright keenness to get down to the brass-tacks on the accord. But, last fortnight, a realisation was also sinking in fast that implementation of the accord was much more than an administrative problem. "The proof of the pudding lies in the eating. It was one thing all this time to go to the judges' field and shout that we will solve the foreigners' issue. But with the ball in their court now they do not know where to look," says Golak Chandra Rajbanshi, leader of the Congress(I) Legislature Party with an obvious show of vicarious glee. Said Chief Minister Mahanta: "It is very tough, much tougher than we had thought. People want us to do so much more than we can humanly do," and adds, "yes, there are a lot of problems."

Just how formidable, is evident from a mere reading of the Assam accord draft in the perspective of the new realities. The heart of the accord is Clause 5 which, in its nine paragraphs marks out the modalities for a solution to the foreigners' problem. Officials in Dispur shudder at the very thought of having to deal with a situation where immigrants are detected and even tried at the tribunals in a substantial number. "Imagine the consequences that will have in today's communally charged situation all over the country?" asked a police official.

The AGP Government is aware of this and yet also of the fact that those who voted them to power would not buy that argument so easily. "This political conspiracy of putting one community against the other will remain in India for ever," said the new AASU President Kartick Hazarika and argued: "After all there has to be some provision for the indigenous people of Assam in their homeland." AASU is pressing the Government to repeal the amendment to the Citizenship Act that was brought about on the eve of the election to reassure the minorities. That was a violation of the accord says AASU General Secretary Sashadhar Kakati asserting that no acceptable solution to the problem was possible unless the Centre

Mrs Trivedi: hasty changes



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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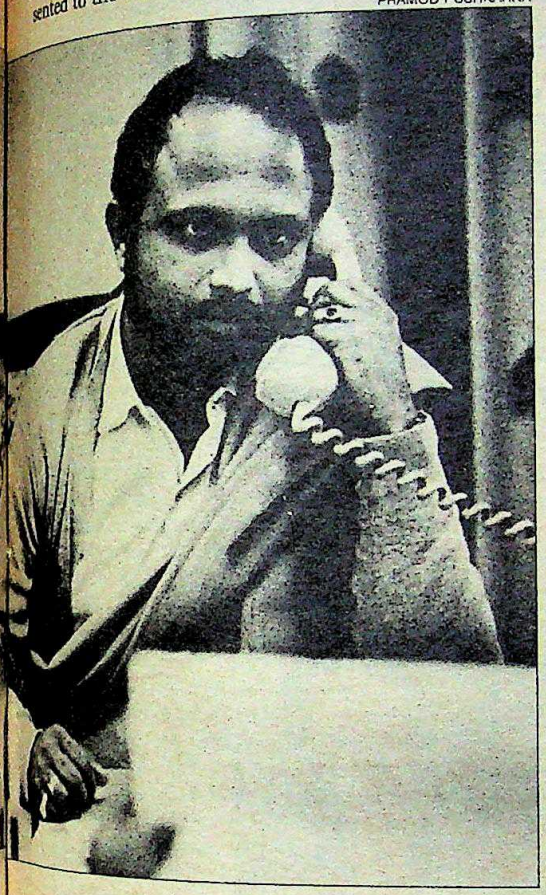
also made major changes in the Illegal Migrants (determination by tribunals) Act of 1983. The state Government has finalised a draft amendment to be presented to the Centre.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Recent experience has already exposed the limitation of the tribunals, 20 of which are in existence in the state at the moment with just 30 judges in all instead of the required 60. The tribunals' record speaks for itself. So far, the state police has investigated only 15,000 cases in about two years. Of these only a ridiculous 380 have been brought to the tribunals for trial ending in 124 convictions. Yet again, the Act makes no provision for the deportation of these people. It only states, that they should remove themselves from India. The law would thus need amendment.

> They are still learning their first lessons in the art of governance and making mistakes such as too many, haphazard transfers of officials, leaving the whole bureaucracy in panic and suspense.

Along with the legal lacunae the Government is also becoming increasingly aware of the fact that any suggestion of overkill on the issue will not only be wasteful, it will also be purely counterproductive. Consequently, the political leaders are trying to convince their supporters, particularly the AASU, of the futility of insisting on the original suggestion that a tribunal should be constituted for each of the 126 assembly constituencies in the state, a logistical impossibility.

Many senior AGP leaders talk of the compulsions in mature terms. Said a minister: "Ultimately we have to see what is practical and possible. Ours is a situation of walking the tight-rope over a swollen Brahmaputra." It was in this quest last fortnight that the ministry was persuading the AASU to give up a proposed door-to-door census of its own.

The next, seemingly innocuous clause promising safeguards for the cultural, linguistic and social identity of the Assamese people presents an even trickier challenge. Last fortnight the Government was admitting that what looked like a juicy full-toss is indeed a treacherous googly. At a long meeting of the top-level committee at Dispur, officials and ministers spent many hours wondering how to define the term "Assamese people". This, indeed, is the most painful Assamese dilemma of all time. In the euphoria of the takeover the AGP leaders had talked in terms of a new language policy, and of making it mandatory for job aspirants to learn Assamese.

This tactical blunder upset many tribal leaders, particularly the pro-left All Assam Tribal Students Union (AATSU). "What do they mean by Assamese language and culture," asks the firebrand AATSU chief Ranauj Pegu charging the "minority government of Assamese caste-Hindus" with coveting the tribal lands and resources but not the tribal people. "What happens to the culture and language of all the tribes and backward classes?" he asked as he collected leaders of 57 organisations of these communities at Guwahati's Nepali Mandir and announced a resolve to agitate against any effort to "thrust Assamese on us". And while it is true that in the last election a sizeable number of tribals voted for the AGP, the loyalties could easily cross the fence once linguistic passions, traditionally the most intense of all in Assam, were raised again. "In our party we know that problem and so even though believe that the AATSU is being instigated by the Congress and communists we cannot take them lightly," admitted a minister. Any such ethnic polarisation would revive the demand for Udayachal, a separate tribal state. This is indeed a tricky situation for a government headed by a chief minister who had even refused to be interviewed by the Bengali service of the BBC in New Delhi on August 15 after signing the accord.

THE TIGHT-rope does not end there. Initially, the clause relating to the rehabilitation of the families that suffered during the agitation seemed to be the simplest of the lot. But now even this poses embarrassing questions. So far the Assamese leadership's idea of those worthy of such help was the families of *"swahids"* (martyrs). The AASU has already supplied the list of 606 such names which also figure on the student organisation's calendar for 1986. But now that they have to follow the constitutional norms of governance the AGP leaders cannot just confine the relief to the agitation martyrs. "We are trying to see how to work this out," Phukan says tentatively but officials have been warning the Cabinet of the possibility of the families of thousands of agitation violence going to the courts and demanding the same resettlement grants. Says an official: "At Rs 20,000 a family that would add up to over Rs 100 crore and no one has that kind of money. Least of all Assam where the current year's debt repayment exceeds revenue receipts."

There are similar problems elsewhere. The work on the border fence, promised in the accord, cannot begin till the MEA persuades the Bangladesh Government not to shoot at Indian fence workers; on the issue of rehabilitation of government officials victimised during the agitation there is the imposing question mark on the reinstatement of Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharya, a former police deputy inspector general. It is an emotional issue but the Centre has repeatedly pointed out

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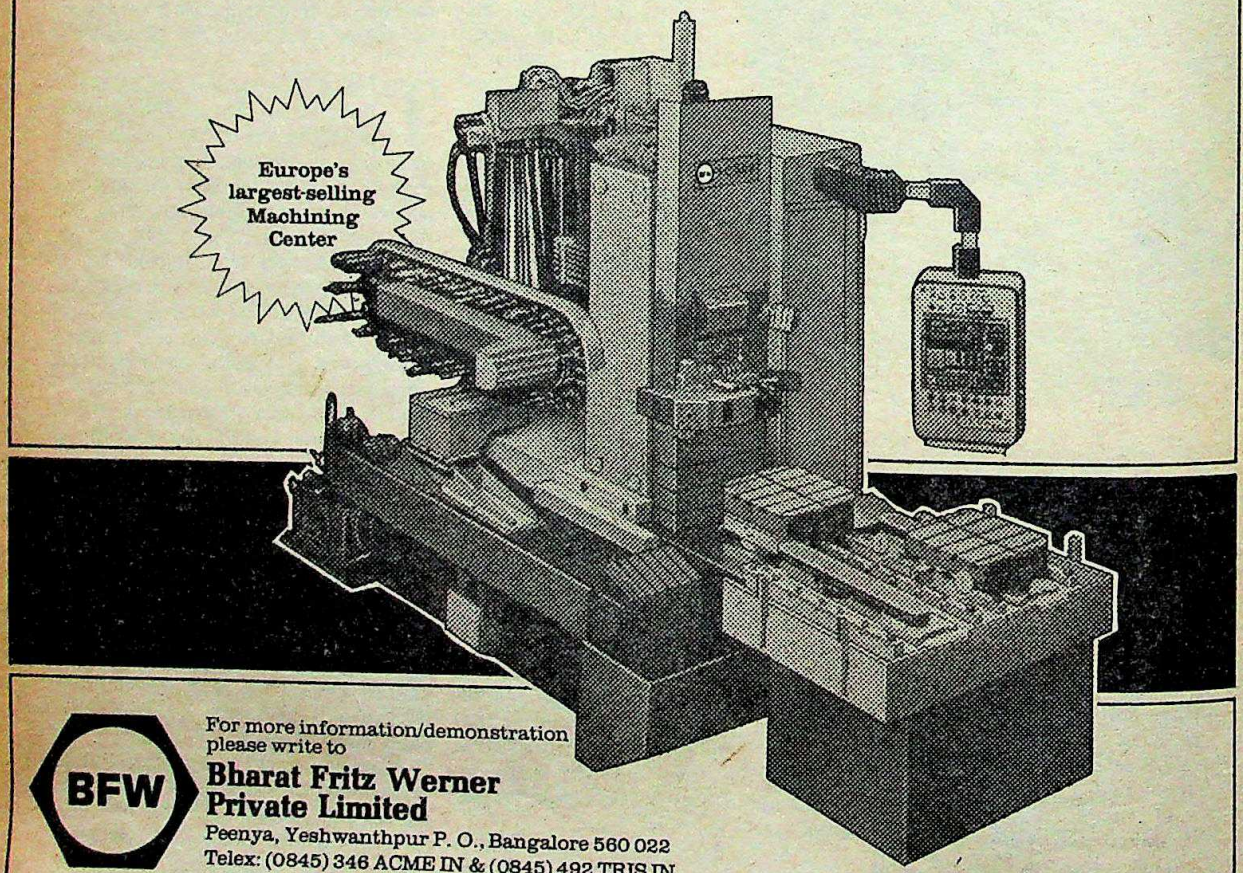

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to the state that anything done in his case will automatically become a precedent for Simranjeet Singh Mann, the jailed Punjab police officer.

With all this at the back of their young minds the AGP leaders find themselves in a constant state of fence-sitting, damned if they do and damned if they don't. Quick action on the accord promises communal and ethnic trouble. Delay will bring in popular pressures in their valued ethnic Assamese constituency besides adding to the voice of the more hawkish elements within the AASU. "In Assam," said an intelligence official, "it is unlikely that the AASU could tomorrow become to the AGP what AISSF is to the Akalis in Punjab. Yet if there is delay on the accord, the situation could become fundamentally similar."

In this sober mood, thus, confrontation, whether within the state or with the Centre is the last thing on their minds and this new mood has been evident in more ways than one in the recent weeks. For example when a pro-AGP mob killed a woman and her young, college-going

EXTREMISTS

New Threat

GRIEF is an utterly private affair. More so in power politics as Prafulla Kumar Mahanta must be realising now. In August last year some armed men, presumably members of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) raided a branch of the United Commercial Bank in Guwahati's Silpukhuri locality. They killed the branch manager and took away the cash. The slain manager was none else than the brother of the girl Mahanta is planning to marry.

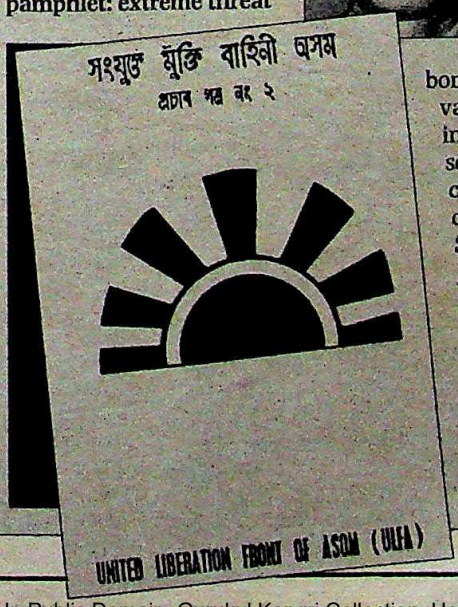
Shortly after he assumed the chief ministership Mahanta faced the inevitability of having to release all the NSA detenus and among them were the four suspected bank dacoits, Bhupen Bargohain, Mohikant Hathibarua, Anil Bharali and Budheshwar Gogoi, in spite of strong opposition from the Union Home Ministry. "He was a good friend of mine," Mahanta now says rather philosophically referring to the murdered bank manager but argues that his government could not have made an exception in just this case.

Last fortnight, however, he was reconsidering the issue all over again as a gang of hit-men shot at close range Tankeshwar Dihingia, a former Congress(I) minister, just as he was driving to the court at Sibsagar in Upper Assam. The police later recovered ULFA pamphlets from the scene and suspect that the assassins had used Chinese machine-pistols of the kind that the organisation has brought back from the training camps of the pro-Beijing National Socialist Council of Nagaland in the Burmese jungles. They also picked up for questioning none else than Bhupen Bargohain, the self-styled vice-president of ULFA released from prison only last month in Guwahati.

Mahanta's Government does not face anything of the kind Surjit Singh Barnala does in Punjab but he surely has a challenge on hand from the extremists. Any incidence of violence in the state discredits his ministry. Besides, groups like ULFA may not confine their hit-list to Congressmen. Pamphlets distributed by ULFA in Sadiya in the extreme eastern corner of Assam, threaten to "teach a lesson to the former AASU leaders for misappropriation of funds". These followed the four-page pamphlet distributed in Guwahati shortly before the elections ridiculing the accord.

> **Prafulla Mahanta's Government does not face anything of the kind Surjit Singh Barnala does in Punjab but he surely has a challenge on hand from the extremists.**

Dihingia (right); and ULFA pamphlet: extreme threat



Much of the information available to the intelligence agencies from ULFA comes from the interrogation reports of the four bank dacoity suspects. Suren Dihingia, Pradip Gogoi and Paresh Barua, three youngsters from Upper Assam first conceived of the organisation and launched it at the fertiliser town of Namrup a month later. Bhim Bargohain, a schoolteacher, was nominated "president and army commander", while Paresh Barua, reputed to be the most cunning in the pack, became the military advisor. Subsequently an ULFA delegation including Dihingia and Barua went to Imphal and contacted Angelus Shimray, the "foreign secretary" of the NSCN, to work out training arrangements. This resulted in the training of about 30 ULFA boys by the NSCN guerrillas at their Burmese hide-outs.

Police sources say the ULFA has a hard core of no more than 60-70 persons and many of these were earlier members of the extremist Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chhatra Parishad (AJYCP) and were involved in cases of sabotage and bomb blasts all over the Brahmaputra valley. Assam police suspect ULFA's involvement in the recent theft of several cases of 7.62 and 9 mm cartridges from a railway wagon carrying supplies for the Border Security Force at New Bongaigaon Junction.

Many AGP spokesmen now allege that the group had been propped up by the Congress(I) to embarrass them. But that is exactly how the Akalis in Punjab always dismissed the extremist challenge till it began to threaten their very existence in power.

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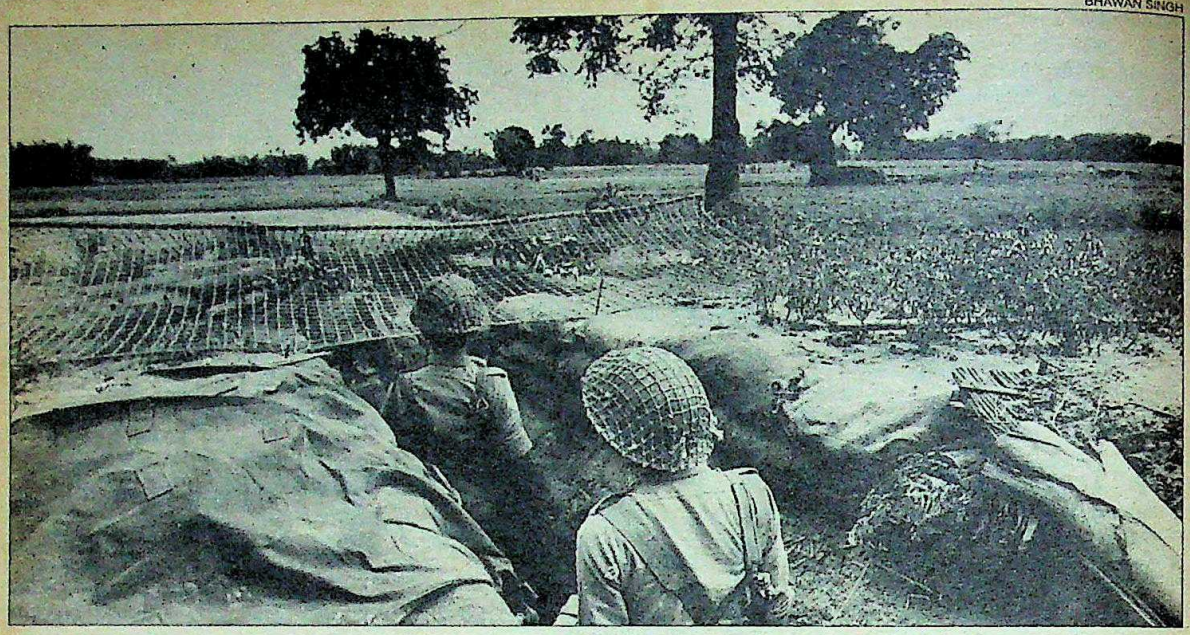
BHAWAN SINGH



BSF on Assam border: fence-sitting

daughter, related to Hiteswar Saikia at Mechagarh in Upper Assam last month, Home Minister Phukan rushed to the spot, suspended the three police officers, transferred the whole 40-man police detachment and ordered arrests. The same concern was evident in the way the Government reacted to the murder, last fortnight, of Tankeshwar Dihingia, a former Congress minister at Sibsagar *(see box)*. Said a senior official: "Each time there is an incident of violence a complaining message promptly arrives from Delhi and no one here wants to end up the way the Akalis have done." This has led to a change in approach and last fortnight, the Government even in the face of tremendous pressure from Assamese, made clear its views and from the appropriate platform. It issued front-page advertisements in newspapers appealing to all "linguistic, ethnic and religious groups" to take the state forward without any apprehensions. The new mood of mellowed conciliation finds acknowledgement even in circles not exactly sympathetic to the Government. "Frankly, the new sense of moderation has surprised me," says Hiren Gohain, professor of English at Guwahati University who was cruelly persecuted for his persistent criticism of the agitation, and adds, "there is a mood of qualified magnanimity. Having won back power that they think they had lost earlier, the Assamese leaders are now in a more satisfied and positive state of mind."

But they have to, first of all, perfect the art of governance and they cannot afford to go on perpetuating the blunder of haphazard transfers leaving the whole bureaucracy in a state of panic and suspense. Chief Secretary Mrs P.P. Trivedi, known to be a stickler for procedure and for her integrity, was turned out ungraciously, the letter of transfer was handed to her by a junior officer. Similarly B.K. Barua, appointed secretary in the Personnel Department recently was transferred to labour while he was away. Both paid the price for urging restraint.

The demoralised bureaucracy adds a dangerous dimensions to the persistent threat of communal violence and a bankrupt economy. "We are in a strange state," says Education Minister Brindaban Goswami, rueing the fact that while people in Delhi are talking of installing computers in schools only 21 per cent of the 25,970 schools have a blackboard. In the matriculation examinations last year, the state had a pass percentage of 18 hiked to 29 with liberal grace marks. "This has to change. There is no time for confrontation," says he.

But that wish will hardly be fulfilled easily. As days pass it will become increasingly difficult to resist pressures on implementing the accord which could mean a lot of confrontation. The only solution is hastening slowly on the accord and yet pressing on with development, a near impossibility in the realm of realpolitik.

"After all there has to be some provision for the indigenous people of Assam in their homeland."

KARTICK HAZARIKA
AASU president

"What provision does the accord have for preserving the culture and languages of tribes and backward classes?"

RANAUJ PEGU
tribal student leader

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Old Spice the mark of a man

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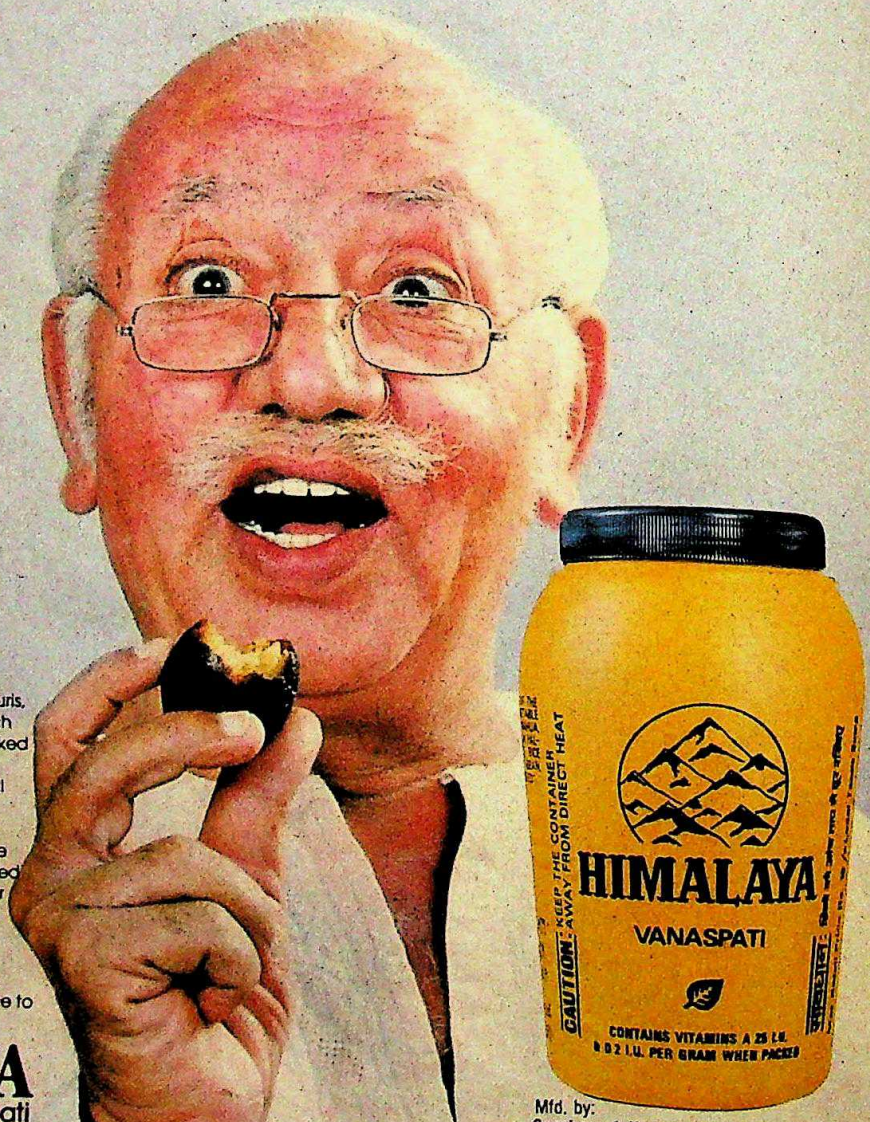
Ask your stomach what it wanted all along

Healthy food cooked in good vanaspati



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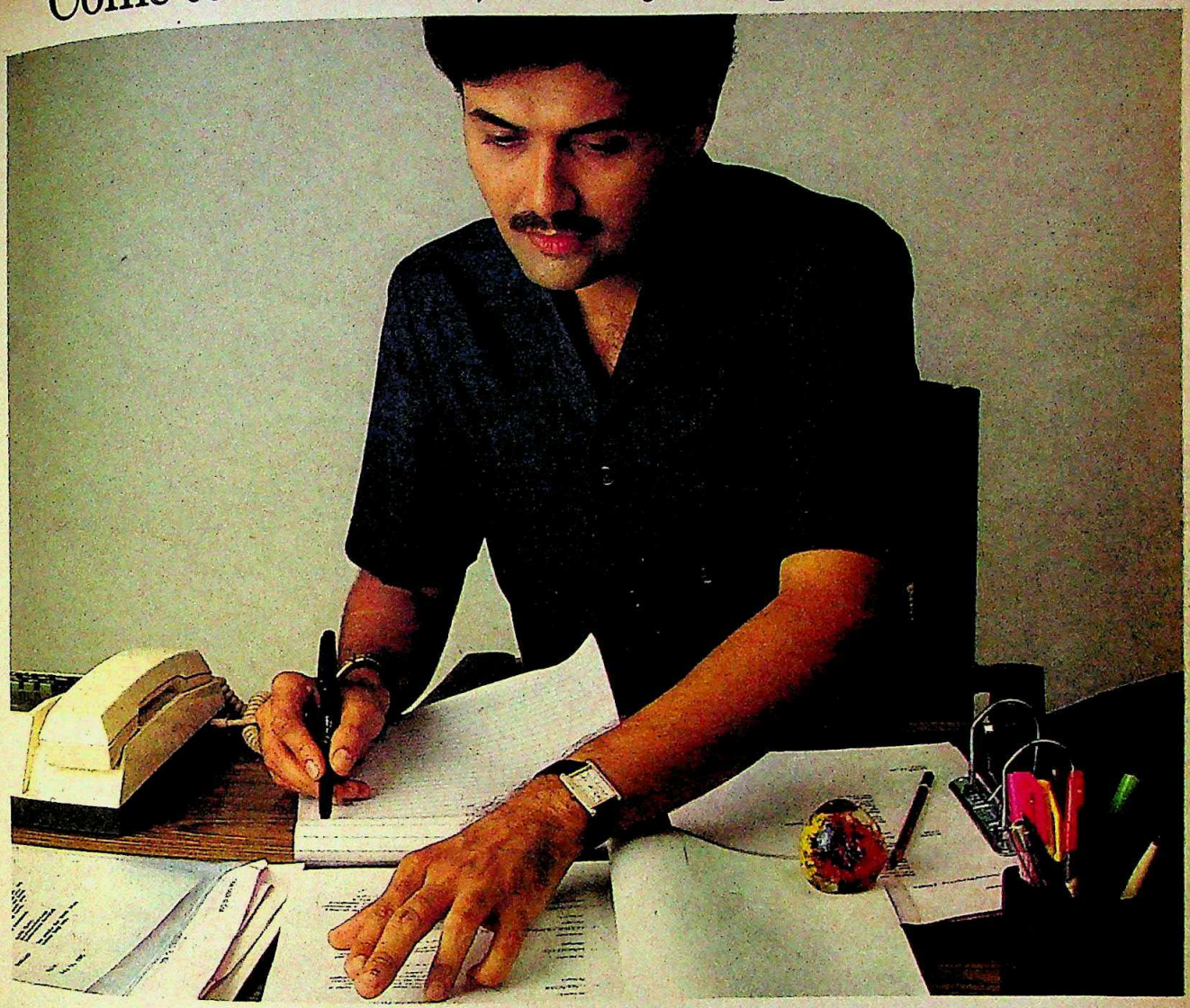
Come to think of it, it's very simple to be happy.



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ow who'd want to hurl a stone at
ich a beautiful TV! Mentally, though,
iany might.
ome of your neighbours for instance.
Who may have seen your new ONIDA.
nd envied its classy, futuristic looks, the
ost astounding true-to-life colour, and the sharpest picture they've ever seen on a TV screen! And have been deeply regretting the fact that they're stuck with colour TVs that are obviously a generation behind!

You may of course argue, your neighbours are the nicest lot. Hardly the type to stoop to violence no matter how much they envy your ONIDA TV. Well... thank heavens!

ONIDA With cordless remote

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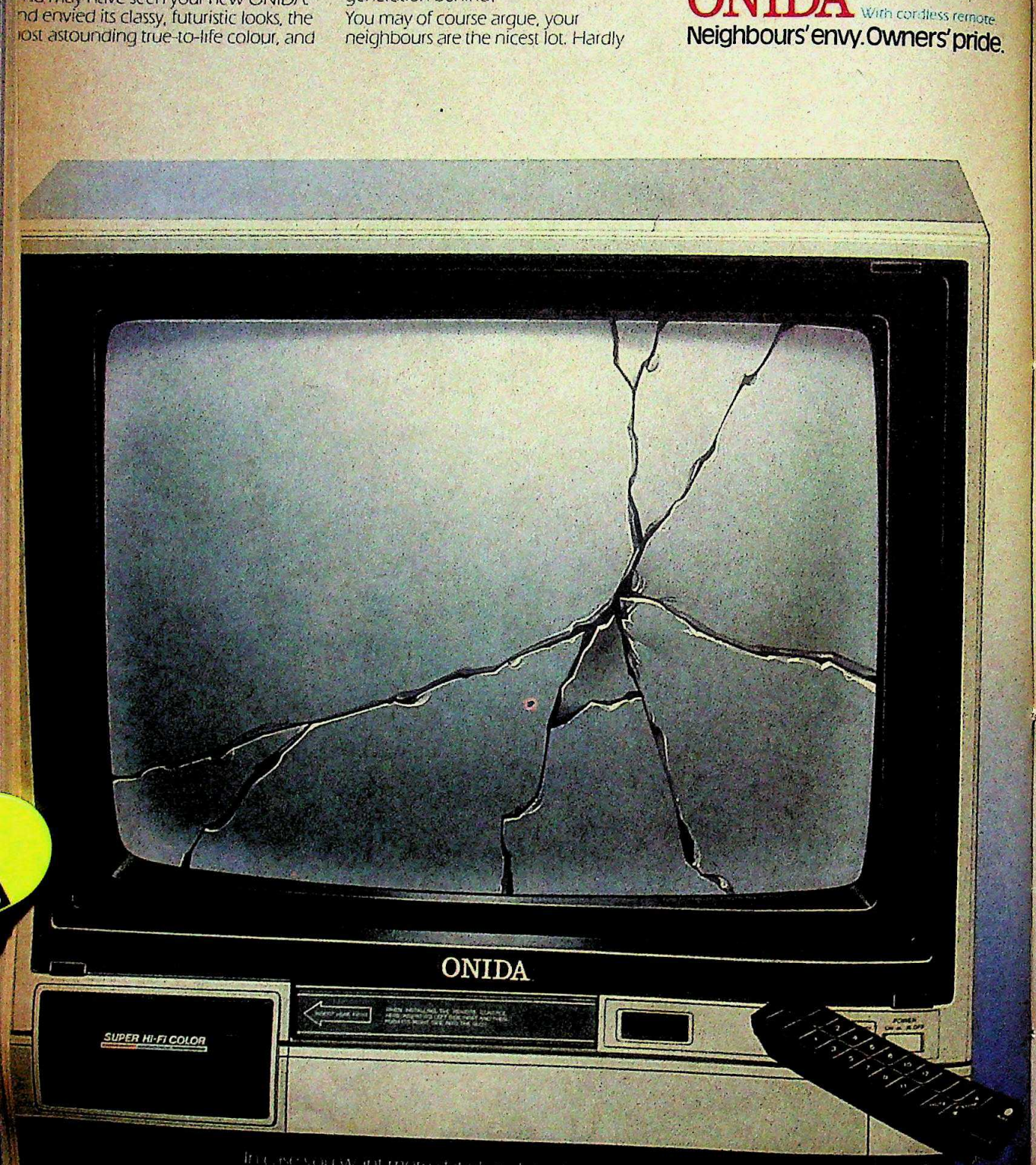

In case you want more details rush to the nearest Dealer

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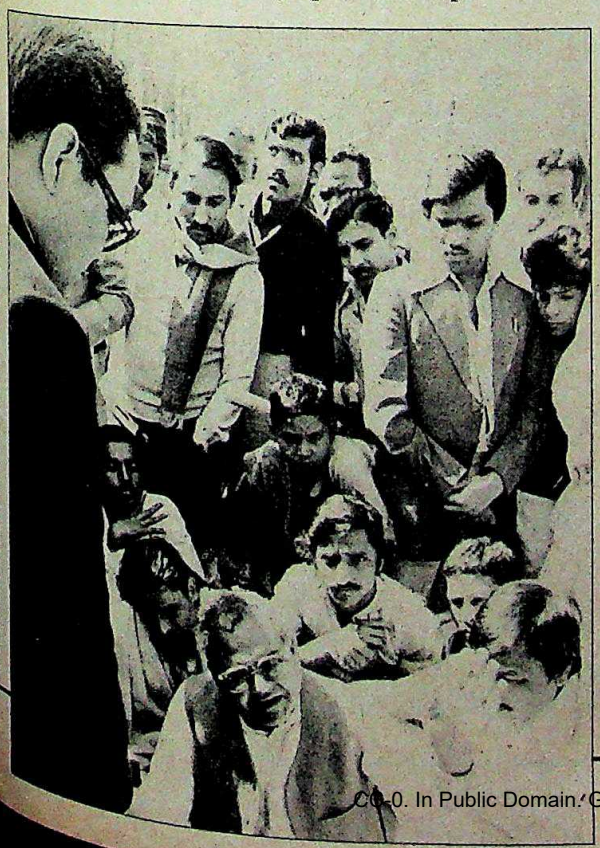
Judgement Day

CRUISING leisurely in a car down Highway No. 34 in West Bengal's Nadia district last fortnight were Calcutta High Court judges Bhagabati Prasad Bannerjee and S.K. Hazra, along with former Calcutta chief justice and sitting Congress(I) MP S.P. Mitra and municipal councillor Shiv Kumar Khanna. When suddenly, a group of men burst upon them like a hurricane, dragged them out and gave them some heavy-handed slaps and cuffs. The assailants were Congress(I) rebels and they wanted to know why Priya Ranjan Das Munshi was made the PCC(I) chief and Siddhartha Shankar Ray nominated for the Bolpur parliamentary seat. Luckily, some BSF jawans from a nearby camp heard the din and rushed to their rescue. As the judges got back into the car, they vowed never to travel with Congressmen again.

Curfew Chaos

THE POLICE too are human after all and to break the tedium of a monotonous curfew, they must have a little diversion now and then. So when Congress(I) MLA Rajni Kant Datta and some others, touched by the hunger of poor children confined by the curfew in Varanasi last fortnight, ventured outdoors and started doling out milk to them, the police acted promptly. Datta had violated the curfew, they said, and showering him with the choicest slaps and abuses, dragged him off to the police station. Of course, they didn't know then that he was an MLA. They came to know that only when Datta sat on a dharna and sparked off an outcry, as both Hindus and Muslims forgot Ram Janmabhoomi and Babri Masjid for a while and protested against the manhandling of the MLA, who is popular among both. Eventually the cops had to pay for it dearly: one of them was even suspended. And the Muslims and Hindus went back to arguing that Ram Janmabhoomi was in fact Babri Masjid and vice versa.

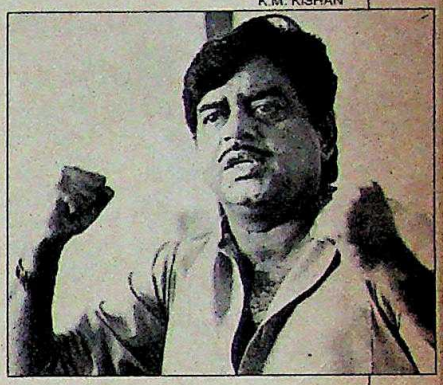
Datta on dharna with sympathisers: slap-stick



Star Struck

IT IS obviously the call of the soil that makes him return to his native Bihar from the tinsel world ever so often. But poor Shatrughan Sinha always goes back disillusioned. And one can't blame him for it. Ever since he made known his desire to join politics, there have been certain forces at work back home that make him want to regret it. And the villain of the piece, as Sinha has come to discover, is none other than the Bindeshwari Dubey Government itself. So that if the star wants to have a Shatrughan Sinha Nite in Patna, it is cancelled at the last minute. If he wants to open a charitable hospital, he finds the project ensnared by red tape. And if he arrives in Ranchi to inaugurate a homoeopathic conference—as he did last fortnight—he finds none of the usual security around. What is more, inquries reveal that the arrangements had to be withdrawn at the last minute on orders from Patna. Sinha has now written a letter to the prime minister complaining against the harassment.

K.M. KISHAN



Sinha: formidable foe

Bald Facts

IT'S NOT only deserted streets that puts our cops off. Sometimes, street-walkers do too. At a certain street corner in Vijayawada last fortnight, there were these four floozies who were slinking around and giving the come-hither to everyone who passed by. And the cops didn't like it one bit. So like true upholders of the law, they decided to dispense some instant justice: they fined them Rs 30 each, took them to the nearest police station, and called in a barber. And lo and behold, before you could say N.T. Rama Rao, those flowing tresses fell prey to the merciless snip and scrape of scissors and razor. The sight of the bald pates must have made the cops feel that they had done their good deed for the day. But the Government has its own ideas on such constabulary zeal and so it was not long before the Additional Superintendent of Police of Vijayawada urban district, Prabhakar Rao, and Sub-Inspector Rajasimha Reddy were suspended. Even though an embarrassed chief minister announced a compensation of Rs 2,000 each for the "inhuman treatment meted out to my sisters", the women have now taken the case to court. The cops, of course, don't know which way to look now.

One of the shaven-headed victims: ordeal by razor

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INFLATION

Paying t

HE WAS directly in the firing line, watched by a national TV audience that ran into millions. And the questions hurled at him reflected the mood of a country up in arms over prices. But Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh was to the manner born: disarmingly apologetic about the price increases that his government had just announced, presenting the dilemmas of his office, playing the white knight when his ministerial colleagues got into trouble, talking of the need for sacrifice.

But Anuradha Kulkarni, a 48-year-old housewife in Hyderabad wasn't convinced. Indeed, she was incensed: "What is this talk of sacrifice? Does he know that most Indians don't know what is a luxury?"

Luxury or no luxury, a country that had become increasingly taken up with colour television sets, new models of cars and new kitchen gadgets is suddenly talking of the prices of wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene. And as the sacrifices are inevitably being made, the public mood has adjusted with a shock to grim reality, a reality that cuts across income brackets, sweeping whole towns and even villages spread all over India into a new and inflammatory debate.

Bhimaiah is a sentry at the Bangalore police commissioner's office. He gets Rs 700 a month, and prices have reached a level where he has to spend almost all his money on food. But even the food runs short: "Many times our family skips breakfast. When guests come, they add to the expenditure. And when they leave, we stop taking breakfast to make up. Otherwise it's impossible."

Twenty-five-year-old Deepa Dutta, a Calcutta housewife, now experiments with candles to see whether they are cheaper than kerosene lamps when the power goes off: kerosene prices have gone up, after all. And 35-year-old Syed Hasnain Imam, who manages a transport company in the city, gets irritated if a

Angry citizens protesting against price hikes in Delhi: rising frustrations

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the Price

friend 'bums' a cigarette, because a cigarette has become so expensive nowadays, and then again he wonders when he can afford to get married.

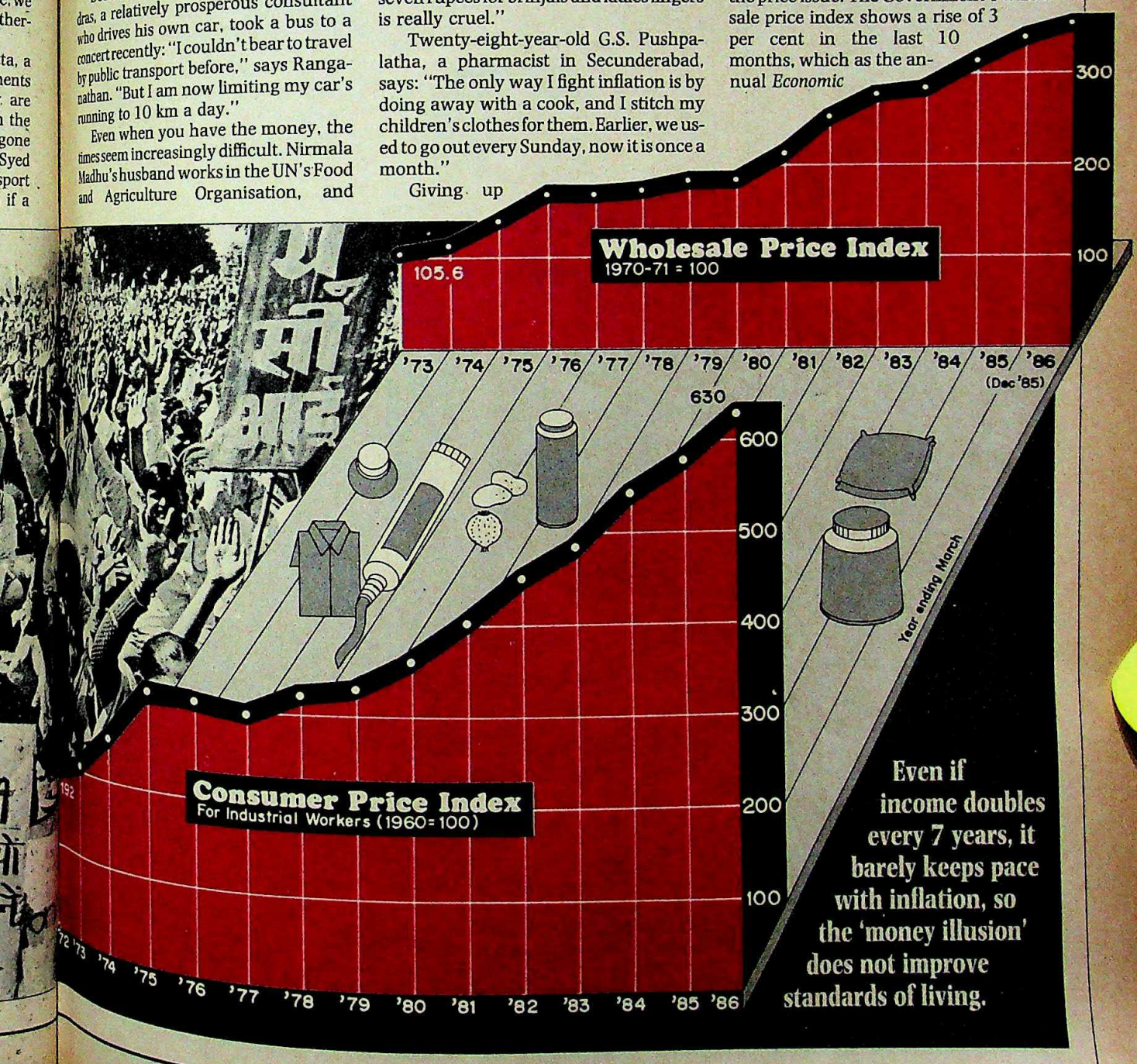
Doraiswamy Ranganathan in Madras, a relatively prosperous consultant who drives his own car, took a bus to a concert recently: "I couldn't bear to travel by public transport before," says Ranganathan. "But I am now limiting my car's running to 10 km a day."

Even when you have the money, the times seem increasingly difficult. Nirmala Madhu's husband works in the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, and should not ordinarily have to worry about prices, but she does: "Even in Bombay in the early '70s, I could run the house on Rs 600 a month. But now in Madras even Rs 3,000 doesn't seem enough. To pay six or seven rupees for brinjals and ladies fingers is really cruel."

Twenty-eight-year-old G.S. Pushpalatha, a pharmacist in Secunderabad, says: "The only way I fight inflation is by doing away with a cook, and I stitch my children's clothes for them. Earlier, we used to go out every Sunday, now it is once a month."

Giving up the use of a car, skipping breakfast, doing the family's tailoring because tailors are unaffordable: sacrifice is certainly the order of the day as the country gets swept by a price debate for the first time since onion prices decided the fate of the 1980 elections. And a government economist confessed ruefully last fortnight: "May be we had sung a lullaby to the people about a rosy future and sent them to sleep. Now they have woken up to a price nightmare."

The odd thing is that this is the unlikeliest year for a public upsurge over the price issue. The Government's wholesale price index shows a rise of 3 per cent in the last 10 months, which as the annual *Economic*



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V.P. SINGH

"One bandh costs Rs 450 crore"

NOTHING has changed the political temper of the country as dramatically as the recent announcement of price increases by the Government. Asked for the Government's defence of its case, Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh gave an exclusive interview to Senior Editor T.N. NINAN *and Assistant Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA *two days before he was to present his second budget. Excerpts:*

Q. Did you expect this public reaction to the recent round of price increases?

A. There had to be a reaction. Who likes a price increase? The reaction was expected.

Q. But did you expect such a strong reaction?

A. Yes, we did.

Q. If you had anticipated the reaction, why did you have to reduce the prices subsequently?

A. Because this was the party's advice, and we agreed to it.

Q. What do you think of the campaign that the Opposition has mounted on the issue?

A. Being the Opposition, they want to get political mileage out of it. But they won't get far. They won't get any permanent gains.

Q. So you think they will get temporary gains.

A. For a day.

Q. How badly do you think the poor are affected by the price increases?

A. Most people tell me a poor rural family buys five litres of kerosene in a month. The price has gone up by 14 paise for a litre. That makes 70 paise more every month for him.

Q. Haven't you alienated the middle class with these price increases?

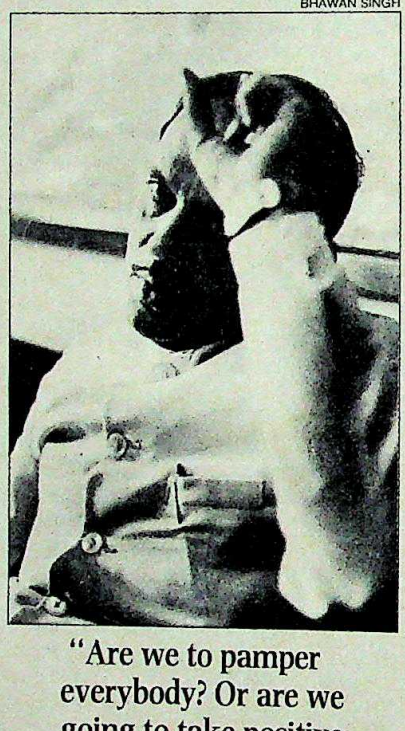
A. People will assess the Government on the totality of what it is doing for the country's progress. One bandh by the Opposition costs the economy Rs 450 crore in production; and the extra revenue we have raised from petroleum products is Rs 530 crore.

Q. What is your political strategy to meet the new situation?

A. We knew we would have to pay a price. But the question was do we try and stick to our chairs, or do we stake something when the country's progress is involved. If we had just gone by our instincts of self-preservation, we wouldn't have taken this decision. But the fact is we did.

Q. But aren't you alienating ordinary people after you have already alienated industrialists?

BHAWAN SINGH



"Are we to pamper everybody? Or are we going to take positive steps for the country's good? We can't be goody goody with everyone. If you are that timid, you can never lead the country."

A. All these questions are on the wrong track. Are we to pamper everybody? Or are we going to take positive steps for the country's good? We can't be goody goody with everyone. If you're that timid, you can never lead the country.

Q. Aren't you personally getting the flak for the pricing decision?

A. Personal flak means nothing.

Q. It could jeopardise your political career.

A. My political career has no meaning.

Q. Really? Then why are you in politics?

A. These are irrelevant issues. We never give a second thought to these things. The basic question is, was the price increase necessary?

Q. Yes, can you answer that?

A. First, this price increase is not because of the failure of the economy. The economy is in good shape. Industrial production has picked up, both railways and power are doing well, we have plenty of food stocks, and inflation is under control. Finally, we have a record buoyancy in tax revenue. So the question is, why a price increase in such a context?

People are saying that the long-term fiscal policy that we announced in December has frozen taxes, so the Government can now only resort to price increases. But they forget that this government has raised a record amount of tax. So taxes are not a limitation, and gross tax revenue during the seventh plan will total Rs 139,500 crore, as is stated in the plan document. This I can assure you.

Q. So what was the problem?

A. There are pressures and problems in three areas. One is public sector losses. Then there is the fertiliser subsidy, which has climbed 1000 per cent in the last five years, from Rs 170 crore to Rs 1,700 crore.

If food and fertiliser subsidies had gone on rising at their present trend, they would have eaten up Rs 41,000 crore during the seventh plan, and the plan provides for a total subsidy of only Rs 17,000 crore. The finance minister has to address this problem. When there are issues like this to be sorted out, why do you talk of the Opposition and this and that which are of no relevance at all.

Q. You've talked of two problem areas. What is the third?

A. The third concerns petroleum. At the end of the sixth plan, 31 per cent of our petroleum consumption was imported. We expected this import content to go to 38 per cent by the end of the seventh plan. Instead, right in the first year of the seventh plan, the import content had reached 40 per cent.

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Q. You mentioned public sector losses. Aren't these because of inefficiency?

A. The fact of the matter is that the Government is borrowing money at 7 to 10 per cent interest and investing it in the public sector, which yields 2 or 3 per cent return. So one day the system will break down. Public sector surpluses are supposed to finance 52 per cent of the annual Central plan, with 48 per cent coming from budgetary surpluses. But this year the public sector contribution is only 37 per cent.

Q. What does this mean for public sector prices?

A. People fear that administered prices may be raised any time, and that they are paying the price for public sector inefficiency. So we are coming with a policy paper on administered prices in this session of Parliament. This will lay down norms of efficiency, and prices will be pegged to these efficiency levels. So people can see the reason for the price, there will be a certain objectivity to it.

Prices will be increased only if the costs of inputs, or wages or the costs of capital go up. Because if you don't do that, the public sector will be subsidising the public sector and will one day wind up.

Q. But if you peg prices to levels of efficiency, and most of your units don't come up to those levels, most of the public sector will soon be sick.

A. The budget will then bear the burden of this inefficiency. The challenge will be to prevent this. And the prime minister is monitoring the public sector efficiency programme on a fortnightly basis with ministers. In fact, the railways and power stations have done well this year. So it can be done.

Q. What exactly is he trying to do?

A. His basic game with the economy is to convert it from a high cost economy to a low cost economy. And he has identified 10 areas where action has to be taken to achieve this: factors like economies of scale, obsolescence, tax burdens and so on.

Q. What are your personal tasks for the new financial year?

A. I have placed a five-point card on my table, these points are my main tasks for the next year: balance of payments, public sector losses and administered prices, the question of subsidies vs investment, reducing the cost of administration, and customer service in banks.

Survey pointed out last fortnight is the lowest such increase in seven years. Consumer prices rose 7.5 per cent between March and November last year, but this too is normal in an economy that has got used to a 10 per cent annual price increase. Yet inflation had clearly been stoking quiet fires of discontent, and the Government was out of touch with this fact when it ignited a conflagration with petrol, diesel and cooking gas prices.

So there is little patience with the Government's price statistics. "Never mind what the Government says or what the papers say," argues 30-year-old Maruti Vishram Gurau, who works in Thane's Precision Rubber Industries. "Everything is more and more expensive day by day." And Gita, a cloth broker's wife in the Bombay suburb of Goregaon points out that a week's supply of vegetables that used to cost Rs 6 now costs Rs 15. "Who can believe the figures the Government puts out about the price rise? The middle class is being crushed out of existence."

RANGANATH Nadkarni, a 50-year-old administrative officer in Bennet Coleman in Bombay, is even more blunt about the Government statistics. "They lie," he says bitterly. "I have not been able to save anything for the last three or four years, and I have to raise the money for a flat that I have booked in Andheri."

Deepak Nagoorkar, a 28-year-old office assistant with a pharmaceutical firm that pays him Rs 1,150 every month in Hyderabad, has reduced his monthly purchase of cooking oil because he can't save on things like rent and milk. Sharad Rajadhyaksha, a 50-year-old head clerk in the Western Railway in Bombay, says he has similarly reduced his family's consumption of rice by 25 per cent, and eight years from his retirement has a grand total of Rs 2,000 in the bank as his life's savings.

Inevitably, blood pressures and the daily frustrations involved in making ends meet now match the spiralling price curve. And a suddenly rejuvenated Opposition called for an all-India bandh last fortnight to protest against the Government's latest round of price increases in wheat, rice, sugar, fertiliser, coal, petrol, diesel, kerosene, cooking gas, and their downstream effects on auto-rickshaw fares, meat, vegetables, milk and anything else you can lay your hands on, if you can afford it.

Delhi citizens can't recall the last successful bandh in protest against prices, but the one in February saw all the shops shut, and angry commuters smashing the windscreens of public buses. And in Patna, opposition leaders have forgotten bitter differences to come together and talk of an agitation like the one led by Jayaprakash Narayan more than a decade ago, since that too had been sparked off by a sudden spurt in prices.

So despite the boom in consumer goods, the euphoria on the stock-market and the rise of the middle class, and despite even the continuing scenes of expensive shops and restaurants chock full of people, the public mood has changed. A rattled government has quickly rewritten its political agenda, and the 21st century is light years away from today's battle for survival.

G. SAMPATH KUMAR

"What is this talk of sacrifice? Does V.P. Singh know that most Indians don't know what is a luxury."

ANURADHA KULKARNI
housewife, Hyderabad

A member of the Cabinet told INDIA TODAY last month: "The Rs 500 crore that we have collected from petroleum products is (politically) the most expensive Rs 500 crore that any government has ever

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PRICE RISE

The Reason Why

WHY DO prices rise? There are more explanations than answers, more answers than solutions and more solutions than success stories on the anti-inflation front.

At one level, prices rise because someone somewhere decides that he can afford to charge more and still find buyers for his product—as the oil producers did in 1973 and then again in 1979-80.

At another level, governments need money and levy taxes to raise it—if the taxes are on goods, the producers of these goods pass the extra burden on to the consumers. Thus three-quarters of the price of a cigarette goes to the government as tax.

Inflation also results when governments try to spend more money than they have by printing extra currency notes. When more money chases the same quantity of goods, prices inevitably rise, as anyone who has been to an auction will testify.

There are domestic counterparts to the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (tyre manufacturers always seem to raise their prices at the same time) and red banner counterparts to cigar-chewing tycoons. Trade unions, for example, use their bargaining power to wrest higher wages for their members and companies will pass these higher costs on to customers.

Sometimes, inflation is imported into an economy because the price of goods it buys from other countries has gone up. Sugar prices on the international market, for instance, have skyrocketed very often.

Most causes of inflation fall into two categories—'demand pull' and 'cost push'. The first is when increased demand for something encourages producers to push up prices. The second is when costs rise (as in the case of wages or power rates), so that these are passed on by downstream users. Economists tend to agree that the first kind of inflation is easier to control than the second.

One man's cost is another man's income—if sugar costs more, the sugarcane grower gets a higher price for his produce. Thus, inflation always redistributes money within the economy. Usually however, the poor tend to get the worst of this bargain and the increases in dearness allowances are never enough.

Higher costs can be neutralised through improved efficiency. It is often argued that the Indian worker is paid far less than his Japanese counterpart but the Japanese worker may produce far more in eight hours than the Indian—in an old Indian car plant, a worker produces two cars in a year; the Japanese worker produces 50. Maruti is now aiming at 25.

But the Government is keeping the worker company. It takes 15 years to complete a project for producing steel and spends Rs 3,000 crore over that period before any steel is produced—so for 15 years money has been pumped into the economy without any goods being produced and you once again have the phenomenon of more money chasing less goods.

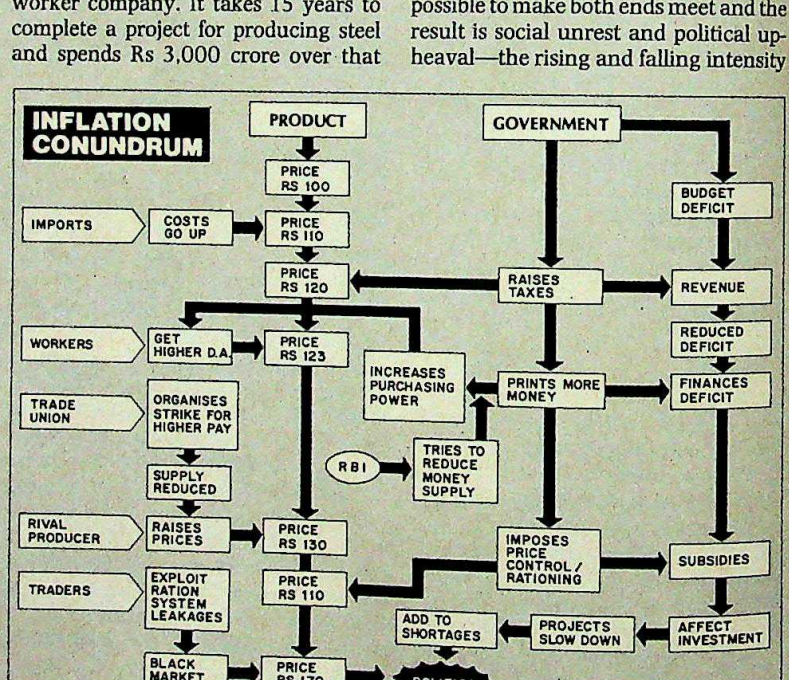
If that is demand pull inflation, poor capacity utilisation of existing factories is a surefire recipe for cost push inflation. Any power plant in the world that produces at sub-optimal capacity will have much higher overhead costs per unit of electricity generated.

Inefficiency can lead to higher costs and prices in other ways—obsolete textile machinery will have more breakdowns and more downtime when the factory and labour are idle. Yet inflation can also drive up the cost of new machinery, so that a unit is unable to modernise.

Higher costs and prices for basic commodities cause sweeping downstream effects. Fuel, transport, basic raw materials, the cost of plant and machinery—all these have in fact made the Indian economy a 'high-cost' one, frequently unable to compete with the rest of the world. This is despite devaluing the rupee from Rs 3.30 per dollar at the time of Independence in 1947 to Rs 12 today.

The worst dangers occur if prices continue to rise and accelerate. Large number of people inevitably find it impossible to make both ends meet and the result is social unrest and political upheaval—the rising and falling intensity of the Jayaprakash Narayan-led agitation in 1973-75 could be traced directly to the rise and fall of the price index and both the agitation and the index peaked in September 1974.

Persistent inflation could also erode the value of people's savings—someone who decided in the early '70s not to buy a Premier Padmini car and instead put Rs 25,000 in a bank will find today that interest accruals have increased his bank balance to Rs 60,000. At today's



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prices, that can only fetch him two-thirds of a Premier. If people lose their faith in savings, money soon becomes unavailable for investing in future development.

Nevertheless, the prices of some items always tend to go up faster than others and the two safest investment bets are real estate and gold. Land prices in most major cities have shot up 500 per cent in the last five years, while gold prices have multiplied tenfold in the last 15 years. Now, company shares have joined this duo to make for a three-pile foundation on which to build fortunes.

The Government has several tools that it can use to try and bring prices under control. If the problem is too much money chasing too few goods, the Reserve Bank can impound money with the banks and reduce purchasing power. But excessive impounding of money supply curbs economic activity and brings about a recession.

If the price rise is caused by a shortage of a particular commodity (like sugar in the recent past), imports can be arranged in order to increase supplies, tame hoarders trying to make a killing and force prices down. Pressure can also be brought to bear on open market prices through the fair price shops.

In some cases, the Government can simply reduce taxes. But these tax reductions are not always passed on—the best recent example is synthetic cloth.

The final option is straight price control, which has been tried in items like steel, cement, fertiliser and paper. But if the government-fixed price begins to go out of line with true costs, a number of results occur—either the producing companies go into the red (as has happened in steel), or the goods begin to be sold in the black market (as was the case once in cement), or companies simply find it unattractive to invest in these fields, leading to further shortages (as has happened in paper). Ultimately, the Government has to resort to imports, or subsidise losses through deficit financing, which is as inflationary. Sooner or later, the Government has to allow prices to rise to reflect their true cost and market conditions.

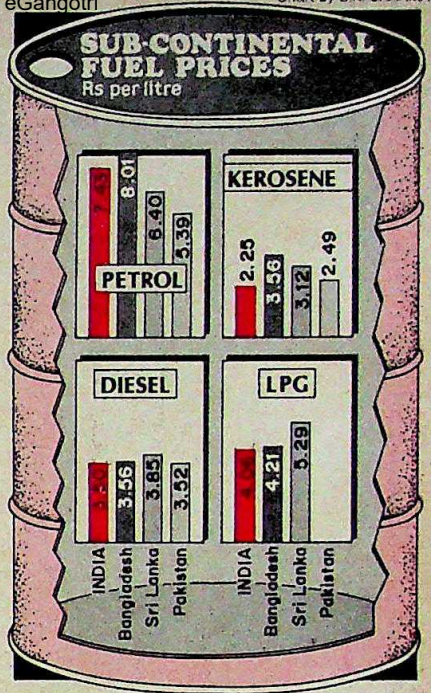
The moral of the story—market conditions and costs should be so managed as to prevent prices from going up. But governments have been trying to achieve just that since the days of Chanakya, usually without success.

—T.N. NINAN

collected. As if to make up for that, the Government was in the last rushed days before the budget struggling to cobble together a new policy package that will keep the prices of basic commodities under control, if not actually reduce them. All this bears one simple message: if the 21st century—and liberal policies aimed at getting to the end of this century's rainbow—dominated economic debate last year, what people like Bhimaiah want now is not the pot of gold at the end of that rainbow but a pot on the hearth with enough to eat in it.

Perhaps it was the accumulated problems of past price increases that made the latest round the last straw. Inflation has, after all, been accelerating steadily over the years: from next to nothing in the 1950s to a sudden burst in the mid-1960s and then further bursts in 1973-74 and 1979-80.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



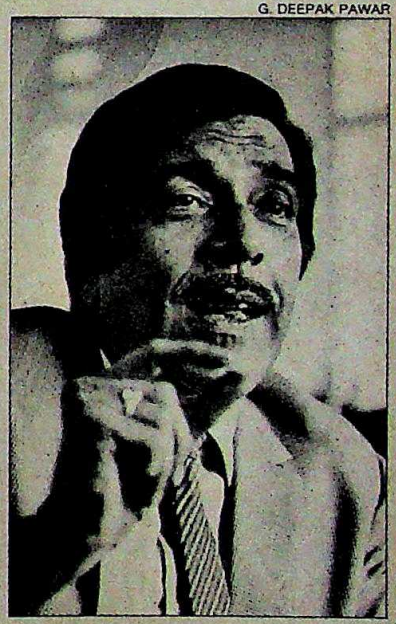
EACH fresh burst has squeezed major sections of the population further, and the anger had been building up as the mounting sums of cash had become increasingly meaningless (a middle class salary 20 years ago can be spent today in 10 minutes at the grocer's). Rising expectations had only led to rising frustrations. Ninety-three-year-old Jibantara Haldar, once a freedom fighter, recalls that he could buy 40 kg of rice in his youth for a rupee, and wishes that "young people would protest against what's going on."

But the problem goes beyond Anger, Bandhs and Consumer Dissatisfaction (the ABCD, if you will, of today's political turnabout). It even goes beyond the dearness allowance. For while wages have risen quite sharply over the years, they have invariably failed to keep pace with prices. A probationary officer joining the State Bank of India in 1974 would have got Rs 850 on his first pay cheque. A probationer today will get around Rs 2,000: an increase of under 150 per cent when inflation has shot up over 200 per cent.

Similarly, an officer in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) who got promoted to the senior scale in the mid-1960s would have taken home Rs 750 then. Today, the pay at that level is under Rs 3,000. That seems like a lot of money, because it is after all a fourfold jump. But prices have risen sixfold in the same period.

Pensioners would have been the worst off, with no relief of any sort against inflation, if it hadn't been for a landmark legal battle fought by H.D. Shourie and his Delhi-based action forum, Common

G. DEEPAK PAWAR



"Will you raise fertiliser prices just when farmers have started using it in large enough quantities to usher in a second green revolution?"

YOGENDRA ALAGH
chairman, Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices, New Delhi

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GOVERNMENT PRICE INDEX

Masking Inflation

THEY are the most controversial numbers going in government: two official committees have recommended major changes in how they are to be calculated, and the Government has dithered for years over revising them. Last fortnight, however, officialdom finally sprang a surprise. Finance Secretary S. Venkitaraman told journalists that a new retail price index that better reflects inflation was under consideration.

Certainly, a more accurate price index is long overdue. The Government has four indices but they are either vastly outdated or have serious shortcomings. Even the most recent one, the wholesale price index whose base year is 1970-71, is over 14 years old. The other three consumer price indices are even more creaky and ancient—going back a good 25 years.

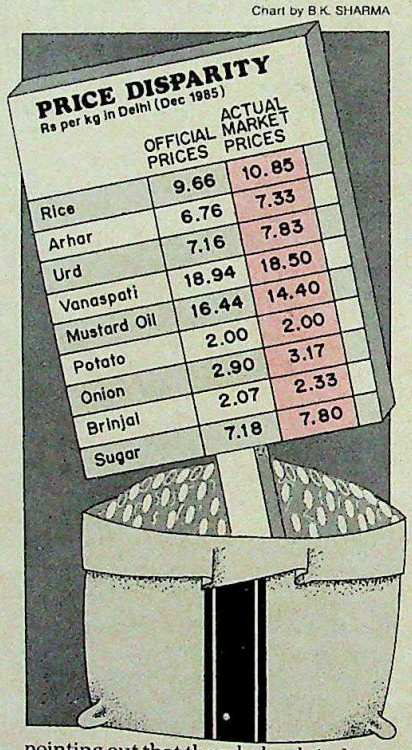
The result of this has been predictable—price surges are understated. At the retail level, for example, the difference between prices reported to the Government last December, the latest available, and *Indian Express* averages for the month range from around 8 to 21 per cent for some items (*see chart*). Senior government statisticians insist that any discrepancies are purely the offshoot of index limitations. "Large-scale fiddles with the figures is just not possible," claims one functionary who did not want to be identified.

A consumer index is based on a selected basket of goods families buy in a given year, each item being given a "weight" in proportion to the expenditure on it. But consumers now buy goods that were not available years ago, and changes in consumption patterns mean they are buying less of what they bought earlier. Apart from the indices being unrepresentative, this implies that the weightage or the relative importance of each item in the index has become outdated, leading to distortions in the total index to that extent.

Many statisticians believe that the Government doesn't help when it uses the wholesale index to measure inflation: a consumer index would be more appropriate. R.S. Deshpande, former member-secretary to two official committees set up to review index numbers, notes that the Government uses the wholesale index to measure the rate of inflation, but the consumer index measures the cost of the common man's basket better. In fact, throughout the world, the latter is used to review inflation rates.

The Government answers this by pointing out that the wholesale index is issued weekly, while the commonly cited consumer index for industrial workers comes with a time lag of some seven weeks. Then, the wholesale index is more representative than the industrial workers' price index; the former covers both urban and industrial markets, while the latter represents hardly six million workers.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



	OFFICIAL PRICES	ACTUAL MARKET PRICES
Rice	9.66	10.85
Arhar	6.76	7.33
Urd	7.16	7.83
Vanaspati	18.94	18.50
Mustard Oil	16.44	14.40
Potato	2.00	2.00
Onion	2.90	3.17
Brinjal	2.07	2.33
Sugar	7.18	7.80

This is true enough, but the advantages may be outweighed by its drawbacks. The index's basket of 360 goods was fixed years ago, and does not account for more recent manufactures (man-made fibres, electronic items and so on). Black market rates are overlooked, manufacturers' price quotations which go into the index exclude sales tax, and H.L. Chandok who has written a book on wholesale price statistics reckons that this could contribute 7 per cent to the chasm between the official index and prevailing market rates.

Finally, the unrealistic manner in which weightage is given to some commodities tends to depress the index. The weight for sugar, for example, is based on the Government's statutory minimum sugarcane price whereas sugar factories may actually shell out more than this for cane. This is largely excluded from calculations.

Few really know the exact impact of all this on the index figures, and even fewer will hazard a guess. But most agree that the statistics understate actual price increases. This is equally applicable to the consumer price index for industrial workers. The index is important because dearness allowance payments are hitched to its swings (for every one point rise in the index, the Government shells out about Rs 70 crore to its employees).

But the index is questioned on many grounds. Some of these are common to the wholesale index, but the undue weightage given to ration shop purchases comes under fire. The industrial workers' index assumes that cardholders pick up the full quota of goods they are entitled to from ration shops, but many often shop on the open market. The index does not fix a smaller weight for the cheaper fair price shop purchases and a heavier one for more expensive items bought on the open market. An official committee had backed this but the Government has sat on the committee's report for two years.

Such delays are not uncommon. Price indices are supposed to be revised every decade, but an Industry Ministry working group set up almost four years ago to update the 1970-71 wholesale index will submit its report only by year-end. And the consumer indices of 1960 should have been set right years ago. Government officials explain the delay only partially by saying that data collection and tabulation take time, and that the delays themselves led to an official decision to opt for a more recent base year. Updated consumer indices may be out this year finally, but officials aren't too sanguine about their being able to still the popular criticism.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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cause, which got the Supreme Court to force the Government to give pensioners something approaching a fair deal. Nevertheless, a government officer who retired a decade back will today have doubled his pension while prices have trebled. As for high court or Supreme Court judges, or secretaries in government departments, earnings have shown very little increases even in nominal terms: a top-rung Indian Civil Service officer back in 1947 made virtually as much money as an IAS secretary does today, although prices have probably risen tenfold and more. Whichever fixed income group is involved, the squeeze is relentlessly there,

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

SOARING PRICES

Retail prices (in Rupees) in Delhi

	1969	NOW
WHEAT (kg)	1.05	2.90
RICE (kg)	1.67	4.00
CAL MOONG (kg)	3.30	7.00
SUGAR (kg)	2.79	7.00
MILK (litre)	1.40	4.50
VANASPATI (kg)	5.76	18.50
TEA (500 gms)	9.80	22.45
SOAP CAKE	0.68	3.00
TOOTHPASTE (100 gms)	3.40	6.90
POPLIN SHIRTING (metre)	4.50	15.00
BANANA (dozen)	1.35	5.00
GOLD (10 gms)	185.00	2130.00
SILVER (kg)	472.00	3933.00

and shows very little signs of letting up.

Inevitably, inflation has changed social values, affected life-styles and dictated new norms for the ideal family: like a double salary, for instance, since no one salary ever seems enough. Where the wife doesn't work, it has increasingly forced the breadwinner to make extra money on the side: all the cobblers' shops between Alwal and Bolarum in Secunderabad cantonment are run by cooks in the local army canteens, senior government officers in New Delhi rent out their servants' quarters for up to Rs 500 a month, and in the Western Railway headquarters in Bombay's Churchgate, the cupboards that should be full of files are often stacked with smuggled cloth that the babus sell to colleagues and their families and friends.

In the private sector, where director-level salaries have been frozen for the last decade-and-a-half, tax lawyer O.P. Vaish says it is common practice to negotiate twin pay packets: one declared and the other not. And a manager in a tea company in Calcutta complained bitterly last fortnight that his company, unlike all the others, did not hand out cash in brown envelopes every month to senior executives.

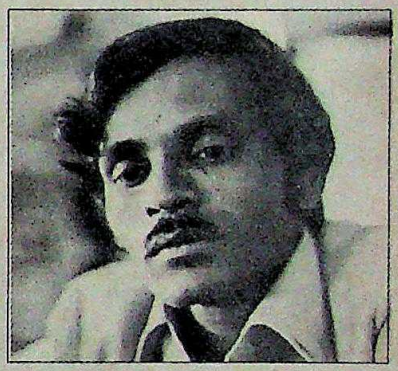
MOST of the time, what people need are not brown envelopes stashed with unaccounted money but plain inflation indexing, so that their real wages remain unaffected by inflation. And when they don't get that, moonlighting becomes the order of the day, because there seems no other way to make ends meet. Gurau of Precision Rubber in Thane works as a part-time dispenser at a doctor's for Rs 250 a month, and S.A. Kashikar, a 53-year-old clerk at Killick Nixon in Bombay, takes tuition and does other people's accounts so that he can send his three sons to college. When it isn't moonlighting, of course, it could be straight corruption, or featherbedding. An officer in the Planning Commission dismissed the effect of the latest price increases and said the commission's clerks would simply up their overtime bills.

If prices have played havoc with people, they have done worse to companies and the economy as a whole. "My electricity tariff has gone up from 53 paise per unit to Rs 1.07 in the last one year," complains an industrialist in Delhi. "But if I raise my product prices, my customers complain." Newspapers have been hit even worse by sharp increases in the prices of newsprint: the Re 1 newspaper is already a reality, and one of the country's largest publishers said last fortnight that the price of one of his newspapers might soon be Rs 2. In 1959, you could get a whole month's reading of the Marathi daily *Navshakti* for less than that.

Steel is a third example. There was a time when Indian steel was among the cheapest in the world. Yet, as a newspaper editorial pointed out last month, Japanese steel today is 30 per cent cheaper than India's, and the downstream engineering industry is crying foul. "How can we compete in world markets if our raw materials cost so much?" asked a spokesman of the Association of Indian Engineering Industry (AIEI).

This list could go on, and it is now a hard fact of life that the Indian economy has become a 'high cost' one: the Government subsidises both food and fertiliser by close to Rs 4,000 crore a year, yet the 29 million tonnes of foodgrain stockpiled with the Government can't be exported because India's costs are too high and exports will be at a loss: US wheat is cheaper. And inflation has taken the prices of machinery so high that hundreds of companies have simply been unable to afford the replacement costs involved in modernisation. The result: a wide swathe of industries across the country are stuck with dated technology and therefore plain inefficient, or obsolete and 'sick'—tex-

NAMAS BHOJANI



"Never mind what the Government says or what the papers say. Everything is more and more expensive day by day."

MARUTI VISHRAM GURAU
Worker, Precision Rubber Industries, Thane

tiles, engineering, jute, sugar, steel.

Industrial sickness, high cost production, profit levels: these are complex issues involving a host of factors, and simplistic statements on prices can ignore the other factors at work. In some cases, rapacious businessmen have simply milked their companies dry. In others, the plants in India are so small that economies of scale are ruled out and their costs automatically rise to levels well above international standards. And protection against imports through customs duties has meant, for instance, that the prices of many petro-chemical products in India are twice or three times the levels abroad.

Plain efficiency is another factor: a 1 per cent increase in the capacity utilisation of power plants can prevent the need

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K.M. KISHAN

"It seems the Government does not want us to live with dignity. Am I expected to change my life-style overnight?"

MADHU KUMARI
Housewife, Patna

for investing Rs 500 crore in fresh capacity; and a 1 per cent saving on power losses in transmission can save another Rs 450 crore. Against this, consider the 33 per cent capacity utilisation achieved by the Bihar State Electricity Board, when the National Thermal Power Corporation does twice that.

Where the Government has tried to keep prices under control by refusing to allow higher returns, or stuck to archaic tax laws on depreciation, the result has been the same: companies have simply not been able to raise the money required to stay abreast of the game. Yogendra Alagh, chairman of the Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices (BICP), says bluntly: "Many prices that the Government fixed simply ignored the cost of modernisation and replacement. Our old steel plants are still running, but they are absolute energy guzzlers."

But the uproar over prices has at least woken the Government up to the larger problem of costs. And Union Finance Minister V.P. Singh said last week (*see interview*) that Rajiv Gandhi himself was personally monitoring every fortnight a programme aimed at reducing costs across the board in the economy, and raising the efficiency levels in the public sector. But success cannot be easy when the problems are endemic. And as Alagh asked: "Will you raise fertiliser prices just when farmers in eastern Uttar Pradesh have started using it in large enough quantities to usher in a second green revolution?"

Some solutions are easier, like lowering taxes on products that are so hopelessly over-taxed that they price products out of people's reach. Three-quarters of the price of a cigarette is tax, so is half the price of a biscuit. And a committee of experts concluded some time ago that 84 per cent of the price of a ready-made shirt was accounted for by tax. Five years ago, the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy discovered at the end of a study that fully one-third of the spending done by a man who earns Rs 500 a month goes to the Government as taxes in one form or another. If V.P. Singh has addressed himself to some of the problems on the direct taxes front, he can certainly look at areas where indirect taxes are accountable for inflation.

MEANWHILE, other issues might be even more difficult to solve: like the increasing scarcity of natural resources. Paper companies today get charged wood royalty rates that are a

HOUSEHOLD BUDGETS

Squeezed

NOTHING sets off grandmother's tales of the good ol' days as easily as prices. Understandably so. For consider the facts:

In 1938, Mrs M.A. Phillips used to run the Aurora Guest House on Cunningham Road in Bangalore. She was a meticulous woman and kept a detailed diary of the daily expenses incurred on feeding her family and a few boarders: some 10 people in all. The good lady died in 1970, but her diary tells its tale even today. And in 1938, using just one rupee, she bought beef, green gram, flowers, plantains, vegetables, chicken and coconuts, plus dog's rice, straw and grass for animals, and 'fowl food'. If she were alive today, it would have cost her that rupee to take a bus to the market.

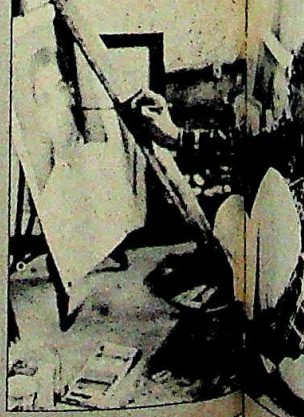
Six years later in Jaipur, 24-year-old schoolteacher Brahmanand Sharma used to get a take-home pay of Rs 27, and make another Rs 20-plus by giving tuitions. Of a total monthly income of Rs 50, he used to save anything between Rs 10 and Rs 15: up to 30 per cent of his earnings. A decade later, in 1954, inflation had begun to take its toll. For Sharma's accounts show that his monthly expenses for a joint family of seven in August that year were Rs 89: two-and-a-half times what they were a decade earlier.

But in Bombay in 1963, the picture was not much different from Sharma's nine years earlier. Thirty-seven-year-old Dalim Shanker Patil in Bombay bought her monthly grocery needs for Rs 76.55: 4 kg of vanaspati, 20 kg of sugar, 6 kg of 'sweet cooking oil', 500 grammes of coconut oil, 2 kg of jaggery, two bars of soap, one box of *hing*, 6 kg of toor dal, 2 kg of chana dal, 225 grammes of coffee, half a kilogramme each of dry beans, masoor and gram, one packet of laundry whitener, 10 kg of wheat and half a kilogramme of peas.

Today the same shopping basket for the shy, quiet Patil would cost at least Rs 500. "Even in 1973, prices weren't as frightening as they are now. I still think of those happy days in the '40s, '50s and '60s. Salaries weren't what they are now, but you could get a full meal at a

Patil, Sharma and Singh: Victims of an uneconomic equation

NAMAS BHOJANI



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hundred times the levels that prevailed three decades ago because wood is disappearing. Hydel power has always been considered cheap and very economical, but as dams have to be constructed in steadily remoter and inaccessible areas, and as deforestation reduces the life of these dams, the real costs of hydel power are steadily rising too.

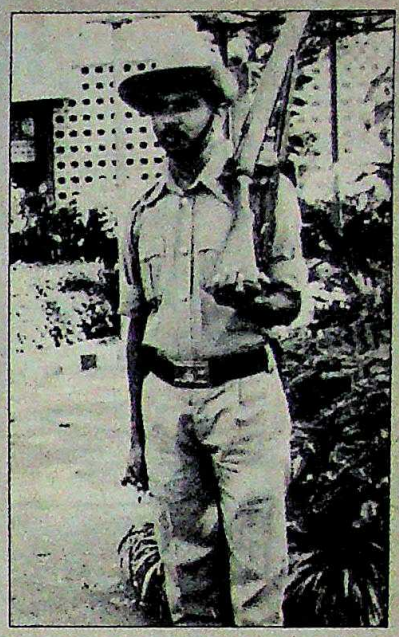
Ultimately, it all boils down to greater burdens on ordinary people. Shivajee Singh, a 60-year-old retired inspector-general of police in Bihar, said that the moment his wife heard about the new price of cooking gas, she "started shouting and virtually turned mad with anger. I didn't know how to face her. They say they are raising resources, but resources for whom and for what?"

On a longer-term basis, there was a time when a lecturer in Delhi University could afford to live a life of satisfactory comfort. But Biswamoy Pati, a lecturer in a New Delhi college, confesses that the recent book fair in the capital was the first one when he couldn't afford to buy a book. And he recounts angrily the fate of a colleague with a wife and child who has to rent the two upstairs rooms in a duplex flat, giving up virtually all privacy because he can reach his rooms only through the landlord's main drawing-room downstairs. The fact is he just cannot afford a better place to stay in, rents being what they are.

Alienation and bitterness are inevitable, leading to such statements as the Patna housewife Madhu Kumari's: "It seems the Government does not want us to live with dignity. Am I expected to change my life-style overnight?" And Kameshwar Choudhary, the 57-year-old principal of a rural college in Madhubani district, said: "This Government is forcing everyone to become corrupt. Otherwise, how can one survive?"

Neither Pati, nor Madhu Kumari nor Choudhary can be in a mood to think just now of the 21st century, let alone wonder what prices will be like in the 21st century. It isn't a thought that would have worried too many people through all the talk in 1985 of the millenium round the corner. And today, of course, the price problems are here and now, as people look for ways to cope with them, wonder what item to strike off the shopping list, fear the next hammerblow, and turn in anger, frustration and disappointment at a government that till yesterday had seemed destined to coast effortlessly all the way to the 21st century itself.

—T.N.NINAN with bureau reports



"Many times our family skips breakfast. When guests come, they add to the expense. When they leave, we stop taking breakfast to make up."

BHIMAIAH
sentry, Bangalore Police Commissioner's office

good restaurant for four annas (25 paise), and a 'Brahmachari' sari for Rs 2.50. Now the expense is killing."

At 66, the now retired Sharma ("masterji") in Jaipur paints portraits to add to his pension of Rs 368. But life is difficult: "We have had a hard life right from the beginning, but the thing about today's prices is that while everyone is buying watches and television sets, food and household items have become so expensive." And there is, of course, no question of saving 30 per cent of his income, as he used to do 42 years ago.

In New Delhi, today, 49-year-old K.P. Singh has little in common with either Patil or Sharma. Patil still lives in her old Andheri home, and Sharma has not moved out of his ancestral home in crowded old Jaipur. Singh, in contrast, has a place in the capital's exclusive Jor Bagh, a comfortable job as projects adviser in DCM, and the salary and perquisites of a senior company executive. But he too feels the pinch. In 1978, he ran his household on Rs 1,380 a month. Three years later, this had gone up to Rs 2,070. Another three years later, in 1984, the monthly household budget had more than doubled to Rs 4,550, and last year it was Rs 5,500. All this excludes his house rent, expenditure on his car and driver, and official entertainment.

In seven years, Singh has had to increase his household expenses fourfold, yet he feels his life-style has suffered. His detailed household expenditure diaries show a liberal consumption of bottled drinks, big dry cleaning budgets and frequent taxi rides by family members. But he feels the pinch, he has occasionally had to draw on the money that he makes on his farm, and says he has reduced his purchases of items like fruits: "I don't live any better today than I did before, and I have to be careful before spending some money on a week-end," he says.

Singh was born when Mrs Phillips used to run her guest-house for one rupee. Today, he finds it difficult to manage on Rs 5,500 plus house, car and driver: a total bill in excess of Rs 10,000 a month, or more than Rs 350 a day. Certainly, his tastes are more expensive than her's, but life on Cunningham Road in Bangalore was pleasant enough in the old days. So if one rupee then equals Rs 350 now, the soaring price curve is a part of the simple economic (or uneconomic) equation.

SUBHASH SHARMA

HARI OM GULATI

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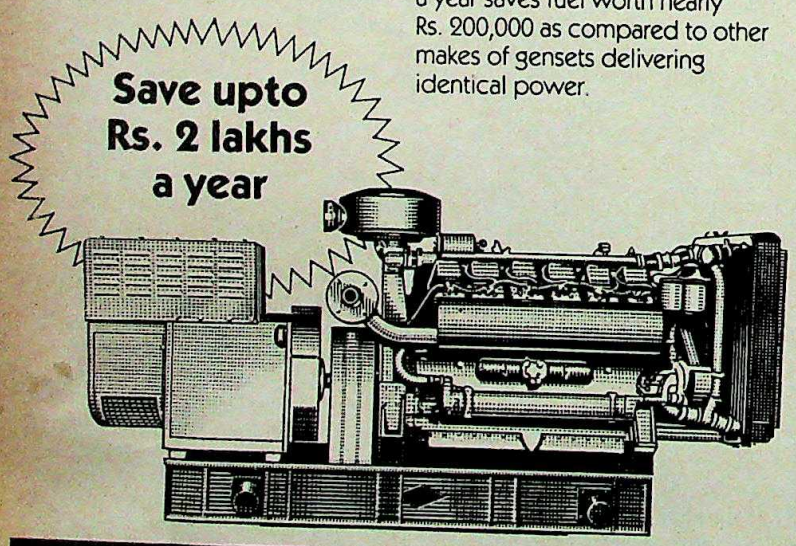

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PETRO-DOLLAR INFUSION

THE FINANCIAL problems that had engulfed the Indo-Gulf Fertilisers and Chemicals Corporation (INDIA TODAY, January 31) have been sorted out, but the Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation (SPIC), which had hoped to get a stake in the prestige project, has finally been edged out despite getting support from officials in the Finance Ministry. Senior officials of the State Bank of India are understood to have come in the way of SPIC. Instead, arrangements have been worked out for financial contributions by an Arab sheikh in Dubai so that the promised inflow of petro-dollars will in fact materialise. Earlier, the co-promoter of the project, the Dubai-based A.M. Bukhatir, had been unable to make the promised financial contributions in time, throwing the Rs 700 crore-plus project in jeopardy. But now things are expected to go smoothly.

FRIES AND SOFTWARE

WHAT is possibly the country's first major French fries plant is slated to come up in Maharashtra. In a major expansion and diversification drive, Indian Organic Chemicals is moving into French fries and computer software, and stepping up polyester filament yarn capacity at its factory in Tamil Nadu from 3,500 tonnes to 11,500 tonnes a year. The French fries project involves a collaboration with the Dutch firm Avico, one of Europe's biggest French fry companies, and an investment of Rs 5 crore in the plant. Around 2,500 tonnes of French fries a year will be turned out initially, half of which will be exported. India is the fifth largest potato producer in the world, and the company sees a huge market in Asia. The chemicals firm has also tied up with Lotus Corporation of the US on software and expects to market some 8,000 packages a year through Computer Point, the computer and software retailer. Some of the software is meant for schools.

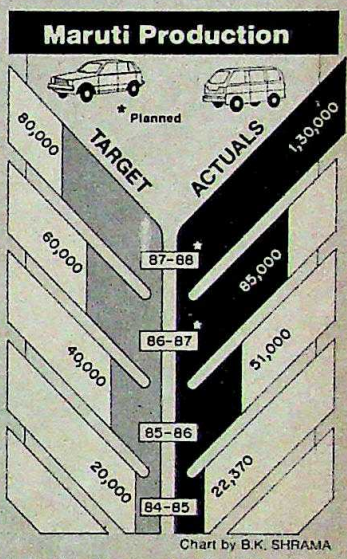
CUTTING RED TAPE

GOVERNMENT-sponsored committee set up last month has submitted a report to the Industry Ministry recommending major reductions in paperwork for small-scale units. Small firms are required by Central government laws to maintain almost 140 forms and registers, and provide often overlapping information to around 38 government inspectors at any given time. The committee has therefore proposed that fewer forms be filled and the laws be amended if necessary for this, and that units be allowed to submit certificates from chartered accountants that they are complying with legal formalities. This would also reduce the number of visits by inspectors. Finally, the committee has recommended excise exemption for units with annual turnovers of under Rs 50 lakh. Since this would include over half the 7.89 lakh small units in the country and involve a sizeable revenue loss, it remains to be seen whether the Government will oblige.

TEMPO TRENDS

THE FIRODIA-owned Bajaj Tempo group is expanding substantially into lasers, solar cells, high-tech electronics and advanced welding equipment. Jaya Hind Sciaky Ltd, an associate welding equipment company, has tied up with a Japanese collaborator on a robots project, and is talking to US and Japanese firms for the laser and solar cells venture. The total investment will be around Rs 20 crore.

MODEL PLANS



THE STATE-owned Maruti Udyog will not produce almost 7,000 vehicles from mid-March to the third week of April. In a planned shutdown during this period, Maruti Udyog's plant in Haryana will expand production capacities from 40,000 to one lakh vehicles a year, two years ahead of schedule. The company has orders in hand for almost two lakh vehicles, and so plans on producing 30,000 vehicles in excess of capacity by 1987-88 by achieving better productivity. A more expensive car model will also hit the roads (the old model is to be phased out) once the factory reopens, but it will be more streamlined, roomier, and 15 per cent more fuel-efficient.

PEGGING PRICES

THE GOVERNMENT has been so rattled by the response to recent price increases in items like petroleum products and foodgrains that it has decided on a new policy that will keep the prices of all basic goods pegged at their existing levels, if not reduced. This includes even such items as fertilisers, cement and steel. Since a number of the public sector companies producing these items are in the red and would like higher prices for their produce, the Government is now embarking on a major programme aimed at reducing costs and achieving improved efficiency.

Going still further, the Government is trying to prune its own administrative expenditure. Apart from the 5 per cent cut that already exists for non-development expenditure, the Cabinet has decided to abolish various non-productive wings of the Government, and unnecessary wings of certain departments. A move in this direction was initiated some months ago, but various ministers had been dragging their feet in taking action. Now they are being left with no choice in the matter, for their administrative outlays in the new budget are being reduced.

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Alfred Allan 3545

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SHAW WALLACE

The Mystery Unfolds

THE SHAW Wallace mystery is finally unravelling. Government agencies say they are close to establishing a link between Bangalore-based liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya and Dubai-based M.R. Chhabria in the controversial purchase of the 38.7 per cent of Shaw Wallace shares held overseas. And in the search for the conclusive piece of evidence, the Finance Ministry last fortnight asked the State Bank of India (SBI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to order separate in-depth probes into the role of SBI officials in advancing loans worth $10.3 million to the Singapore-based Tentura Pvt Ltd, managed by Vijay Mallya's United Breweries International (UBI). The loan, government officials suspect, may have been used by Mallya to partly finance the Shaw Wallace acquisition.

Mallya had told INDIA TODAY last month that the loan had nothing to do with the Shaw Wallace deal, and that he himself had not participated in the share transfer. But the Government decided to launch investigations into the loan soon after the Enforcement Directorate informed the Finance Ministry that it felt SBI's loan may have in fact been used by Mallya for the Shaw Wallace acquisition.

The 38.7 per cent overseas shareholding of Shaw Wallace changed hands in January last year for $26.4 million, and Chhabria had subsequently claimed that he was the new owner of the overseas shares. But newspaper reports had persistently linked Mallya with the deal.

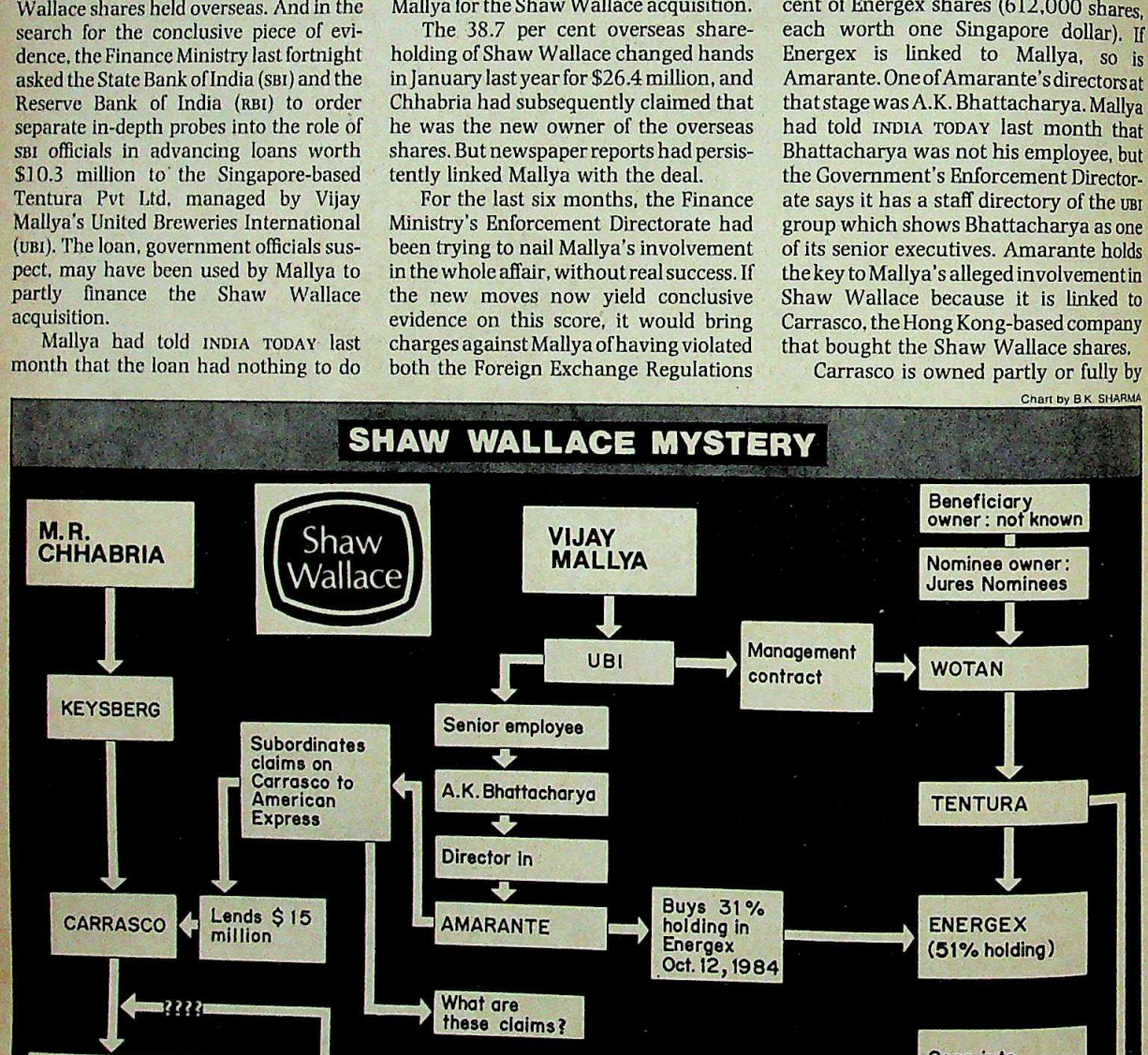
For the last six months, the Finance Ministry's Enforcement Directorate had been trying to nail Mallya's involvement in the whole affair, without real success. If the new moves now yield conclusive evidence on this score, it would bring charges against Mallya of having violated both the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA) and the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act.

The new evidence hinges on the existence of a hitherto unknown company based in Singapore, called Energex Pvt Ltd. Fifty-one per cent of Energex shares are owned by none other than Tentura, the Mallya-managed firm that got the SBI loan in late November 1984, at which point the Shaw Wallace shares were up for grabs.

On October 12, 1984, the Hong Kong-based Amarante Company bought 30 per cent of Energex shares (612,000 shares, each worth one Singapore dollar). If Energex is linked to Mallya, so is Amarante. One of Amarante's directors at that stage was A.K. Bhattacharya. Mallya had told INDIA TODAY last month that Bhattacharya was not his employee, but the Government's Enforcement Directorate says it has a staff directory of the UBI group which shows Bhattacharya as one of its senior executives. Amarante holds the key to Mallya's alleged involvement in Shaw Wallace because it is linked to Carrasco, the Hong Kong-based company that bought the Shaw Wallace shares.

Carrasco is owned partly or fully by

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



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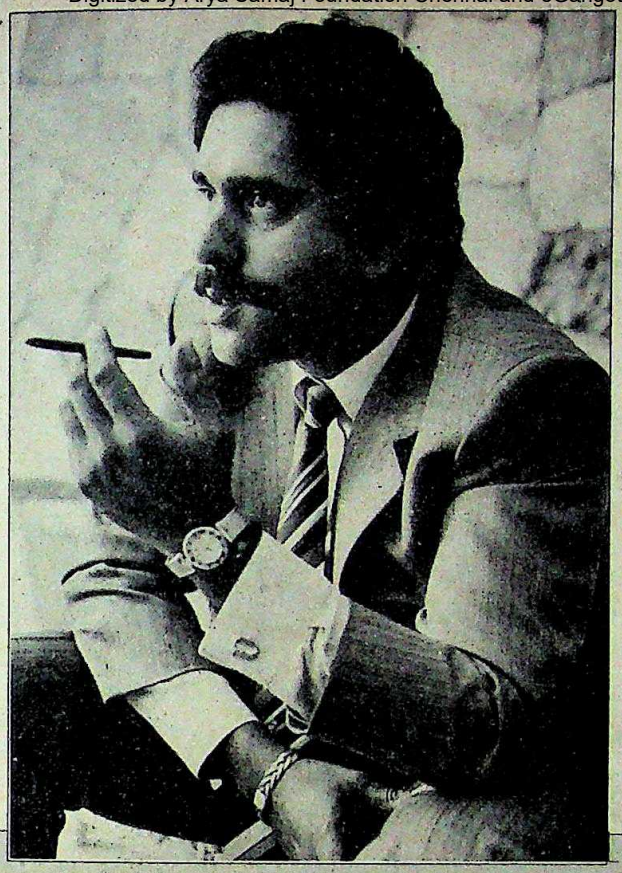
Chhabria, and it had taken a $15 million loan from American Express to finance the $26.4 million Shaw Wallace deal. Amarante entered the picture here because when Carrasco took the loan, Amarante formally subordinated its claims on Carrasco to American Express.

What these claims on Carrasco are is not known, but enforcement officials suspect that Amarante had provided the $11.4-million balance needed by Carrasco to buy the Shaw Wallace interest, and that some of this money could have come from the SBI loan to Tentura, which was linked to Amarante since October 1984 through Energex: a link that was not known of before.

Mallya had told INDIA TODAY last month that 90 per cent of the SBI loan to Tentura was in the form of letters of credit, and that very little cash loan was therefore involved. But government officials say they have documents which suggest that there might be more to the loan question.

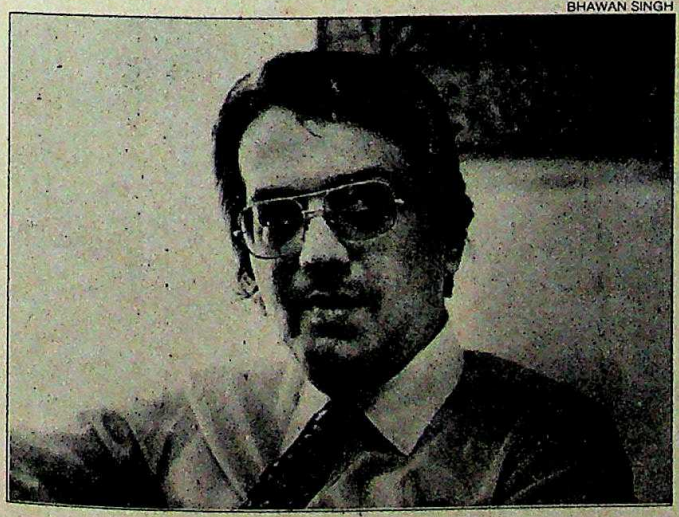
The directorate officials conclude from these documents that most of the loan was not given in the form of letters of credit, as claimed by Vijay Mallya. According to statements of accounts issued by the Registrar of Companies and Businesses, Singapore, on January 31, 1986, both Tentura and its parent company Wotan Pvt Ltd created charges on their assets to SBI. They were created on November 30, 1984, when SBI gave the loan to Tentura.

Meanwhile, the odd part of the acquisition of Energex shares by Amarante was that Amarante had just been formed in Hong Kong, and Energex had just gone into receivership when the share transfer took place. It is a mystery as to why anyone would be interested in the shares of a company under receivership. But a senior banker offered a possible explanation: Energex's parent company Tentura was taking a loan from SBI, and the acquisition of Energex shares by Amarante just before the loan might enable Amarante's assets to be offered in mortgage for the Tentura loan. This would be in the same manner that both Tentura and its own parent company, Wotan, mortgaged themselves to the bank for the loan. If this were indeed the case, and if Amarante's assets were to include a part of Shaw Wallace's shares (or at least the money advanced to Carrasco to buy the Shaw Wallace shares), the complicated transaction would begin to make business sense.



The Government decided to launch investigations into the loan soon after the Enforcement Directorate informed the Finance Ministry that it felt SBI's loan may have in fact been used by Mallya for the Shaw Wallace acquisition.

BHAWAN SINGH



Mallya (top) and Chhabria: trapped in a controversy

At the moment, of course, the Government has not yet got the clinching evidence on how exactly the loan money was used. But several details that are known of what had been going on at the time make for an intriguing picture. Energex was incorporated in Singapore in 1978 for carrying out wholesale and retail business with a paid-up capital of half a million Singapore dollars. While no details about its activities between 1978 and 1984 are available, one of UBI's general managers, V.S. Kumar, was formally put in charge of Energex in June 1984. Morris Mathias, UBI chief and the head of Mallya's operations abroad, circulated an internal memorandum on May 25, 1984, saying that Kumar would look after Energex. Wrote Mathias: "Energex will be a profit centre and Kumar will take full responsibility for purchasing, finance, production, marketing and of course, the profitability of the business. He will be located at Energex."

But Kumar's transfer to Energex proved disastrous for the company. Within five months, the Singapore branch of Indian Bank, which had advanced loans to it, placed the company under receivership on October 4, 1984. Energex's assets had a book value of 250,000 Singapore dollars but its liabilities were estimated at four times its current assets. The purchase of Energex shares by

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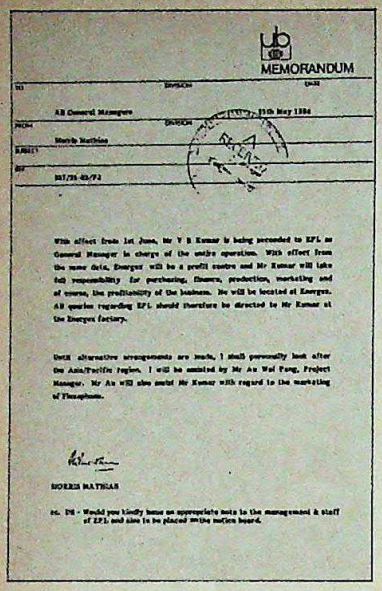


UB
MEMORANDUM

To: All General Managers — Division: — Date: 25th May 1984

From: Morris Mathias — Division: — Ref: —

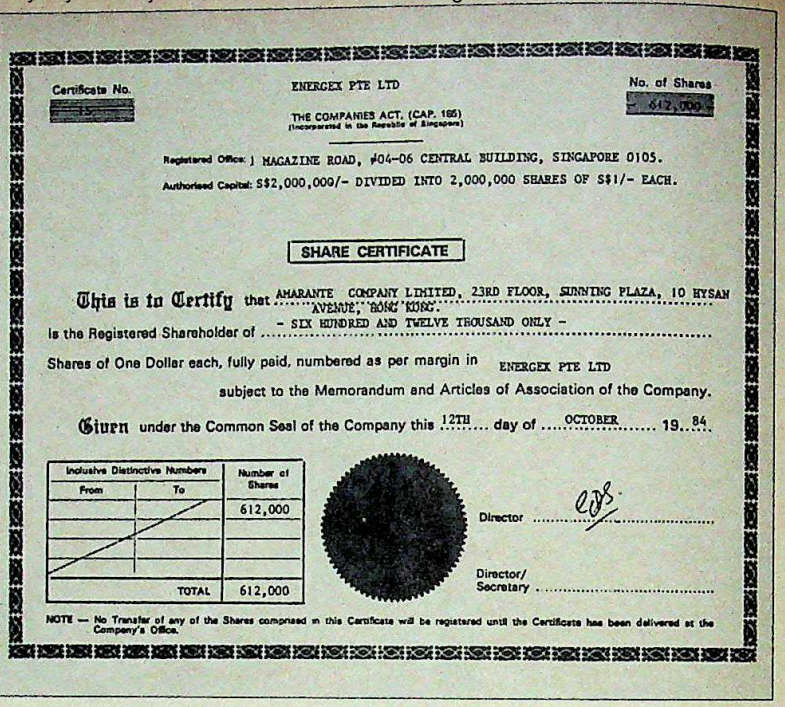
Ref: MM/84-85/92

With effect from 1st June, Mr Y B Kumar is being seconded to EFL as General Manager in charge of the entire operation. With effect from the same date, Energex will be a profit centre and Mr Kumar will take full responsibility for purchasing, finance, production, marketing and of course, the profitability of the business. He will be located at Energex. All queries regarding EFL should therefore be directed to Mr Kumar at the Energex factory.

Until alternative arrangements are made, I shall personally look after the Asia/Pacific region. I will be assisted by Mr Au Wai Pang, Project Manager. Mr Au will also assist Mr Kumar with regard to the marketing of Phosphate.

MORRIS MATHIAS

cc. PM - Would you kindly have an appropriate note in the management & staff of EFL and also to be placed on the notice board.



Certificate No. [redacted] — ENERGEX PTE LTD — No. of Shares 612,000

THE COMPANIES ACT, (CAP. 185)
(Incorporated in the Republic of Singapore)

Registered Office: 1 MAGAZINE ROAD, #04-06 CENTRAL BUILDING, SINGAPORE 0105.

Authorised Capital: S$2,000,000/- DIVIDED INTO 2,000,000 SHARES OF S$1/- EACH.

SHARE CERTIFICATE

This is to Certify that AMARANTE COMPANY LIMITED, 23RD FLOOR, SUNNING PLAZA, 10 HYSAN AVENUE, HONG KONG.

is the Registered Shareholder of - SIX HUNDRED AND TWELVE THOUSAND ONLY -

Shares of One Dollar each, fully paid, numbered as per margin in ENERGEX PTE LTD subject to the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Company.

Given under the Common Seal of the Company this 12TH day of OCTOBER 19 84

Inclusive Distinctive Numbers		Number of Shares
From	To	
		612,000
TOTAL		612,000

Director

Director/ Secretary

NOTE — No Transfer of any of the Shares comprised in this Certificate will be registered until the Certificate has been delivered at the Company's Office.

Office memo showing UBI connection with Energex and share certificates of Energex with Amarante: links with Shaw Wallace.

Amarante took place eight days after Energex was placed under receivership. One of Energex's directors, G. Dhana Sekharan, issued the share certificate to Amarante, so that 30 per cent of Energex's authorised share capital passed on to Amarante.

A directorate official described the latest bits of information as a "breakthrough". But he added that the Government would be able to nail UBI down only if it got cooperation from SBI and Indian Bank on information concerning the loan. So far, the banks have refused to divulge any details on the plea that this would amount to violation of Singapore's banking laws. But the inquiries ordered last month suggest that the full details of the story might finally be known.

Surprisingly, SBI gave the loan to Tentura although its subsidiaries were either losing money or were under liquidation. Among the various subsidiaries, Chuan Kah Food Manufacturing had suffered a loss of 0.5 million Singapore dollars, UBI Computers Services 0.75 million Singapore dollars, United Distributors had ceased operations after running up losses of 2 million Singapore dollars, Distillery Industries had also ceased operations and Energex itself had gone into receivership after suffering a loss of 3 million Singapore dollars.

Enforcement officials suspect that Amarante had provided the $11.4 million balance needed by Carrasco to buy the Shaw Wallace interest, and that some of this money could have come from the SBI loan to Tentura.

SBI officials in Bombay, however, maintain that the loan was fully secured, but they refuse to divulge the amount outstanding against the loan. However, if as Mallya claims the loan was granted in the form of letters of credit in 1984, the bank should have recovered its money after the letters of credits were honoured. But an SBI spokesman in Singapore told a newspaper two months ago that the loans were fully secured, and by implication still not repaid.

Since SBI has not disclosed the purpose for which the loan was advanced, the directorate officials charge that the money was finally used for partially financing the Shaw Wallace purchase.

If the details of the SBI loan hold the key to unlocking the Shaw Wallace mystery, another key will be provided by establishing the ownership of the various companies involved in the complicated transactions. Chhabria had told the enforcement officials who questioned him last year that he would provide them the full details of how he raised the $26.4 million that he used to acquire the Shaw Wallace shareholding. But he has not yet done this. He had also promised to provide the full details of the ownership of Carrasco and its holding company, Keysberg. These details have not been provided either.

The ownership of the other companies are also a secret. Energex is owned by Tentura, which is owned by Wotan, which is owned by Jures Nominees, which is held in trust by a lawyers' firm. So the beneficiary owner of this chain of companies remains unknown. Similarly, the beneficiary owner of Amarante remains unknown. If the identities of these various owners are disclosed, the Shaw Wallace mystery will finally be solved.

Mallya, meanwhile, pleaded time beyond INDIA TODAY's deadline for answering questions concerning Energex, and said he would have to get the full details. Meanwhile, the Government's wheels had already started moving. The ultimate outcome in this celebrated case still remains uncertain, but one thing is certain: there will be more disclosures in the coming weeks. —PRABHU CHAWLA

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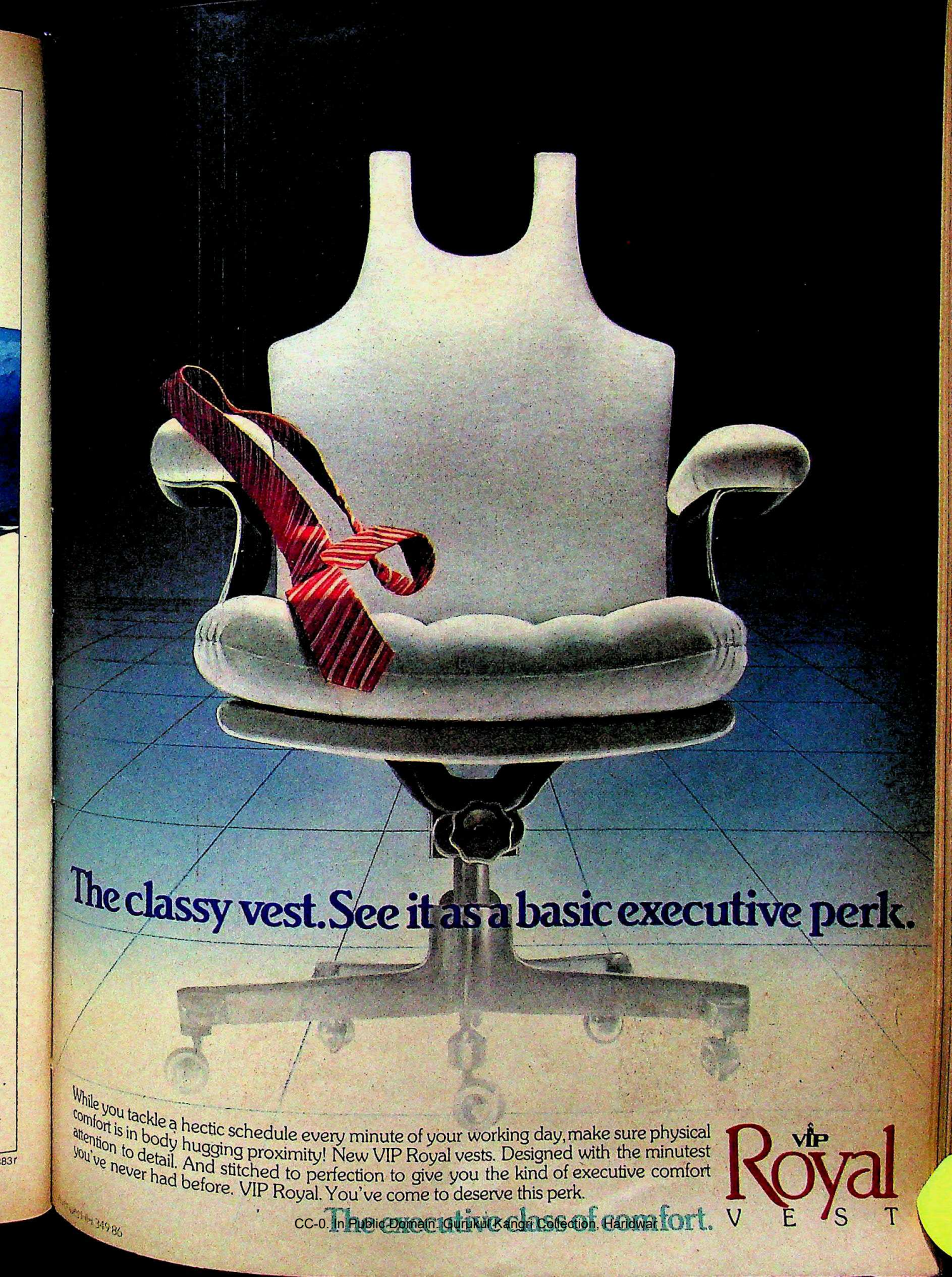

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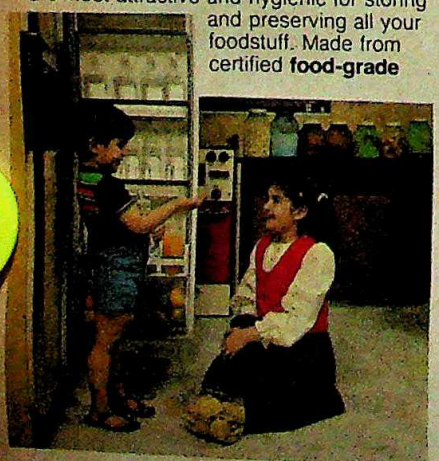

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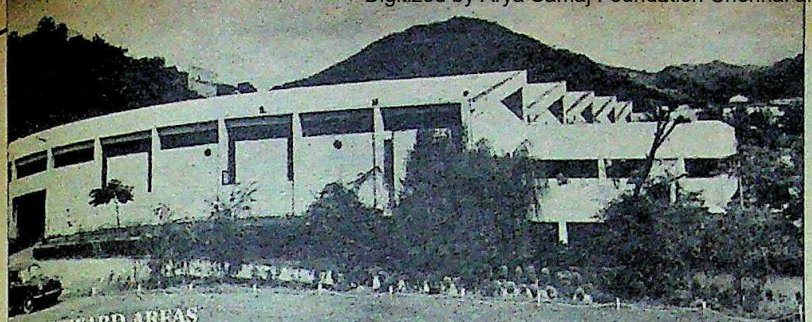

Factory in backward Parwanoo in Himachal Pradesh: no infrastructure

BACKWARD AREAS

Reverse Gear

MAHENDRA Jhawar is not a man given to stubbornness. But the chairman and managing director of the Usha Telehoist group of companies is adamant on one point—his group will never again set foot in what the Government classifies as a no-industry district. The group launched a tractor chain links factory in Karnataka's Kolar district, but the Rs 7-crore venture was plagued with problems almost from day one and Jhawar has had enough. "If the Government is serious about developing industrially backward areas, it must first create the infrastructure in such places. The backward area policy's purpose is not being served," declares Jhawar.

That sentiment is echoed by a widening spectrum of businessmen, chambers of commerce and even some economists who are beginning to question the way the Government is going about attracting investment to industrially backward regions. Says economist Isher Ahluwalia, who works for New Delhi's Centre for Policy Research: "I have a hunch that the policy is not working—or workable. I'm not against the objective of regional dispersal of industry, but you must have the infrastructure first." And the Association of Indian Engineering Industry (AIEI) has gone on record to suggest that companies scrambling for manufacturing licences have occasionally gone into backward areas on a half-hearted basis, establishing assembly operations but not full-fledged production facilities. AIEI Executive Director Tarun Das argues: "A whole lot of people who are not keen on moving to backward areas try to technically implement their licences but not in the real spirit, because there is really no other way of getting a licence."

Clearly, the official programme to reshape the landscape in industry-starved regions has only partially taken off. Three years ago, the Government revamped its scheme, tagged on 118 regions which had no large or medium-sized industrial units ("no-industry" districts) to the existing 168 backward districts (the tally is now some 300) and pepped up the incentives for firms to move to such areas. These included investment subsidies, soft loans and concessions. A key inducement was a virtual assurance of a licence for companies willing to shift to no-industry districts.

This was followed up in January 1985 when the Government freed firms covered by the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act from licensing requirements for around 22 items, on condition that they manufacture these in backward areas.

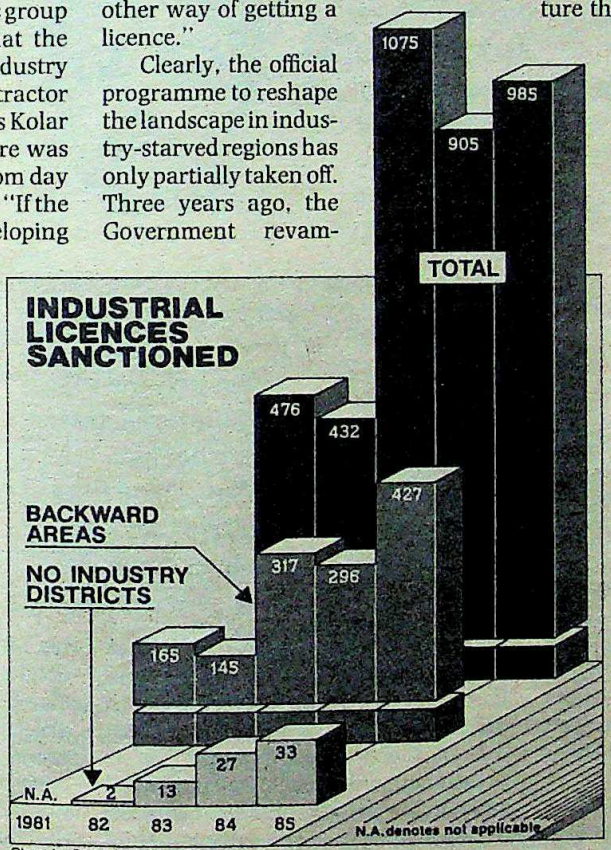

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

Few quarrel with the programme's goals—correcting regional imbalances and dispersing manufacturing concerns to undeveloped parts of the country. But the first target still remains elusive, while the second has been only partially met.

The rub lies in the reluctance of businessmen to invest in areas where infrastructure does not exist. Industrialists complain that they have to foot much of the horrendously heavy bills for basic facilities such as housing for the staff, schools for their children, roads, power and transport arrangements. Raw materials have to be ferried miles from urban centres to plant sites, skilled employees have to be cajoled with fatter salaries to shift there and project costs spiral. These are not fully covered by the incentives, and many of those who decide to take the plunge seem to acquire second thoughts, if the number of letters of intent that are not turned into licences is anything to go by.

But the Government has finally woken up to the problem. A committee headed by Planning Commission Secretary C.G. Somaya is now reviewing the backward area scheme's impact. Says a committee member: "The terms of reference include assessing the impact of the scheme and suggesting modifications in it if

"If the Government is serious about developing industrially backward areas, it must first create the infrastructure."

MAHENDRA JHAWAR
managing director, Usha Telehoist group

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necessary." Before March-end, the committee would submit a report to the Government recommending an overhaul of the programme, if not an alternative approach altogether.

The latest initiative itself follows an earlier salvage operation. Some months ago, officialdom earmarked Rs 600 crore for infrastructure in 99 no-industry districts, to be spent over the next five years. As a first step it picked 11 "growth centres" spread over six or seven states: Rs 6 crore is to be funnelled to each of them through the Industrial Development Bank of India for investment in housing and other facilities.

No one would question the wisdom of these moves. For no-industry districts have not been a roaring success. While around 18 per cent of the total number of letters of intent the Government granted were for ventures in such districts, very few of them were translated into licences (*see chart*). A senior bureaucrat in the Industry Ministry, however, contends that it takes a minimum of two to three years for projects to come up. That is true, but the trend is disquieting.

The picture is brighter on the backward district front. A study by the Urban Development Ministry's Town and Country Planning Organisation suggests that the number of backward district projects registered with the Directorate-General of Trade and Development climbed sharply in the six years ending in 1983. These are mostly for small ventures that do not require a licence. But even here, exactly how many of them actually became factories on the ground is not clear. A senior government official privately reckons that the figure may not exceed a third of the projects registered.

There is more disquieting evidence. The Government and the financial institutions have sanctioned a whopping Rs 7,120 crore in backward area subsidies and aid, but some of these projects have remained on paper. Only 69 per cent of the total institutional aid sanctioned in the last 15 years has actually been utilised. The statistics also suggest that more projects took off the ground in states with a better track record of providing infrastructure than in other states. The obverse of this is that four states in the first category hogged over 37 per cent of the total aid. Obviously, more has to be done to rectify regional industrial imbalances.

MUCH of this confirms what several businessmen have been saying all along: at the ground level, the problems are daunting enough to keep companies away from backward areas. Many state governments drag their feet in handing out subsidies. "We were eligible for subsidies on power generating sets for a project in Punjab but got them after 8 or 10 years," recalls Parvindar Singh, managing director of Ranbaxy Laboratories.

Even when incentives are handed over, they don't fully offset the 10 to 25 per cent higher project expenditures that firms fork out in backward areas. Argues Subodh Bhargava, chief executive of the tractor company Eicher Goodearth, which has three backward area or no-industry district ventures: "The concessions granted to companies to go to backward areas are in no way adequate for the costs." Modi Cement is putting up a cement plant in a backward area 100 km from Raipur, and industrialist Yogendra K. Modi says that the company spent Rs 20 crore more than estimated, half of it on a 23-km railway line to bring in coal to the plant site.

There are other horror stories. Bringing in skilled staff from outside triggers off local pressures on companies to absorb sons of the soil. Says one businessman: "Our factory was the only major unit in the area and became a focal point for local politicians who exerted pressure on us to take on unskilled sons of the soil." And firms such as Modi Cements, Eicher and the JK group's Straw Products Ltd employ couriers to transmit messages to their head offices because telexes and telephones do not function. Straw Products set up a paper mill in a backward area in Orissa some 23 years ago. "But," says company president Shailesh Chandra Jain, "if the phones don't work you have to go 200 km to Vishakhapatnam to make a phone call."

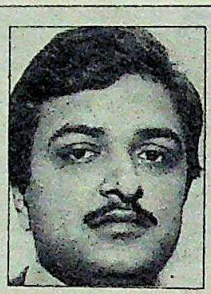
Finally, questions still remain as to how quickly development takes place and how widespread it is in backward districts. Some company executives, however, insist that their backward area units provide spinoffs to surrounding localities. Jain of Straw Products says that its paper mill in Orissa directly employs 3,000 people and indirectly provides a livelihood to another 25,000.

There have been a few successes too in the backward area story such as Dhar in Madhya Pradesh and Hosur in Tamil Nadu. But the first is close to Indore and the second offers adequate infrastructural facilities, suggesting that the failures have been due to the lack of an adequate infrastructure.

"The scheme will take off. Give it a little more time," argues a senior Industry Ministry bureaucrat. With the Government on the verge of changing course, he could be right. For backward areas provide the elbow room to big corporations to expand, which developed zones do not, as P.M. Sinha, Hindustan Lever's vice-president for corporate affairs, points out. Moreover, the scheme presents an opportunity to firms to escape high wage, high cost islands like Bombay. Deep C. Anand, chairman of the Gabriel India group of companies, defends the backward area faith because "there are more problems in cities like Bombay where the infrastructure has broken down."

In the final analysis, it makes sense for firms to eye backward areas. And firms will move there—if they do not have to dig too deeply into their coffers to do so. With the Government doing a rescue act, a scheme that has floundered for long may finally get going.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports



Y.K. Modi complains they have spent Rs 20 crore more than originally estimated, about half of it on a rail line.

Deep C. Anand, of the Gabriel India group feels there are more problems in cities like Bombay where the infrastructure has broken down.

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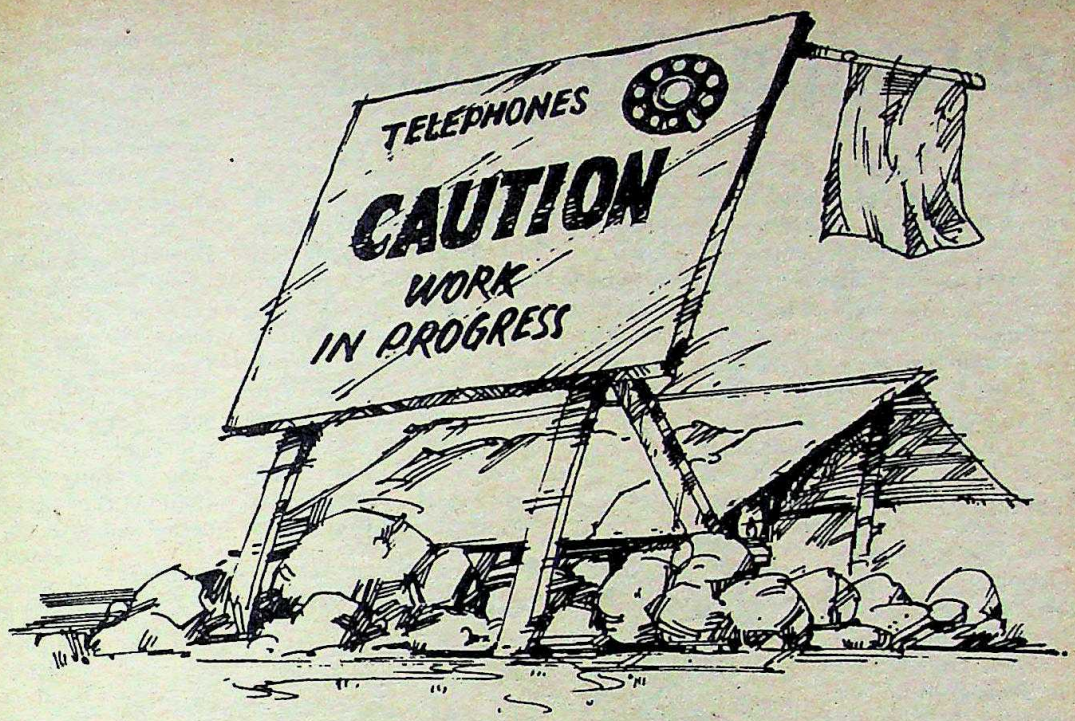

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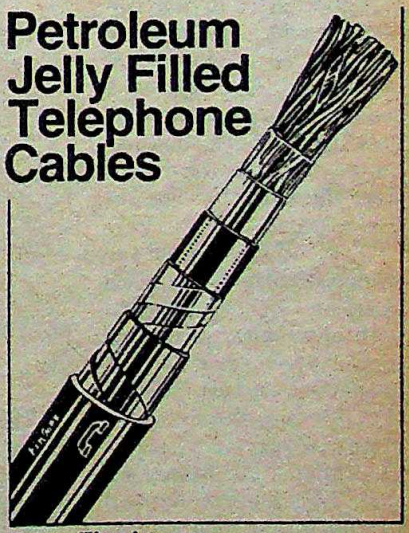

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TAX RAIDS

Tightening The Bonds

FRAUD, tax evasion, laundering black money through shares, flouting foreign exchange rules—the charges were serious enough. But when paraded across the front pages of newspapers and linked with some of the most respected names in the Indian corporate world, the rumblings were inevitable.

Last fortnight, the Government continued to swoop down on companies in a blaze of media publicity. In dramatic raids over the last few weeks, tax officials hit the offices and factories of Bata India, Voltas, Brooke Bond, Nagarjuna Fertilisers and Chemicals, and Computerade (a sister concern of J.M. Financial and Investment Consultancy Services Pvt Ltd). Company employees were grilled, sometimes into the early hours of the morning, top executives (the managing director and a non-resident director in Bata's case) were arrested, mountains of files seized and the residences of senior officials searched.

Any action on that scale was guaranteed to raise corporate hackles. And last fortnight, in an unprecedented closing of ranks, companies seemed to be readying to hit back. One financial daily reported that quite a few firms were thinking of sueing the Excise Department.

Some of those caught in the latest storm have in effect charged the Government with impropriety in rushing to the press since the tax allegations related to sums that were in dispute. In a press release, Bata India Chairman M.M. Sabharwal said: "It is unfortunate that the matter has been given so much adverse publicity before any allegations could be established." And, Voltas Chairman A.H. Tobaccowala issued a detailed rejoinder prominently published in the newspapers: "The manner of the investigation and the subsequent arrests raise issues of public policy."

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence charged Bata with illegally claiming almost Rs 1 crore in customs duty drawbacks (tax rebates that the Government gives on exported items). The Government says that the firm actually used natural rubber in the soles of shoes it exported, but claimed that it used synthetic rubber. Duty is leviable on the first but not on the second and any duty refund claimed on a non-dutiable item would clearly be fraudulent. The company has denied this, saying that it had been talking to government agencies on the matter, the amount under dispute was "just a few lakhs" and not Rs 1 crore, that exports form around 2.5 per cent of its annual turnover of Rs 200 crore and the Government could have had for the asking any documents it wanted instead of raiding the firm.

In another export-related issue, Brooke Bond is under a cloud for allegedly under-invoicing tea exports, but company officials were unavailable for comment. The issue of the Rs 5-crore excise evasion charges levelled at Voltas may be more damaging. Tax fiddles by at least some refrigerator-manufacturing companies are common knowledge, but the Tata company had gone to the Bombay High Court on tax demands relating to a period ending in 1983. If Tobaccowala is to be believed, the excise man zeroed in on a subsequent 17-month period on essentially the same grounds that the company has questioned in court. The Government is well within its rights to do this, but it could more properly have awaited the outcome of the case.

The most curious tale of all is the Nagarjuna affair. The high-flying steel, cement, coated tubes and leasing company group had privately placed a Rs 10-crore equity issue for its Rs 600-crore fertiliser project. The issue was managed by J.M. Financial, a heavyweight with over 200 clients including the Tatas and Birlas. Income tax officials raided Nagarjuna premises in Hyderabad and J.M.'s sister share registrar firm Computerade, as well as the homes of Nagarjuna and J.M. directors and claimed to have unearthed evidence that massive amounts of number two money had gone into the Nagarjuna shares in benami transactions. Tax officials indicated that "this is probably the largest share market swindle we have unearthed so far".

That remains to be seen, but the officers had amassed quite a bit of so-called evidence. On one side were a pile of share certificates with the names and the number of

A.H. TOBACCOWALA
chairman,
Voltas

"The manner of the investigation and the subsequent arrests raise issues of public policy."

K.V.K. RAJU
promoter,
Nagarjuna group

"None of the Nagarjuna group has a single bogus or benami share anywhere in the country."

M.M. SABHARWAL
chairman,
Bata India

"It is unfortunate that the matter has been given so much publicity before any allegations could be established."

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shares allotted neatly typed in. On the other were the application forms, still to be sent out to the people who had already got the shares and one official says that "quite a few application forms appear to have been filled in by two or even three different people." It was at first sight the classic scam.

Namesh Kimpani, managing director of J.M. was not available for comment, even as the income taxmen camped in his offices. K.V.K. Raju said there was nothing to the allegations: "None of the Nagarjuna group of companies has even a single bogus or benami share anywhere in the country." And an executive of the group pointed out that the Government had made enquiries eight weeks ago and the company had plenty of time to suppress evidence if it was so inclined.

However, market sources tell a curious story. It begins when Nagarjuna decided to ask for Rs 10 crore from the market, part of the Rs 60 crore that the directors would need in hand when they went asking for loans for their Rs 600 crore project. But they wanted private placements—this meant that they wouldn't have to issue a prospectus—without sending out application forms. The company decided to go ahead with this informal money-gathering operation on the advice of their lawyers.

The money management firm called in a broker who was asked to contact about 70 brokers who in their turn were supposed to call up 35-odd people each and request them to buy 5,000 shares, costing Rs 50,000. There was no premium and payment to the brokers was, a source confirmed, strictly by cheque. The brokers are said to have been over enthusiastic and got six times as many people as they should have—in all 12,000.

This was when J.M. appears to have been rather unwise. After they received a list of the applicants, they sent out application forms to each one in an issue which was meant to be privately placed. About this time somebody complained to the Income Tax Department.

While the knotty question of whether Nagarjuna was on the right side of the law in asking for money on such a word-of-mouth basis remains, the Government seems unfazed by the mounting flak on its continuing raids. Indeed, one senior Government functionary hinted last fortnight that more raids were on the cards. If these do materialise, a right royal legal battle could erupt in a blaze of publicity. And then, so to say, the boot will be on the other foot.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI with bureau reports

GURPREET SINGH

Crossed Wires

GURPREET SINGH, 52, is not your screwdriver technologist looking for a fast buck in electronics. His 21-year-old Continental Devices India Ltd is one of the top half a dozen manufacturers of electronic components in the country, and he himself—educated at Doon School and St Stephens College before he did industrial engineering and an MBA at Washington University in the US—is one of the acknowledged spokesmen of the country's fastest growing industry. Though supportive of the Government's steps to promote the use of electronics, he remains a severe critic of the picture that he sees in a frontier industry. He spoke to Senior Editor T.N. NINAN in New Delhi last fortnight on his hopes and frustrations:

THE BEST thing that happened to the electronics industry three years ago was that the Government set itself a goal: of increasing electronics production tenfold to Rs 10,000 crore by 1990. The trouble is that there was no detailed working paper or strategy to work towards this target. So nothing very much happened. Then Rajiv Gandhi came on the scene. Being an electronics buff, he talked of the 21st century, and so electronics became a buzzword. And in March last year, the Government announced that various areas of electronics were being de-licensed, and that licences were being broad-banded.

These were wonderful announcements, but I had to point out at a meeting with the industry minister six months later that the notifications had not been issued to make the new policy effective. It still took another five weeks, and the notifications are still incomplete. If I ask about the procedure for broad-banding, they don't even know the procedure. I don't expect electronics output in 1990 to be more than Rs 6,000 crore, but even that will be an achievement.

In any case, what does the Government mean by de-licensing? I still have to go to the Government for approval of my phased manufacturing programme, for clearance of capital goods imports, for the location of my factory, for clearing my collaboration agreement, for clearance by the controller of capital issues if I want to raise money from the public, and submit my proposal to detailed scrutiny by the Directorate-General of Technical Development if I want imports at the lower of the rates that the Government specifies. So what have you changed? Just two things: I don't have to fill in a form with 18 copies, and there is no limit to the number of entrants in any field. I don't think this is de-licensing, at least not in the terms that either the Oxford or Webster dictionary would understand it. You can't undo 20 of 200 knots tying me up and ask me to run.

You must remember that electronics is a very fast moving field, with rapid obsolescence. A product's life cycle is often no more than two years, sometimes just six months. So if it takes a year to get a licence, arrange for the infrastructure and then another two years to productionise something, you will always be producing obsolete items.

The Government's aims are well-meaning: it wants faster growth, fresh technology and contemporary products. The first has happened only modestly, the second will still take time, and the third seems impossible until we develop mass markets and get economies of scale. The Government now encourages me to produce as many components as I want, but where is the market for their use in end products? The TV market has dried up, and a mass market has not developed in either radios, electronic watches, telephones or even calculators.

Exports is the other option, but my basic costs are too high. If you take a TV set from Delhi to Faridabad, the octroi is Rs 250, and the sales tax Rs 500. Then how can you cut costs? The tax on a colour TV set priced at Rs 7,500 is Rs 3,250.

I would like to see genuine de-licensing so that I don't need any permissions from the Government. I must be allowed to acquire technology at commercial rates, the cost of inputs must be dramatically lowered, and the Government must develop a mass market so that we can remain contemporary.

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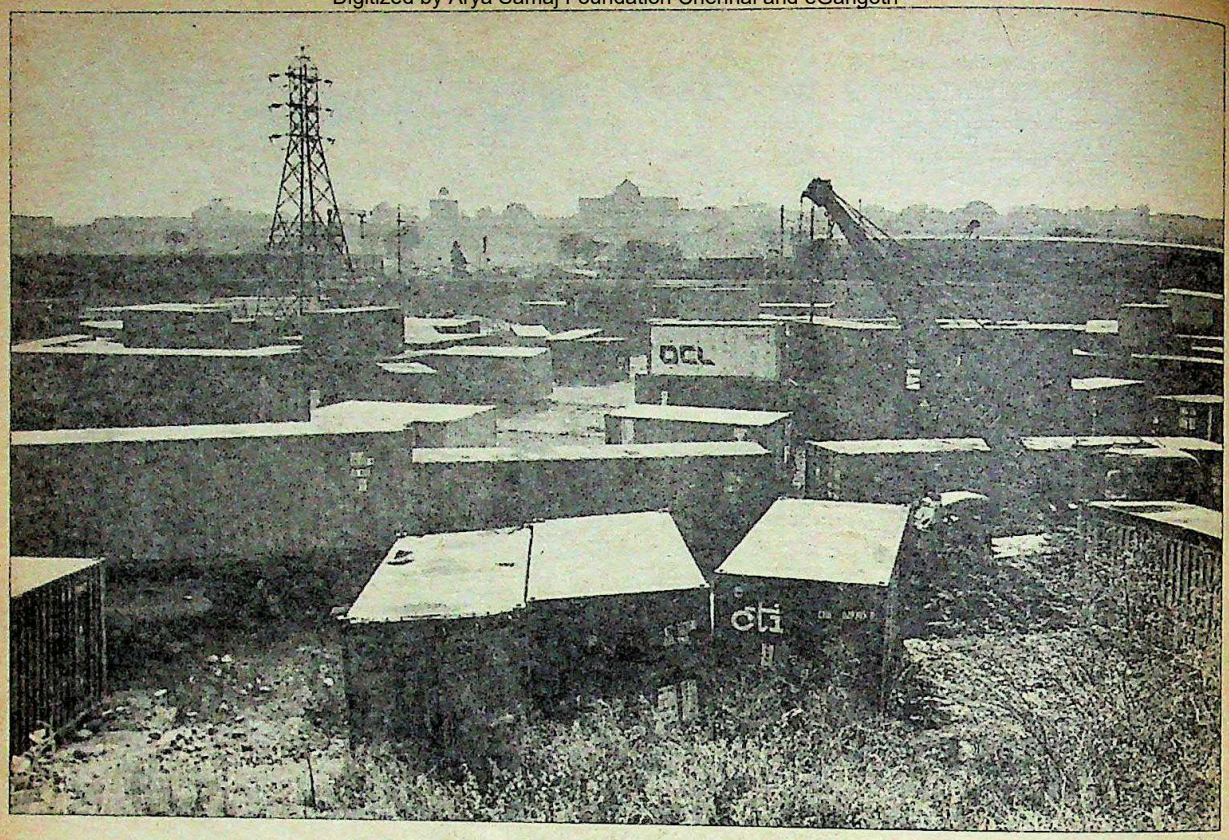

Containers strewn about the yard at the Delhi depot: soured dreams

INLAND CONTAINER SERVICE

The Derailed Depot

DELHI'S Inland Container Depot (ICD), established two years ago as an extension of Bombay Port, has fallen prey to gross mismanagement and abuse. Traders using the facility complain that they suffer incalculable losses on account of excruciating delays, missed shipping connections and cancellation of export orders. It is in essence, a headless organisation with little or no built-in system of accountability. Despite its potential of playing a vital role in the efficient movement of thousands of crores of rupees worth of exports and imports in and out of Delhi, the entire operation has degenerated into a trader's nightmare. Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *reports on how a system integral to the smooth operation of international trade and crucial to earning foreign exchange is being rapidly derailed:*

THREE steel containers packed with Bata shoes being exported to 17 different buyers in the UK were recently Customs-cleared at Delhi's inland container depot and despatched by rail to Bombay Port to catch a ship sailing on January 29. One container made the ship. The other two didn't. For two weeks, the railways—which freighted the containers to Bombay—had no idea where the missing goods were. They were ultimately tracked down by a shipping agent.

Haryana Minerals Ltd, a state government undertaking that exports about Rs 7 lakh of slate stone mined in Narnol, to Australia, Belgium and Holland each month sweated out a similar frustration. A recent consignment of the material delivered to the facility was cleared for shipment to Bombay after lying in Delhi for nearly three months because containers could not be loaded in time. The Haryana Government was able to save its letters of credit, but wound up risking the loss of several future orders.

These are but two results of bureaucratic bungling, ineptitude and turf battles which are cutting a wide swathe of sabotage through the Government's intention of establishing Delhi's ICD as a pivotal building block designed to help facilitate international trade in northern India—estimated at about Rs 2,000 crore—and make exports from this region more competitive and aggressive in foreign markets. Delays, shoddy equipment, inefficient railway services and an apparently underhanded effort by a community of vested interests in the Bombay Port area who seem determined to strangle the new operation with red tape in order to prevent a loss in their own business, are playing havoc with users, many of whom now threaten to boycott the facility altogether.

After several years of brainstorming, ICD was born two years ago so that traders from the capital's export-rich hinterland could send out or import goods in containers and have all their formalities, paperwork and packing done in Delhi, instead of faraway Bombay, while simultaneously taking belated advantage of the container revolution that had swept through much of the world. "It made, and still makes eminent sense," says R.C. Dubey, director of transportation in the Commerce Ministry, and one of the pioneers of the concept "to make the Delhi ICD an extension of the

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Bombay Port...It would also help decongest the roads from truck traffic, reduce the need for expensive wood that is used in crating, and provide a more fuel-efficient method—the railways—for surface transportation to Bombay." Currently Bombay handles about 160,000 import and export containers annually, of which about 9,000 originate from or are destined for Delhi. This accounts for only 10 per cent of Delhi's actual potential in light of the fact that nearly half the containerised trade handled at Bombay emanates from Delhi's hinterland but does not use the ICD facility.

As of now, good intentions are all that pave the railroad track from Delhi ICD to Bombay Port. As Ashok Mehra, president of the North India Steamer Agents Association, who helped persuade some 25 foreign shipping lines to use the new facility, puts it: "This ICD serves India's heartland. I was involved with its creation during the very early difficult days. But seeing its operation now I cannot help but feel alarmed and frustrated."

That frustration is only natural. The movement of goods from Bombay to Delhi or back is so delayed that exporters miss shipping connections and importers are forced to close their factories for want of components or raw materials. Ideally, the ICD is supposed to function like a conveyor belt with no restrictions or stoppages en route. But the various authorities running Bombay Port have apparently refused to recognise Delhi as an extension of their own facilities, and have hobbled the system with myriad byzantine, duplicative controls and regulations.

Authorities involved in running Bombay Port require a container to undergo a staggering and seemingly interminable 22-step approval process before it is allowed to go by rail to Delhi. Exporters who have already undergone Customs formalities in Delhi are subjected to similar red tape in Bombay. The upshot is that an average round trip between Delhi and Bombay that should take no more than six days by rail now takes close to 22 days.

Ed Norton, import manager for Bata UK who bought nearly (PS) 2 million worth of footwear for export to European markets from India during 1984-1985, and is the single largest user of the Delhi ICD, says: "We've missed umpteen shipping connections. We get orders cancelled all the time from our customers. This is unfortunate because they've begun to think of Indians as unreliable. Some of my competitors think I'm mad to do business in India. Things get held up all the time, and by the time you get through arguing, the bloody boat's gone."

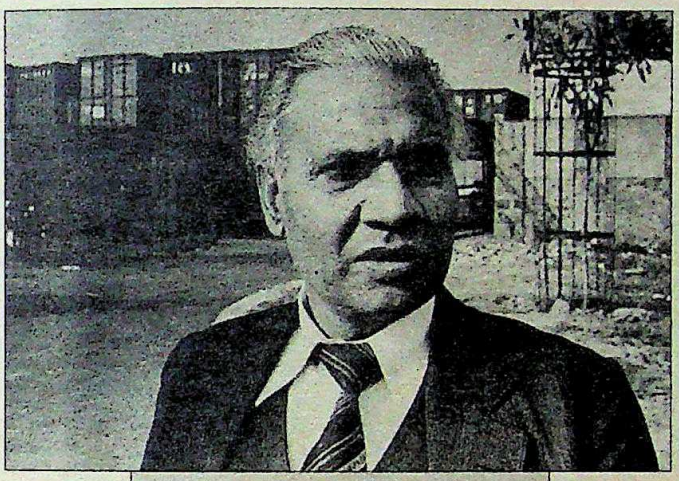
One of the most harrowing examples of harassment in Bombay that traders relate is "the broken seals racket". When a duly inspected container leaves Delhi for Bombay with an export consignment, it is affixed with a railway seal and a Customs seal. The Customs seal is usually a flimsy wire contraption with a paper attached to it. With unnerving regularity these seals come mysteriously undone in the Bombay Port area. Even if the railways seal is intact and the container is still securely padlocked, Bombay Customs insist on reopening it, recalling all the paperwork from Delhi for new verification, and re-examining the entire cargo. In the time lost, the vessel for which the container is destined has often sailed. In some cases the Bombay authorities will detain the container for months, claiming that there are no guidelines to deal with the issue of broken seals, thereby consigning the fate of the export cargo to bureaucratic limbo.

"We know those seals are deliberately broken in Bombay," one senior government official confided, "but it is very difficult to prove unless you catch the culprits in the act." The official said that Bombay "vested interests" lose a lot of money for every container handled in Delhi. One source estimated that for every 1,000 containers handled in Delhi, Bombay labour organisations, police, clearing agents, Bombay Port Trust, Customs officials, gatemen and crane operators lose about Rs 60 lakh each month in income from handling charges, fees, brokerage commission and kickbacks. In fact, when the Delhi ICD was first being organised, the dock labour threatened to hold up all containers going into or out of Delhi. Finally the Government agreed to pay Rs 3.50 to the Bombay Dock Labour Board for every container handled in Delhi.

The promises of economy and convenience that attracted—and still attract—traders to the ICD have degenerated into a dismal list of horror stories:

► In June 1985, Escorts imported 25 containers of Yamaha motorcycles. They were first held up in Bombay for want of certain documents. After they arrived in Delhi they were suddenly transferred from the depot to an adjacent storage area meant only for empty containers. This was because the depot was being "spot cleared" in anticipation of a visit from Minister of State for Railways Madhavrao Scindia, who was to arrive there on an inspection to investigate charges that the depot was unbearably congested. The containers were cleared on September 23—but not before Escorts had been charged nearly Rs 10 lakh in detention and ground rent charges. The additional cost, passed on to the consumers, was an extra Rs 530 per motorcycle.

► As of mid-January this year, some Rs 40 lakh worth of goods for export to Hamburg, Tilbury, Rotterdam and Marseilles were waiting for as long as six weeks in ICD sheds for containers. Agents for Overseas Containers Ltd, which needs about 50 empty containers each month, had received barely 20 between November and January. Because of a shortage of railway flat wagons which carry containers, and a reluctance on the part of the railways to carry empty containers and



"The Railways are the number one culprit in this mess. They delay movement of goods, they delay movement of documents. The handling equipment is poor and the cranes hardly ever work."

S.D. DUGGAL
clearing agent and managing partner, Manilal Patel & Co.

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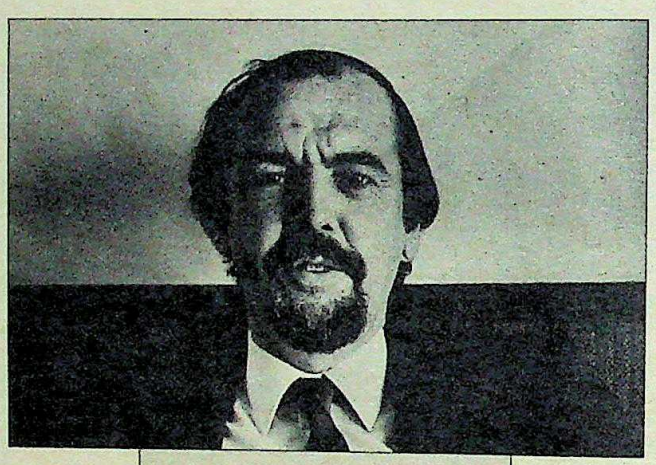
interminable delays in carrying them, goods languish in storage at Delhi often missing as many as three ship connections from Bombay to other international ports.

Delhi's Renasonic Enterprises was awaiting a shipment of electronic imports worth Rs 3 lakh from Hong Kong. The shipment arrived in Bombay on August 20, 1985 and languished there for almost four months resulting in net losses, company officials said, of nearly Rs 7 lakh. Bombay Customs officials had refused to clear the consignment because, they said, the documentation to forward the goods to Delhi was incomplete. Shipping agents for the company made out a fresh application. The Bombay authorities lost the papers and asked the agents to file them again. But now, finally, when the papers were found to be in order, Customs informed the agents—four months after the goods had arrived in Bombay—that the container seals were missing and a police investigation would have to be ordered.



"We've missed umpteen shipping connections. We get orders cancelled from our customers. By the time you get through arguing, the bloody boat's gone."

ED. NORTON
Import manager Bata (UK)

Shipping agents and their customers complain that they are forced to pay ground rent, detention and demurrage charges to the railways when containers arriving in Delhi are not cleared within a specified time even when the fault is clearly not theirs. According to one estimate the railways rack up nearly Rs 30 lakh each month from these charges. After a week's grace period the railways charge escalating fines—starting at Rs 200 a day—for containers which have not been cleared even though the railways are sometimes themselves the culprits causing the delays. Last January, several containers of waste paper intended for some 20 factories which had closed operations for lack of this raw material were delayed for more than 20 days at ICD facilities even though Customs formalities and payments had been cleared within a record 48 hours. Result: the customer was asked by the railways to shell out nearly Rs 25,000 in ground rent and detention charges.

S.D. Duggal, a clearing agent and managing partner of Manilal Patel and Co says: "The railways are the number one culprit in this mess. They delay movement of goods, they delay movement of documents. They allow the stuffing or emptying of containers only up to 4.30 p.m. After that they close shop and nothing can happen. But it is impossible to handle the containers within this time because the handling equipment is poor and the cranes hardly ever work. The roads of the storage complex are not paved and so the area handles far fewer containers than its capacity."

IN ADDITION to making money from detention and demurrage charges, the railways earn an estimated Rs 2 crore annually from the freight charged on containers moving in the Delhi-Bombay circuit. Railways acquired the ICD complex for free from the Trade Fair Authority. Instead of investing in its improvement, the railways operate the facility through a convoluted system of subcontracting. A customer pays the railways Rs 175 per container for grounding, opening and handling charges.

But the railways do not perform this function directly. They contract it to the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) for Rs 150 per container, keeping the remaining Rs 25. The SCI in turn contracts the handling job to United Lines Agency (ULA) for Rs 130, keeping the balance of Rs 20. ULA further subcontracts the work to a subsidiary called Shift-And-Lift for Rs 125 per container, again keeping the remaining Rs 5. On each container, therefore, the railways, SCI and ULA make Rs 50 without doing any work. And Shift-And-Lift—in this pass-the-buck operation—is left with a payment that does not enable it to buy new equipment or modernise.

A senior railways official who was contacted for comment said that the current system of contracting would be changed by April when negotiations for a new contractor with modern equipment will get underway. He readily admitted that the ICD facility is congested, the stacking and unloading areas inadequate, and the handling equipment of poor quality. "But in fairness to us," he said, "you must realise that we had a sudden increase in container traffic. Until August we were handling about 600, 20-foot containers a month. That figure jumped to more than 1,000 within a short period. We were simultaneously paving and redoing our storage facilities to handle things with greater efficiency. There was naturally a disruption during that period."

The official added that the Railways Department was aware of the problems and had done much to cut down on transit time. He also noted that delays in loading or unloading were often because of Customs formalities, or customers not taking timely delivery of their goods.

J.K. Shakdher, manager for Forbes Forbes Campbell shipping division argues that the situation creates interminable buckpassing because ICD is essentially a headless organisation without a budget or centralised authority. "If you complain about anything," he says, "everybody blames everybody else because no one seems to be in charge."

ICD is run by a standing committee consisting of representatives of the Railways, SCI, Commerce Ministry and Bombay Port Trust. The railways have finally appointed two divisional railway managers in Bombay and Delhi charged with improving matters. And further the Railways Reforms Committee has recommended creation of an independent container corporation.

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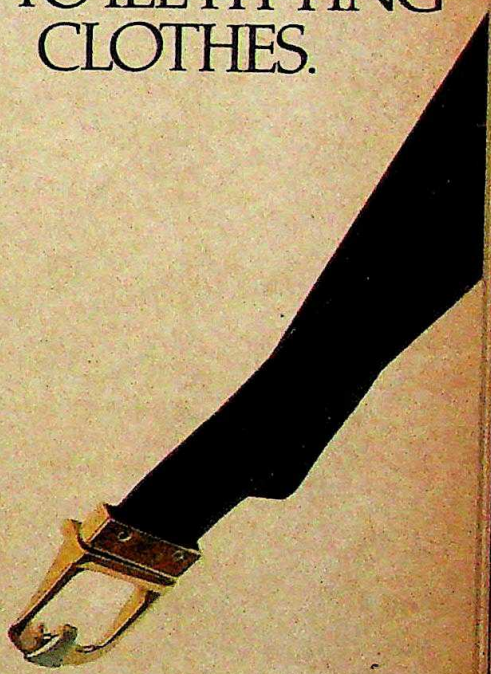
EVER SINCE I DISCOVERED RAYMOND'S READYMADES, IT'S GOODBYE TO ILL-FITTING CLOTHES.



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Raymond's Mens Wear

Location courtesy: The Taj Mahal Hotel, Bombay.

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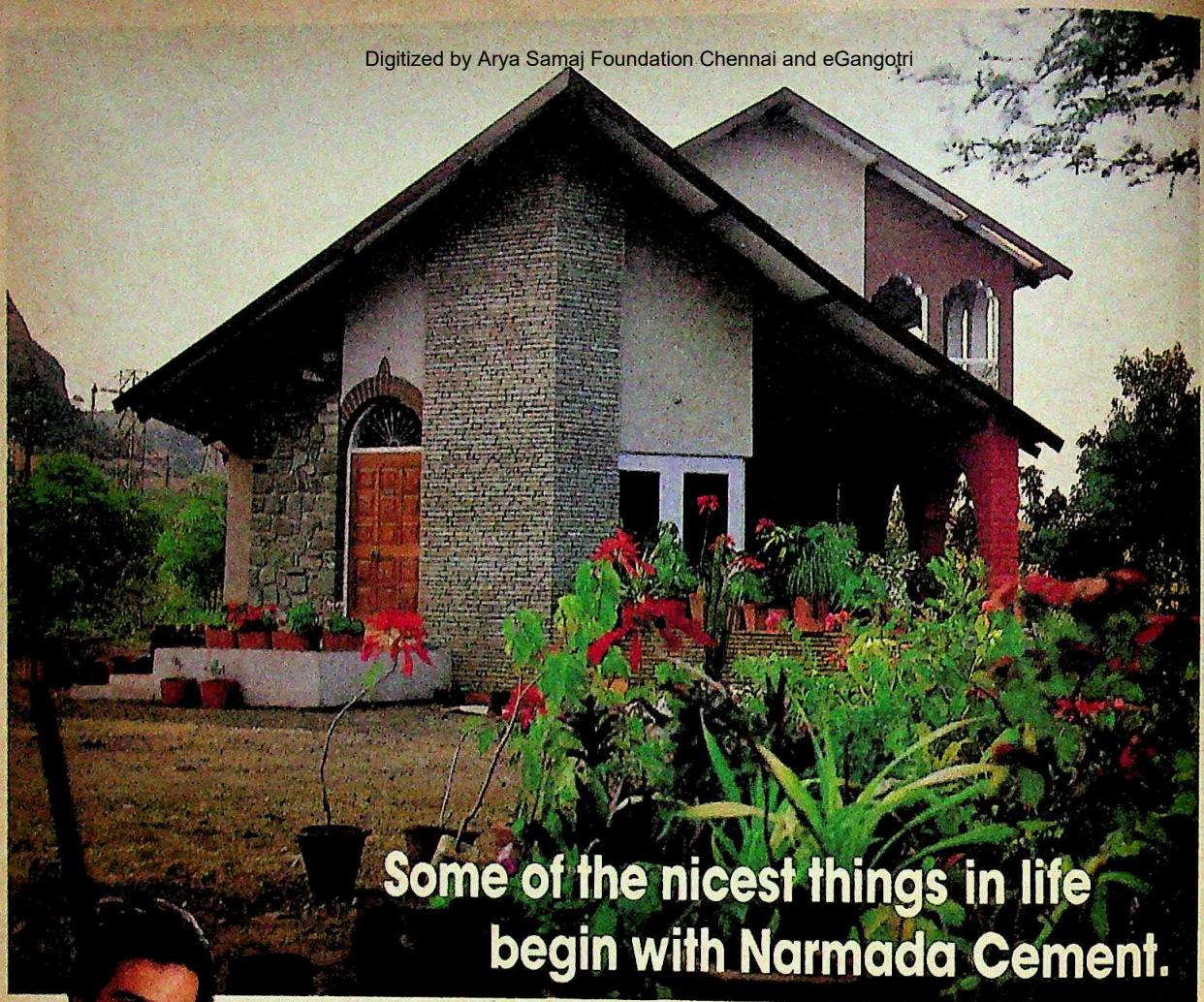

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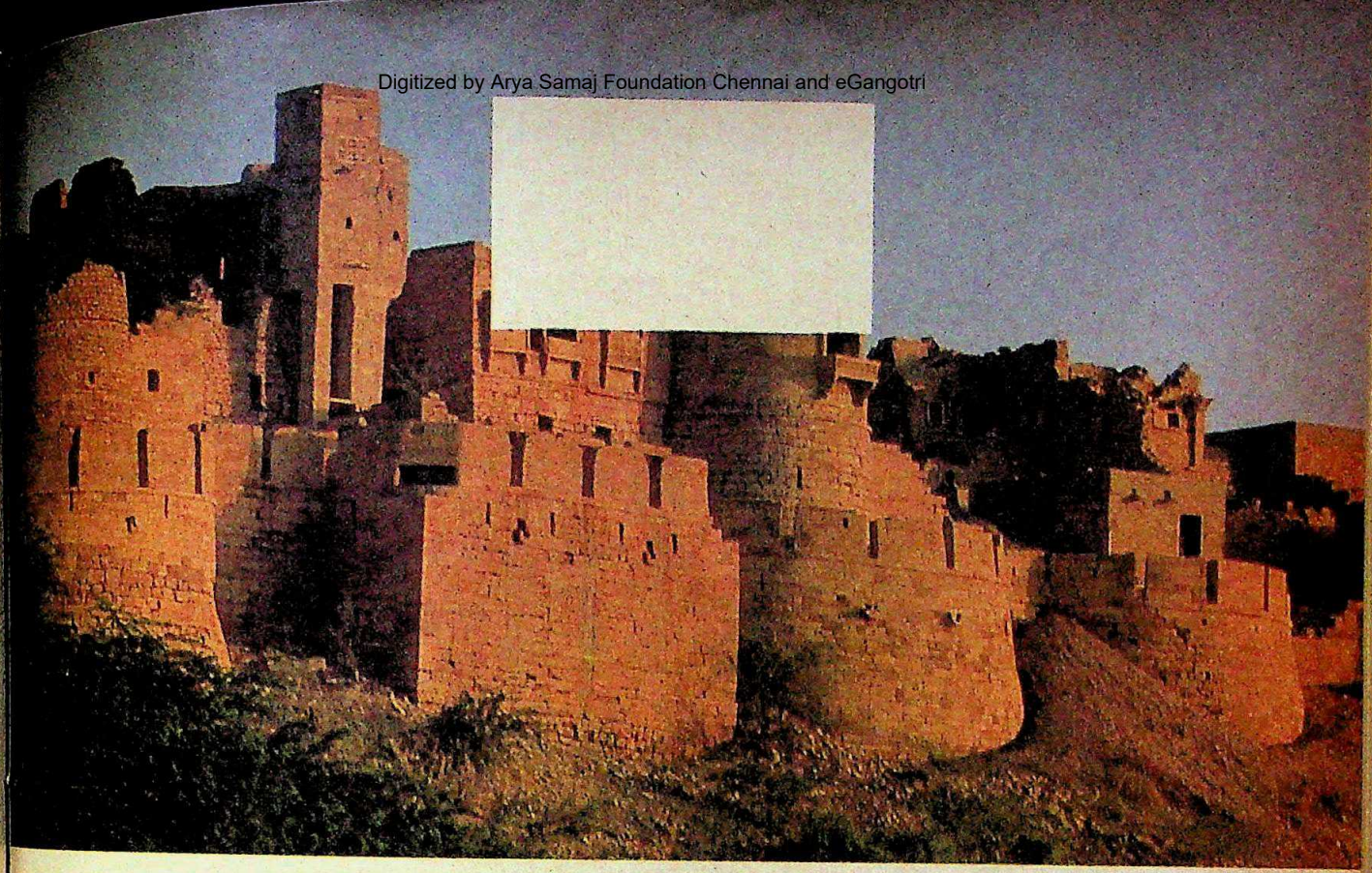

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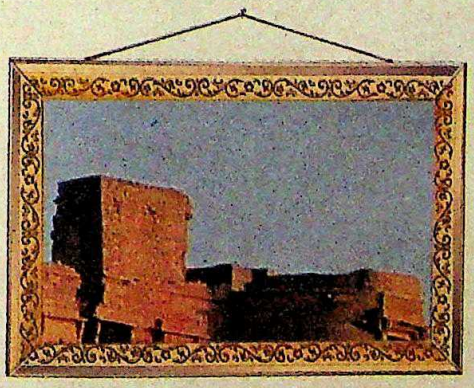

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(Indian Medical Gazette 118 223, 1984)

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SPORTSWEAR

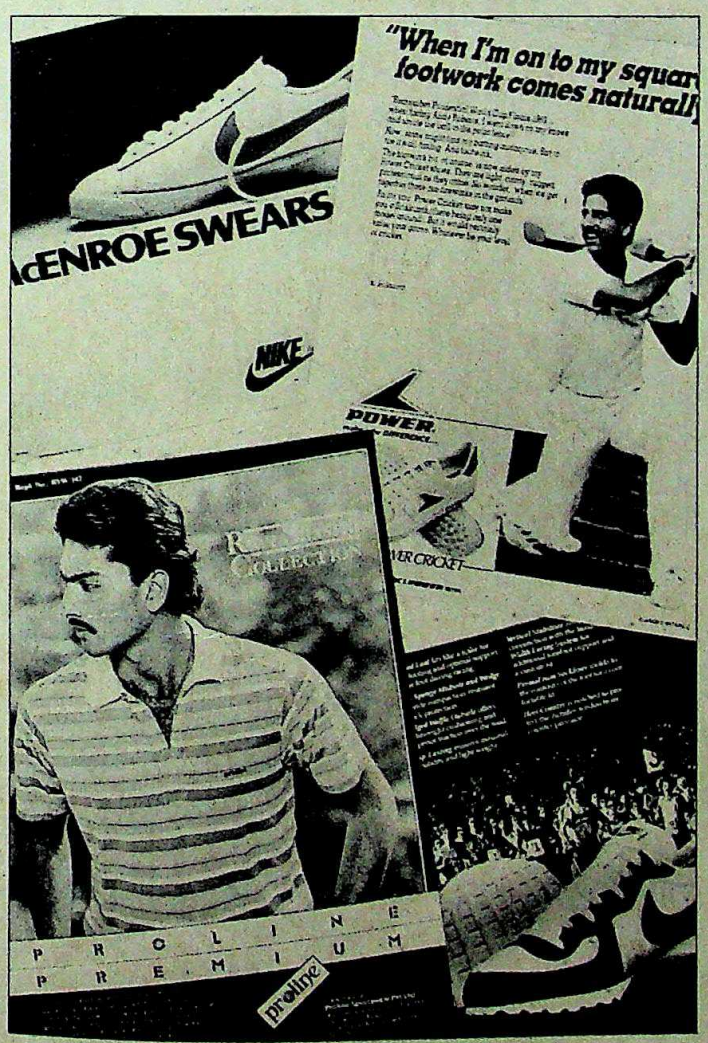
Getting into Stride

AMERICAN multinational Nike promises to kick off an altogether new ball game in the fledgling Indian sportswear industry if its application for a licence comes through. The company plans to team up with Burroughs Wellcome India Ltd to set up a sophisticated plant in Goa to manufacture quality sportswear. And if the buoyant state of the market is any indication, established smaller companies are in for a hefty dose of competition.

Burroughs Wellcome (India), with a turnover of Rs 45 crore, had been looking around for new areas of investment after diluting its foreign holding under the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act. Its tie-up with Nike (pronounced Naikey)—the world's second largest sportswear and sportsgear manufacturer after the West German Adidas—raised quite a few eyebrows since it was a totally unfamiliar field and the risks in an untested market like India were considerable. But Sudeepto Datta, Nike's representative in India who operates from a room crammed with Nike products and promotional material at the Wellcome head office in Bombay, is optimistic: "Nike was set up 11 years ago soon after health consciousness gained ascendancy in the US," he says. "I can see the same interest in keeping fit picking up in India. There's a big market for quality sportswear. Now we should stop treating sports as a hobby, it's a business."

His optimism is not entirely misplaced. For a long time the sportswear industry was synonymous with the ubiquitous canvas shoe from Bata and cotton T-shirts from Dawn, Fred Perry and Symonds. But Bata—perhaps the first to sense the shift towards a more sporty life-style—launched its Power range of sportswear and sportsgear in 1982 and hit the jackpot. Annual sales accelerated from Rs 50 lakh in the first year to over Rs 6 crore by the end of 1985. And Deepak Deshpande, Power brand manager, happily admits: "There's a 60 per cent increase in demand every year. We can't make as much as we can sell."

The entry of Nike will pose a direct challenge to Power since the former is likely to introduce a similar product range—running and specialised sports shoes, T-shirts, shorts, jogging and track suits and equipment for various sports and games. Nike will also bring in sophisticated, computerised product design and hi-tech manufacturing tech-



Collage of sportsgear advertisements: competitive edge

Gurus Deshpande, however, remains unfazed by the spectre of Power's domination coming under threat: "Bata can match Nike's high-tech inputs," he says, adding: "Anyway, competition can only raise the standard of the industry."

Sunil Gavaskar seems to concur. In fact, Gavaskar who had spotted the trend two years ago and opened "Sunny's Boutique" in Pune, pointed out that clothing quality is now comparable to what is available in the West. But based on his experience with the boutique, "a lot needs to be done as far as footwear is concerned. A wider range with different kinds of shoes for different requirements is needed. Nike could show the way".

The most visible trend in sportswear has been the improved quality and popularity of the T-shirt, which now comes in polyester cotton, and has virtually replaced the cotton bush shirt as the *sine qua non* of casual wear. Smash and Proline (with its Ravi Shastri ads) are the two brands that have done the most to make the Indian T-shirt respectable. Apeego's Anil Goel, who introduced Smash against strong opposition from dealers in 1981, said that there had been a hundred per cent expansion of the market in the last four years. "It is still too early to talk of a boom but a manufacturer can easily expect to sell 1 lakh T-shirts every year."

Established small companies in the field have benefited substantially from the market's expansion. V.G. Manke, who set up Fred Perry in collaboration with the British company of the same name in 1956, does Rs 14 lakh worth of business every year and N.R. Bhandarkar, regional manager in Bombay of the Allahabad-based Symonds, said that sales have shot up to Rs 35 lakh from less than Rs 1 lakh ten years ago. But sportsgear is still Symonds main product line (Rs 1.5 crore annually) and Bhandarkar admits that while the increase in sportsgear sales have not matched the rising demand for sportswear, it has still

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gone up by 10 to 25 per cent over the last four years. Dealers like S. Jagtiani of Bombay Sports and Sportique confirm this. The difference in demand for sportsgear and sportswear lies in the fact that Indians are more attracted to the idea of a sporty look rather than active participation in any game or sport.

The coming of Nike is bound to add that much more aura to the sporty lifestyle but Bhandarkar voiced the misgivings of the smaller manufacturers when he said that the Government should keep multinationals out to protect small companies. And Power's Deshpande added a note of caution when he pointed out that a clear picture had yet to emerge on the market for sports products in India—there has been no research worth the name and the market is very sensitive to product pricing. But Nike's entry is certain to add a competitive edge to the industry and put it firmly on the fast track.

—M. RAHMAN

ISLAMIC BANK

Interest Free

ISLAMIC banks are increasingly common across the Muslim world. Now secular India has joined the club, with the launching in Bangalore of the Al-Ameen Islamic Financial and Investment Corporation (India) Ltd (AIFICIL). Incorporated three months ago with an authorised capital of Rs 1 crore, the path-breaking venture began operations last fortnight in the two-storeyed Millia building on the city's busy Narasimha Raja Road—but not before it ran into unexpected hitches.

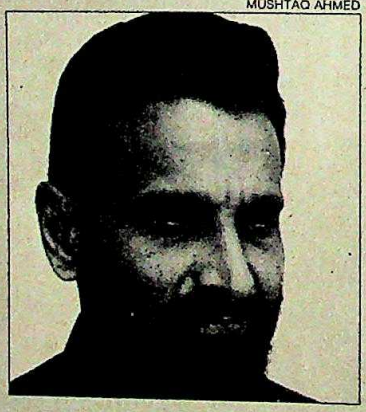
The Reserve Bank of India does not permit non-interest charging banks, so the promoters—including a Congress(I) member of the state legislative council—found a way around the hurdle; the bank would be registered under the Companies Act and would then collect deposits and give loans without offering or charging interest.

So, technically, AIFICIL is not a bank but a non-banking financial company. "But this is the nearest we can get to an Islamic bank," said K. Rehaman Khan, the Congress(I) MLC who is the corporation's managing director. The Koran expressly prohibits usury and so devout Muslims needed a nation-wide financial institution that follows Islamic principles, he argued.

Interest-free financial institutions run by Muslims already exist in the country, but these are either cooperative societies with limited resources and member-clients or *bayatal-mals* (public treasuries), small, unregistered, mutual help societies. So AIFICIL is touted as India's first commercial Islamic banking institution, and is getting set to open branches in Hyderabad, Madras and Calicut as the first steps in reaching for a national network.

SUBASH P. BAJAJ

MUSHTAQ AHMED



The bank's offices (above); and Mumtaz Ahmed: path-breaking

The brain behind the venture is the 45-year-old Mumtaz Ahmed Khan, the founder of the Al-Ameen group which runs a string of educational institutions, hospitals and an interest-charging Amanath Cooperative Bank. Having toyed with the idea of an Islamic Bank for many years, Ahmed Khan finally made up his mind after attending a world conference of Islamic Banks held in Islamabad in 1984. He suspects that he was invited to the conference only because the organisers mistook his bank for an Islamic one, but the opportunity helped him get invaluable information on Islamic banking. "Convinced that the idea was feasible I returned to India with plenty of literature and began work," said a clearly buoyant Ahmed Khan.

By last fortnight the corporation had collected Rs 40 lakh from non-resident Indians towards the authorised capital. The rest was being collected as equity shares of Rs 10 each, to be subscribed through small private placements but not by a public issue.

AIFICIL's key to survival, as in the case of other Islamic Banks all over the world, will be the principle of profit-sharing. Instead of getting interest on their deposits, the depositors will share the profits of ventures set up with AIFICIL's interest-free loans. The organisers point out that sharing profits is not the same thing as giving or taking interest. "Islam does not ban sharing of profits at all. We may also have to share the losses of a venture," Rehaman Khan pointed out. But he was confident that the idea would click as "we will be quite choosy about whom we give loans."

—SRINIVASA PRASAD

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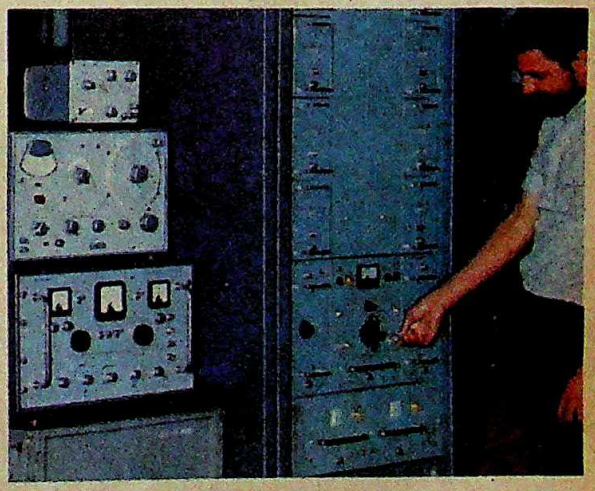

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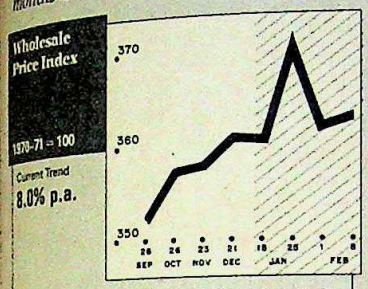
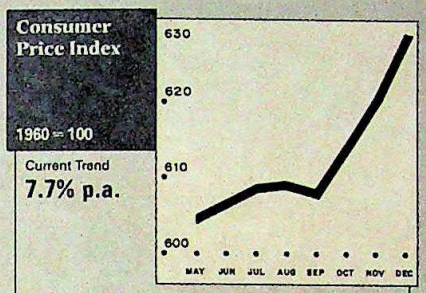
THE ERA of price stability is rapidly coming to an end. Exports are falling precipitously and imports are rising at a decidedly high rate and the trade gap was near Rs 799 crore in September. Money supply has risen marginally, but bank credit has tightened. The share-market rules steady while gold seems to be going out of fashion.

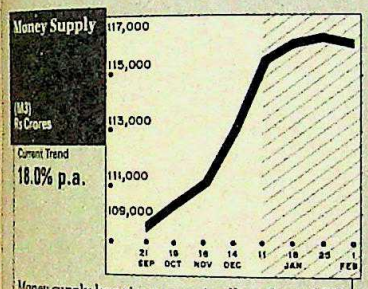
All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data to which regression are fitted.



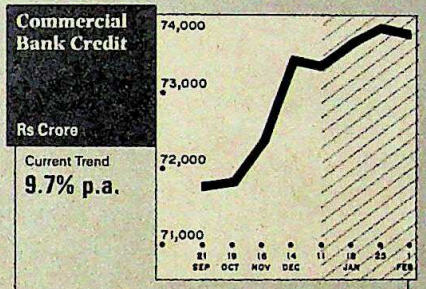
Wholesale prices have begun rising alarmingly, and these figures have not taken the new fuel prices into account.



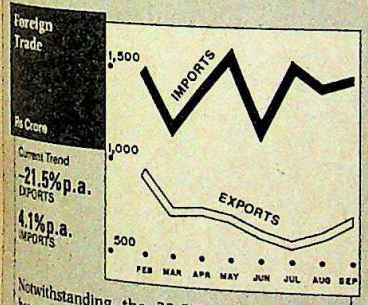
The picture in consumer prices is no better. The consumer price index has risen steadily and the increase is accelerating.



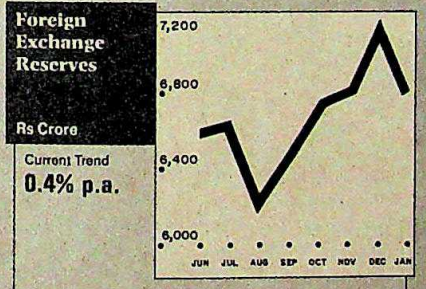
Money supply has risen marginally—from 17% to 18%. This is one variable that the Government seems to be keeping under tight control.



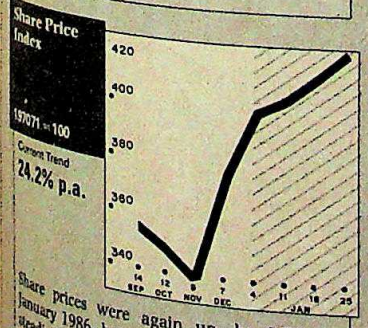
Commercial bank credit continues to tighten, from 11% to under 10%. This is largely due to a reduction in credit for foodgrain procurement.



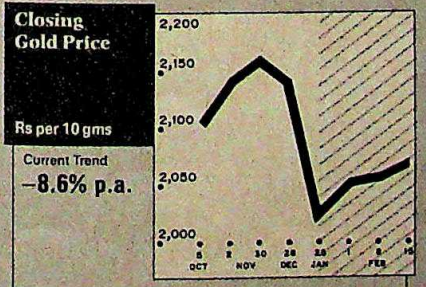
Notwithstanding the 23.5% rise in exports between July and September, exports are falling by 21.5% while imports are growing by 4%.



There was a 5% fall in foreign exchange reserves between December and January, reversing the growth between August and December.



Share prices were again up—by 5.7%—in January 1986, but the market seems to have steadied after its earlier frenetic pace.



An upturn in gold prices in February—by 0.8%—has done little to stop its slide. Savings may be moving out of gold, into other assets.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of Items in January, 1986

	%Growth
Cycles	31.50
Onions	19.75
Zinc	19.18
Tapioca	16.72
Coal	11.24
Gur	6.61
Groundnut Seeds	6.11
Steel Furniture	4.32
Atta	4.13
Maize	3.07
Rape & Mustard Seed	3.06
Pesticides & Insecticides	3.03
Cotton Raw	2.88
Transformers	2.57
Mustard Oil	2.57
Tobacco Raw	2.48
Bajra	2.22
Jute Textiles	2.18
Milk	2.06
Mining Machinery	1.98
Masoor	1.95
Eggs	1.89
Copra	1.78
Ragi	1.56
Utensils	1.06
Tyres	0.96
Bars & Rods	0.95
Pig Iron	0.95
Rails	0.93
Formulations	0.92
Cotton Seed	0.88
Semis Billets	0.86
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	0.86
Camel Back	0.85
Aluminium	0.84
Tractors	0.82
Jowar	0.79
Boilers	0.78
Steel Structurals	0.78
Industrial Instruments	0.77
Machine Tools	0.74
Sewing Machine	0.73
Plates & Sheets	0.72
Radio & T.V.	0.70
Electrical Motors	0.64
Tubes	0.64
Petrol	0.63

Of the 139 series considered, 77 of them with a total weight of 45.286 had a positive growth and 62 of them with a total weight of 41.34 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1986	1985
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, January	15686	14803
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, January	708	697
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, January	2866	2666
Crude Petroleum		
Thousand Tonnes, January	2761	2635
Petroleum Refinery Products		
Thousand Tonnes, January	3772	3043

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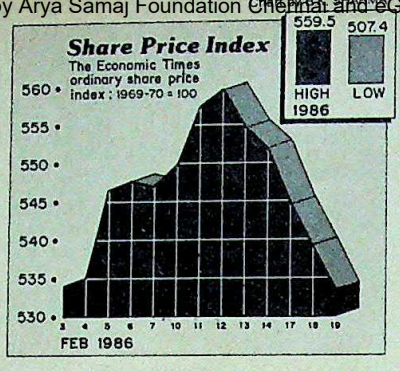
THE MARKETS

Blue Mood



WITH the time for the Union Budget having come around, the stock-markets finally began to show signs of nervousness last fortnight. The widespread reaction to the Government's recent price hike announcements dampened the mood further, while the disclosure that the Government had rejected the applications of several companies for producing cars resulted in shares like TELCO taking a nosedive while Escorts dropped by Rs 7 to Rs 74. Both shares are now close to their lowest points in the year.

Inevitably, bulls began to unload their holdings and shares registered losses on a wide front. Among the big losers were Baroda Rayon, Blow Plast, Brooke Bond, Cyanamid, Garware and National Organic. Gujarat State Fertiliser, which had been drummed up the previous fortnight on the expectations of a bonus issue, fell back by Rs 65 to Rs 1,505. However, some other counters—like SPIC and Premier Automobiles—came in for fresh buying on expectations of bonus issues. And TISCO improved following the Government decision to reduce the import duty on sponge iron from 70 per cent to 40 per cent; although the decision was meant to help mini-steel units, TISCO will also benefit. Real staying power was, meanwhile, displayed by Reliance whose share remained steady at its dizzy height of Rs 326 despite its mercurial chairman Dhirubhai Ambani, being hospitalised.

More unexpected were the developments on the new issues market, where half a dozen companies that floated shares in mid-February met with a poor response from the investing public. This may well have been because numerous share, debenture and bond issues have got crowded into the last quarter of the financial year, including large issues by some public sector giants. Nevertheless, the prices of some newly-listed shares also fell back, indicating a new mood among investors who had earlier been so enthusiastic about everything on offer that they seemed unable to distinguish between blue chips and potential duds.

The immediate future in terms of share price trends clearly depends on what Finance Minister V.P.Singh will have unveiled on February 28. His last budget had been noted for an absence of incentives meant specially for the investing community. For instance, the capital gains tax still dogs share investors and often comes in the way of financial institutions unloading their holdings. And the leading lights of the stock-market have argued vehemently for doing away with the deduction of tax at source on dividend payments. Marketmen were hoping last fortnight that if the finance minister gave concessions to industry last year, he would offer something to investors this time round.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1986 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 19.2.86	Change on Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	39.50	39.50	0.50 –
Associated Bearings	990.00	775.00	955.00	75.00 +
Associated Cement	386.00	346.00	372.00	2.00 –
Atlas Copco	92.50	77.00	88.50	3.00 –
Bajaj Auto	2280.00	1950.00	2260.00	246.00 +
Ballarpur	65.50	55.00	56.00	6.50 –
Baroda Rayon	490.00	410.00	420.00	50.00 –
Bata India	82.50	72.00	73.00	1.00 +
Bayer	680.00	445.00	640.00	70.00 +
Best & Crompton	106.00	84.00	102.50	0.50 +
Bharat Forge	86.00	67.00	69.00	5.00 –
Blow Plast	160.00	105.00	120.00	20.00 –
Blue Star	110.00	90.00	90.00	15.00 –
Bombay Dyeing	120.00	86.00	91.00	2.50 –
Brooke Bond	95.00	74.00	87.00	8.00 –
Ceat Tyres	450.00	240.00	450.00	65.00 +
Century Spinning	1690.00	1430.00	1635.00	5.00 –
Chloride India	122.00	99.00	103.00	2.00 –
Citurgia	65.00	50.00	50.00	9.00 –
Colgate	262.50	220.00	235.00	5.00 –
Cyanamid	100.00	70.00	84.00	9.00 –
DCM	58.50	41.50	43.00	3.50 –
Dunlop	74.50	49.75	68.00	2.00 +
Elecon Engg.	117.00	82.50	95.00	nil
Escorts	94.00	70.50	74.00	7.00 –
Food Specialities	270.00	235.00	252.50	7.50 –
Garware Nylon	61.50	41.00	43.00	6.00 –
Glaxo	87.00	68.00	76.00	1.00 +
G.E. Shipping	36.00	26.50	27.00	5.00 –
Gujarat St Fertilisers	1700.00	925.00	1505.00	65.00 –
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	80.00	82.50	2.50 –
Hindustan Lever	160.00	127.50	146.00	9.00 +
Hindustan Motors	128.50	120.00	124.50	nil
Indian Explosives	84.50	69.00	76.00	5.50 –
Indian Hotels	140.00	115.00	137.50	7.50 +
Indian Organic	90.00	78.50	81.50	3.50 –
Indian Rayon	151.00	119.00	134.00	10.00 +
Indrol	390.00	285.00	375.50	32.50 +
Ind. Suzuki	81.00	58.00	69.00	2.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	480.00	360.00	420.00	25.00 –
ITC	69.25	53.00	66.00	2.50 +
J K Synthetics	132.00	106.00	122.00	4.00 +
Kinetic Engineering	325.00	280.00	290.00	10.00 –
Kirloskar Cummins	715.00	590.00	590.00	70.00 –
Lakme	195.00	172.50	187.50	2.50 +
Larsen & Toubro	204.00	180.00	190.00	2.50 –
Lipton	69.00	46.50	63.50	3.00 –
Lohia Machines	70.00	60.00	62.00	4.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	72.00	73.00	6.00 –
Motor Industries	910.00	735.00	745.00	45.00 –
National Organic	777.50	585.00	692.50	80.00 –
Nirlon	77.00	57.00	59.00	12.00 –
Orkay Silk Mills	167.00	125.50	153.00	2.00 +
Peico Electronics	104.50	68.50	69.00	15.00 –
Premier Auto	745.00	632.50	692.50	25.00 +
Ranbaxy	160.00	115.00	141.00	11.50 –
Raymond	97.00	82.00	82.00	4.50 –
Reliance Industries	340.00	226.00	326.00	1.00 +
Sandoz	88.00	62.00	84.00	3.00 –
Shriram Fibres	88.00	71.00	81.00	2.50 +
SPIC	169.00	129.50	167.00	24.00 +
Tata Steel	1425.00	1142.50	1360.00	35.00 +
Telco	910.00	780.00	815.00	75.00 –
Vulcan Laval	162.50	85.00	142.50	7.50 +
Wimco	98.00	62.00	87.00	5.00 +
20th Century Leasing	77.50	55.00	63.00	1.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.8084	8.7674
Austria	Schilling	100	77.1121	76.3045
Bahrain	Dinar	1	32.9930	32.8770
Bangladesh	Taka	100	41.6719	41.0132
Canada	Dollar	1	8.8847	8.8497
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.4581	1.4548
Egypt	Pound	1	15.1020	15.0913
France	Franc	1	1.7513	1.7482
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5938	1.5888
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1130	1.0932
Iran	Rial	100	15.0092	14.8330
Italy	Lira	100	0.7817	0.7732
Japan	Yen	100	6.8965	6.8618
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7717	0.7706
Kuwait	Dinar	1	41.6332	41.1530
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.0497	5.0164
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8801	0.8732
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6092	0.6001
Netherlands	Guilder	1	4.7922	4.7725
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7810	0.7803
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.7899	5.7608
Spain	Peseta	1	0.8420	0.8310
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4330	0.4229
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.6930	1.6856
Switzerland	Franc	1	6.4866	6.4539
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7660	0.7559
Thailand	Baht	100	47.4400	47.3291
UK	Pound	1	17.9517	17.9163
USA	Dollar	1	12.3875	12.3650
UAE	Dirham	1	3.3932	3.2717
USSR	Rouble	1	12.5253	12.4839
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	5.4466	5.4347

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 20.2.86.

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The rich, regal look of Featherlite
Your home deserves nothing less

Lucky's Featherlite® Sponge Leather

Soft • Supple • Luxurious

Available in a stylish range of single and double shades in the various textures of textiles and leather. The perfect upholstery material for furniture that looks distinguished, feels luxurious. Also ideal for car seats, footwear, handbags, gloves, jackets, kiddies' garments and more. Featherlite is as beautiful as leather but cheaper and more practical, too — can be wipe cleaned.

From India's most modern plant. With technical assistance from Stork X-Cel of Holland.

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Incentive

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Sigma and ships?
Sure!

We've gone full steam ahead with a fleet of marine paints. Protecting them against the ravages of fouling. Sheltering them from the onslaught of the elements.

In fact, where there is a surface there is Sigma. Feeling top of the wall at home. Working overtime in offices. Coating steel furniture with shining armours. Dressing up heavy machinery with durable coats.

SIGMA PAINTS

We give surfaces a good start.

And a great finish.

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Renora/SP/186

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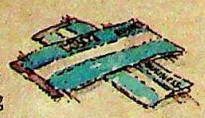
"A winner all the way via Amsterdam?"

"Yes! KLM has just announced their 'Win-on-the-Way' Bonanza!"

Bonanza is right!
Because a KLM flight to Amsterdam could easily mean a flight to the end of the rainbow. A treasure trove awaits you there. Come! Be a raider of the lost ark!



A Contest that could be a walkover for you! Try us.

If you're over 18 and flying KLM Royal or Business Class on an intercontinental flight with a same day transfer at Amsterdam, you will be eligible for this fabulous offer upto 22 March 1986. From Holland Promotion Foundation.

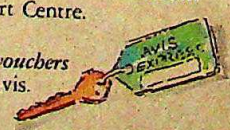
Look what you Win-on-the Way. It's simply, WOW!

5 Volvo 740 Turbo Estate Cars
The luxury car with more room, motoring comfort, quality and safety! What's more, it will be delivered in the country of the winner.

10 "Luxury Holland Holidays" for two
Including: Royal/Business Class flight, 4 nights in Amsterdam and 3 nights in a castle!

150 sparkling diamonds
From the world-famous Amsterdam Diamond House of "Samuel Gassan"!

100 Tax-free shopping vouchers
To spend in the Amsterdam Airport Centre.



100 Avis car rental vouchers
Free car-hire from Avis.

A surprise awaits those who do not win the above prizes.

It's so simple, you just can't miss!

At the airport, along with the boarding pass, collect your Exchange Coupon and the Winner Brochure.
So, when booking, schedule your itinerary so as to avail of this tempting offer!

Come! Win-on-the-Way (WOW). Over and over again.

Contact your travel agent, or call us at:

Ahmedabad 77677, Bangalore 28703, Bombay 221013, Calcutta 441221, Cochin 39165, Delhi 343998, Goa 2298, Hyderabad 36042, Jalandhar 76088 Madras 86356, Patna 25437, Pune 61358, Kathmandu 214895 and Dhaka 250357.

The Reliable Airline

KLM
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VAYUDOOT

Taking Off

IT STARTED out as the airline industry's poor cousin, using small aircraft to link remote towns often hard to reach by rail and road. But the way it has grown, the 'third airline' Vayudoot is edging its bigger brother, Indian Airlines (IA), out of a large part of the growing aviation market. In the last three years the fledgling feeder airline has added 42 stations to its original network of eight, and another 25 are to be included this year including Daman, Diu, Dhanbad, Agartala, Ajmer, Calicut, Jalandhar, Shimla, Thanjavur, Ganganagar, Gangtok and Konark.

Much of this growth has been at the cost of IA, which is giving up both aircraft and routes on its existing air map. Vayudoot started out by using borrowed turboprop aircraft to fly to small stations shunned by IA, often using staff borrowed from the domestic air industry's mother goose. The general manager at that time—an IA pilot concurrently looking after Vayudoot—was quite content to play second fiddle to IA. The result was that Vayudoot did not grow beyond its subsidiary role during this period.

Two developments have forced Vayudoot to emerge from under IA's wing—the appointment as chief executive of Air-India executive Harsh Vardhan, who had his own ideas on how to develop the third airline, and the recommendations of the Government-appointed Billimoria Committee, which suggested that Vayudoot take over the entire turboprop fleet of IA and routes with traffic below 50 per day.

Alongwith that came the decision to equip Vayudoot with basic commuter aircraft. Five new Dornier 19-seaters have already arrived and another five are expected by end-1986. The transfer of IA turboprops to Vayudoot starts this month with four aircraft being handed over. Eventually almost the entire 17-plane fleet of HS 748 Avros and Fokker F 27s is to be transferred, along with some of the turboprop routes.

But among the several disputes dogging all this is one over price: Vayudoot wants the planes to be transferred at book value—which is 1 per cent of the purchase cost—while IA wants the much higher price. Another is IA's complaint that the engineering and maintenance staff currently looking after the turboprops will stay with it while the revenue will be reduced. IA has asked that some of Air-India's routes be transferred to it to compensate for the loss of revenue from the routes being handed over to the third airline.

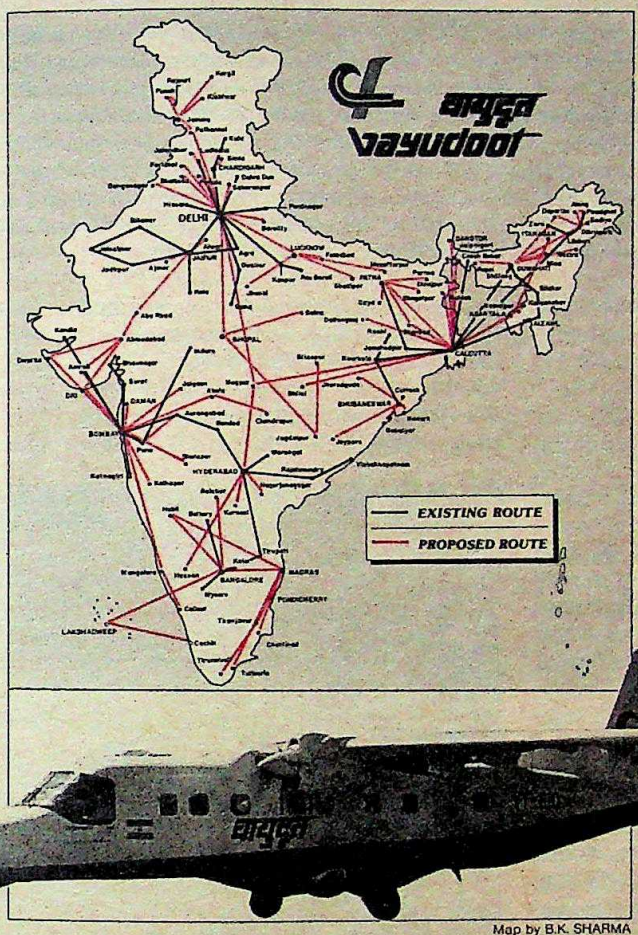
Vayudoot's desire to avoid expanding its staff infrastructure is understandable—it has so far managed to make a profit from the turboprops. Says Vardhan: "Our low overheads, which includes crew and maintenance costs come to only 5 per cent compared to around 30 per cent in IA. This is our saving grace." This enables Vayudoot to make money from the same turboprops which rang up a loss of Rs 13 crore in 1983-84 for IA. But the breakneck expansion that is on the cards may force Vayudoot to increase spending on infrastructure and enter the same overheads spiral which afflicts IA.

Nevertheless, this leaves IA with a problem of surplus staff. But an aviation specialist argued that this should be temporary: "The airline will be receiving a new type of aircraft, the Airbus A 320, in three years and it should pay attention to training its staff for it."

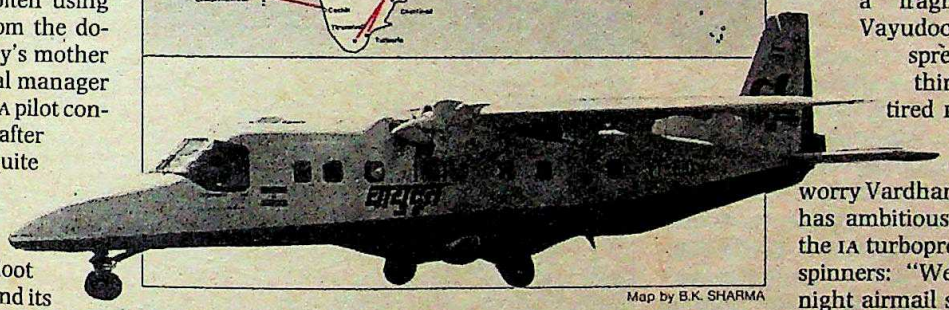
Vayudoot may be ecstatic about the turboprop windfall, but there are some doubts as to whether its skeleton organisation—with a staff strength of only 400—will be able to absorb the additional planes. "It's a fragile structure, Vayudoot has already spread itself quite thin," said a retired IA official. But doubts like these do not worry Vardhan, who already has ambitious plans to use the IA turboprops as money-spinners: "We will start a night airmail service for the P&T Department which will fetch us a profit of Rs 2 crore on a revenue of Rs 9 crore and also introduce the 40-seater turboprops on routes where traffic has grown." With that, he hopes his airline will make a "modest profit of Rs 1 crore in 1986-87", an improvement over the Rs 60 lakh loss in the current year.

Meanwhile, Vayudoot is already looking ahead of the present phase and setting up an aircraft evaluation committee to select turboprop replacements. The aircraft under consideration are the 50-seater Fokker F 50 (an extended version of the F 27), the 47-seater Aerospatiale ATR 42, the 62-seater British Aerospace ATP (an extended, re-engined version of the HS 748) and the 36-seater Saab Fairchild 340. If all these plans work out well, the 'third level airline' that had just five years ago been dismissed as unviable will have proved its critics completely wrong.

—RAMINDAR SINGH



Map by B.K. SHARMA



The Dornier 228: spreading wings

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HEROIN ADDICTION

Hitting New Highs

THE MYTH that drugs went out of fashion along with long hair and hippies has been unobtrusively exploded in India. An epidemic of heroin addiction is sweeping through the country. Even as psychiatrists and officials watch in horror, the plague has spread with amazing rapidity and hit almost every section of society—students, young professionals, taxi-drivers, petty vendors and even government officials. Hospitals in the major cities, ill-equipped to deal with the problem, have only now started recording the toll. The problem has acquired more dangerous dimensions with the large-scale influx of heroin into India leading to inexpensive availability. To analyse the dimensions of the problem Prinicipal Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA *spent several days in Delhi and Bombay talking to a number of addicts, psychiatrists, social workers and drug enforcement officials, while bureau reports from Calcutta, Madras and Bangalore added a national perspective of the problem. His report:*

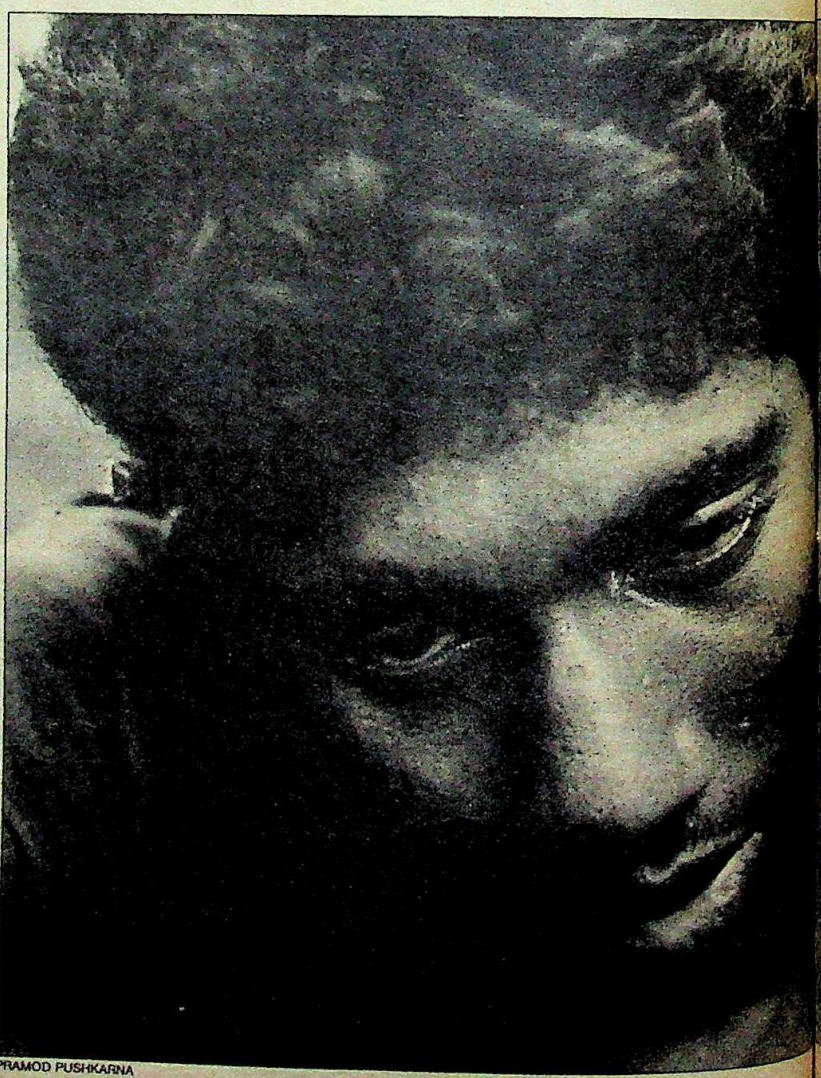
KANWAR Sandhu, an air force officer in Delhi, had no idea what the packet of brown chalklike powder lying under his 17-year-old son Prithi's mattress was. "Nothing dad, just some stuff," was the reply to his innocent query. Two months later Sandhu, leafing through an article in a magazine, realised what it was—an impure form of heroin called smack or brown sugar. By then Prithi had been taking it for two years and is now being treated in a private clinic for severe withdrawal symptoms of heroin addiction. Prithi will be missing his 12th standard examinations.

Nor did Narayan Das, 22, a fish monger in Calcutta's busy Park Circus Market know what smack was when a friend offered him a cigarette containing heroin almost a year ago. He just knew that it made him forget all his worries. A fortnight later when his friend stopped giving it to him his body ached, his eyes and nose watered and he felt listless. Only when he inhaled smack did relief come. Ever since then he has been hooked on to the drug and spends his daily earning of Rs 40 on smack. Says Narayan Das: "My mother often cries and my father begs me to leave it and take to liquor instead. But I just can't give it up."

When friends gave Ashok, 25, a Bombay taxi-driver, smack two years ago they told him it would give him *"nasha"* (intoxication). He likes it so much that he now spends Rs 70 daily on smack and when he ran out of money, he sold his taxi and even hawked his wife's *mangalasutra*. His brother brought him to K.E.M. General Hospital in a delirious state last fortnight.

Three years ago hardly anyone heard of smack addicts. But today it has become the number one problem concerning officials and psychiatrists combating drug addiction in the country. Bombay psychiatrist Anand Nadkarni of K.E.M. General Hospital, which treated 812 addicts last year, says: "Heroin addiction is spreading like some kind of guerrilla movement. It hasn't made a frontal attack but the deeper you go into the problem the more you realise how much it is entrenched in the country." Adds a worried C.B. Sujaya, joint secretary, Union Social Welfare Ministry: "Even before we could get down to doing something about the problem it has already assumed massive proportions."

Major hospitals in the country have already begun recording the toll:



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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▸ In four major government hospitals in Delhi—which treated only 50 patients in 1982—almost 3,000 addicts came for treatment last year and 1,000 of them had to be refused admission because of lack of beds.

▸ Three government hospitals in Bombay treated 2,500 addicts last year. However, only 1,000 could be admitted for treatment.

▸ While in Calcutta an estimated 200 addicts sought treatment, reports from the neighbouring north-eastern states is perhaps the most worrying. In the state of Manipur alone, 256 people, many of them girls in their teens, had to undergo intensive treatment for smack addiction last year.

▸ The problem has spread even to the southern states and hospitals in Madras and Bangalore have treated over 200 addicts in the past year.

But these figures are only the tip of the iceberg because researchers estimate that only one out of every 10 addicts come for treatment. Police intelligence puts the number of addicts in the country at a conservative 1 lakh which is increasing at the rate of 15,000 every year and psychiatrists are already talking of a heroin plague sweeping the country. At the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), which treated a record 1,044 patients last year—up from 325 in the previous year—psychiatrist Davinder Mohan said dolefully: "What we are seeing is an epidemic that is growing in geometric progression. And it is still to peak."

The epidemic is not immediately apparent because it has no stereotype addicts—like the jeans-clad, long-haired hippie who symbolised the drug subculture in the West. In India heroin with its deadly addictive qualities has become the great leveller, enslaving students like Prithi, auto-rickshaw and taxi-drivers like Ashok and petty vendors like Narayan. It has not spared factory workers, young professionals, government officials and businessmen either.

Xavier, 19, has been taking heroin for the past three years. He dropped out of school and now works as a car mechanic to have his daily dosage of a gramme of smack costing Rs 40. He has been admitted to hospital several times but just cannot kick the heroin habit.

"It's like having one foot on a banana peel and the other in the grave. All I need is a push."

In Delhi and Bombay, where heroin addiction has reached serious levels, studies show that the problem has hit all sections uniformly. In Calcutta it is the lower income groups like petty shop owners, taxi-drivers and vendors who have been badly affected while students are now getting hooked on to the smack bug too. But in Madras it is mostly students who come for treatment. What is alarming is that a majority of the addicts coming for treatment are males in the age group of 16 to 25—in the prime of their youth. Trapped in heroin's acrid fumes, they have been reduced to the level of zombies willing to resort to anything, even crime to pay for their daily fix.

Unlike in the US where the heroin plague swept the country in the '60s as an avant garde phenomenon, psychiatrists are hard put to explain the dramatic rise in addiction levels. At G.B. Pant Hospital, New Delhi, which treated 910 addicts last year, psychiatrist G.C. Munjal has a simple answer: "Availability and low prices." Munjal has a point. In most major cities smack, the impure form of heroin, has become as easy to buy as an aspirin tablet.

IN DELHI'S congested Paharganj, almost every bylane has a hut where both men and women will sell a "quarter" (quarter gramme of smack) for Rs 15. The slums of Dhongri, Tardeo and Dharavi in Bombay have any number of pushers peddling drugs in the streets and the code word is either "powder" or "smack". Calcutta police raided a number of paan shops recently after it was rumoured that they were adding small quantities of brown sugar in *zarda* paans. Smack is openly sold in the streets of West Anna Nagar and First Line Beach in Madras and in Bangalore, the crowded bylanes of City and Russel Markets are the key centres.

Falling prices—from Rs 50 for 25 milligrammes two years ago to a low Rs 10 to Rs 15 now—is what attracted Shreekant Godbole, 30, a small restaurant owner in Bombay's dockside. Godbole, a heavy drinker, found that heroin was cheaper and more intoxicating than alcohol. An added advantage was that his breath did not smell and his parents couldn't easily detect his new addiction. Like Godbole a majority of those who tried heroin had no idea about its addictive potential or its harmful effects and psychiatrist L.P. Shah of K.E.M. Hospital says: "Most of them take to it innocently and are ignorant about its dangers."

But if smack is so freely and cheaply available it is mainly because India has become a major transit centre for heroin smuggling. Narcotics officials estimate that every year 3,000 kg to 5,000 kg are smuggled into India from Pakistan's North West Frontier Province through the porous borders of Punjab and Rajasthan and then smuggled out again to Europe from Bombay and Delhi. India's experience is beginning to match that of other transit countries which sooner or later became centres of high drug addiction. In 1980, Pakistan, one of the principal trafficking centres had no addicts.

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Today it has five lakh. Sufficient warning for India which first 'discovered' smack barely four years ago.

However, not everyone is convinced that the heroin plague is caused mainly by availability and low prices—especially the poor. Shah's colleague Nadkarni, who treated 57 cases of slum children addicted to heroin, found that most of them exhibited a fierce independence unusual for their age.(*see box*) The parents were too busy slaving it out for a living to worry about their children, who anyway worked at various odd-jobs and had money to spend. With traditional social controls and values breaking down and exposed to an unusual degree of stress at a tender age, these children took to tobacco, alcohol and finally drugs like heroin in an attempt to lighten the load. The adult addicts seem to have grown up in a similar environment singularly bereft of hope and Nadkarni says: "This is the price we have to pay for urbanisation."

Sheikh Nawaz Khan, 27, of Calcutta whose dreams of becoming a photographer are slowly evaporating took to smack three years ago to kill "my boredom". Ever since then he has done a lot of jobs to support his addiction—like driving taxis, working on ships and even being a nightwatchman. His family has disowned him but Khan says:"I just can't live without smack and I have no money for treatment."

But among college students where a drug subculture always existed, the major reason for being hooked onto smack is, as psychiatrist Alan D'Souza of Bombay's J.J. Hospital puts it: "Intense peer group pressure." While in the '70s it was ganja, hashish and LSD that were the rage among students, in the '80s with the prices of heroin dropping to about that of a bottle of beer smack is the in-thing. "It has become fashionable for students to smoke heroin," laments Moonis Raza ,vice-chancellor of Delhi University.

Raza reports that heroin addiction is "acquiring serious proportions" in the more prestigious colleges in Delhi and the habit is beginning to trickle down to other colleges. Bombay University found that heroin addiction among students had become so acute that the authorities have formed a drug addiction cell to chalk out programmes to educate students about its ills and declared January 28 as anti-drug day. In Madras, student councillors estimate that at least 15 per cent of the students had tried smack at some time or the other and at least 7 per cent have become regulars.

One such victim is Rajiv, 22, a commerce student who used to smoke grass alongwith his friends and tried smack because it was easily available and, as he put it, to "feel elitist." Within a year he was so completely hooked that he had to drop out of college. Madras-based psychiatrist S. Vijayakumar says: "Initially they smoke in groups but later it becomes a totally individual addiction. Then their grades in college come plummeting down."

Most parents find out about their children's addiction to smack a good year after they first started smoking it and the discovery is also accidental—they find that the child suddenly shuns all company, borrows plenty of money and sometimes steals articles from the house. Sandhu, the air force officer, had no clue that Prithi was taking it because there seemed to be no obvious physical symptoms. He began to suspect something only when Prithi began to spend hours in the bathroom—a favourite smoking place for addicts.

"Most of them took to it without knowing its harmful effects."
DR I.-P. SHAH
K.E.M. Hospital, Bombay

But for others like Sunita, wife of autorickshaw-driver Devinder Kumar of west Delhi's Kirtinagar, the experience could be far more traumatic. Initially the only signs was that Kumar preferred to stay alone in his room all day and did not play with their two children. But things got worse when he stopped giving her money to run the house. Then he started selling her jewellery and finally sold his autorickshaw saying that he was not earning enough. He usually flew into a rage when Sunita protested. "It had reached such a stage that I wondered what was going to happen to my children and I wanted to commit suicide," she said. Fortunately her father-in-law intervened and Kumar was admitted to the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital for treatment last fortnight.

So powerful is the craving for heroin that addicts stop at nothing to get their daily dose. Stan, a 19-year-old Bombay school drop out, steals coconuts from trees in neighbouring residential colonies and sells them to pay for his daily dose. He has already been arrested thrice for being in possession of drugs and been in prison for 10 days. Deepak, 24, a former Delhi export firm representative, shamefacedly remembers that he used to pilfer money from bus conductors bags.

Many of the addicts turn peddlars too like Mohammad Daoud, a taxi-driver who was arrested in January by the Bombay police for allegedly selling heroin. Daoud has been on heroin for the past two years and he started ped-

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When he first took smack Ashwini Shukla, 25, a Delhi sales executive thought: "I wouldn't be dumb enough to get hooked on to this stuff." A year later he was borrowing from friends, selling his watch , his tape recorder and even his sweater to buy the stuff. His mother is disgusted with him. Ashwini,who lost his job recently,now says:"No one trusts me anymore. There is no where I can go for help."

ding the stuff after he found that his income of Rs 40 a day just could not meet his expensive habit as well as feed his five children. Jail authorities in Imphal, the capital of Manipur, have appointed a psychiatrist to their panel of medical specialists after two addicts—arrested for peddling drugs—committed suicide in jail because they could not get their daily dose. And in Delhi, police say that a third of the petty robberies in the capital are committed by smack addicts with chain-snatching being their specialty.

It is only when they run out of money, start borrowing and stealing or their health fails that most addicts seek medical help. Unfortunately what most of them do not realise is that facilities for treating addicts in the country are woefully inadequate. Treating an addict not only involves first putting the patient under two weeks of detoxification but also a follow up for at least six months to rehabilitate the patient completely.

Delhi's four government hospitals treating addicts have only 40 beds as a result a majority of the 3,000 addicts last year had to be treated as outpatients. Psychiatrist R.C. Jiloha of G.B. Pant Hospital which has only four beds to offer to the 350 addicts who came for treatment last year, says dejectedly: "What we do in hospitals is only count heads. There is no proper follow up and rehabilitation of patients and as a result relapse rates are high." In Bombay's J.J. Hospital, which gets an average of 100 patients a month, D'Souza reports that the relapse rate was a high 75 per cent.

More important than the detoxification programme is the rehabilitation therapy which involves not only giving time for the patient to recover physically but also hold group therapy sessions with other recovering addicts so that they could face the world again. Most addicts who have been on heroin for more than three years lose weight rapidly, suffer from congested lungs and heart trouble—all requiring prolonged intensive care which is simply not available in government hospitals.

Consequently, private de-addiction clinics have mushroomed especially in Delhi and Bombay. They are expensive and meant only for the middle and upper income groups. Most of them charge around Rs 2,000 for a course of treatment and then ask the patient to visit them once a week for counselling spread over six months. Each sitting costs Rs 50 and in all including medicines, an addict's family might have to spend around Rs 5,000 for getting him out of the habit.

Costs such as these are beyond the reach of most addicts and even for those who could afford it the chances of a complete cure are slim. Calcutta psychiatrist D.N. Nandy, who runs a de-addiction clinic, says: "The important factor is motivation and if there is a person—a psychiatrist, friend or a person of the opposite sex who empathises with the addict—the cure is almost automatic."

But that is easier said than done because most of the addicts have borrowed heavily from their parents and friends, stolen articles, broken off friendships and in general isolated themselves from society. Most of them have lost their jobs and few are willing to employ an ex-addict.

Looking for ways to tackle heroin addiction psychiatrists are beginning to stress the need for exclusive rehabilitation centres for smack addicts relying on former addicts as cousellors. One such centre was started two years ago by Sahara, a private voluntary organisation in Delhi's Greater Kailash Extension. The centre, run by social workers Neville and Elizabeth Selhore, admits addicts for a minimum period of six months charging them Rs 1,000 a month. Says Neville: "You won't find white coats and spotless corridors here. We don't treat our inmates as junkies. We treat them like friends and make them feel as if they belong. It is almost like home."The addicts are put on a regimen which includes exercises and group therapy under the guidance of former addicts and are taught to live a disciplined and responsible life.

While rehabilitation centres like Sahara are steps in the right direction, many more are needed to cope with the flood of addicts. The Union Government would have to be involved in a big way but so far it has done precious little to alleviate the problem. Its approach is more preventive than rehabilitation. In a belated move to study the magnitude of the problem, the Welfare Ministry has sponsored a survey in nine major cities in the country. While the results are likely to be out by summer, the Union Gov-

"What is lacking is a national effort to halt the trend."

DR D. MOHAN
AIIMS, New Delhi

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TEENAGE ADDICTION

Starting Young

AT THEIR age they should have been expending their energy in the playgrounds or the classroom. Instead Suresh Gangurde and his friend Anil Devpude, both 12 years old, spend their time lolling listlessly near their ramshackle huts in the slums of Ramabhainagar on the dusty Thane highway in Bombay. Their glazed eyes, emaciated frames and stunted growth tell their own pitiful story—for well over two years they had been addicted to smack and when they gave it up barely two months ago, the withdrawal effects nearly killed them and they had to be admitted to hospital.

They had been introduced to smack by an older boy working in one of the many illicit liquor stills in the slum. "It was a strange, peaceful experience," Anil recalls, "I forgot about everything and felt the world was a lovely place." They began buying the drug at Rs 5 a vial from Kishan Jhagde, 40, the local charas dealer. They were soon hooked onto the stuff and dropped out of school.

They are not the only ones. In Bombay's teeming slums and elsewhere across the country, reports and social research indicates the most frightening aspect of drug addiction—the abnormally large number of teenage addicts. Hospitals report that at least a quarter of the addicts coming for treatment to hospitals are in their teens. In Delhi psychiatrists G.C.Munjal and R.C.Jiloha of G.B. Pant Hospital, who made a study of adolescent drug addicts recently found that a disturbing 21 per cent of the total addicts who had come to the hospital for treatment were under 19 years of age with a staggering 40 per cent of them being school dropouts. Warns a worried Munjal: "It's a dangerous sign and it is likely to degenerate to more grave levels if the prevailing trend continues."

When Bal Varsha Prathisthan (BVP), a local social work organisation began work a year ago in Ramabhainagar it was shocked to find that more than 200 of the slumchildren were hooked on brown sugar and most of them had taken to petty crime to pay for their daily fix. A nearby transit camp offered mute testimony to their situation—houses in the camp had been stripped completely off its asbestos roofs, drainpipes, doors, windows and even water taps by boys from the slum to buy brown sugar. Addicts had also taken to pilfering goods from loaded trucks parked on the highway at night.

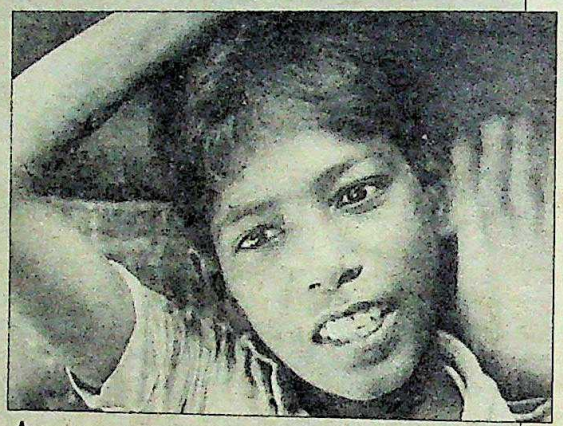
While initially Anil and Suresh did oddjobs for bootleggers to pay for their smack needs, later they took to petty crime. Says an unabashed Anil: "We used to steal whatever we could lay our hands on from shops—saris, groceries everything."

Other boys have equally traumatic tales to narrate. Gautam Yeshwante, 15, who lives nearby got hooked onto smack two years ago and dropped out of ninth standard. His father, a welder in a pipe company, tried to use force to stop him. "He tied me to a post and beat me black and blue in front of everyone. But I still couldn't give it up," says Gautam.

As a first step BVP decided to send the children for detoxification. Since November last 40 boys, including Anil, Suresh and Gautam, have been treated at the K.E.M. General Hospital nearby. Psychiatrist Anand Nadkarni of K.E.M. who treated them recalls: "Anil's withdrawal was severe. His blood sugar level dropped dangerously and he was close to death." Even when he was delirious Anil kept moving his fingers as if he was rolling a cigarette filled with smack—indicating how badly the boys had been hooked onto the stuff.

The boys now undergo group therapy sessions in a tin-roofed shack which also serves as a Bal Wadi. During these sessions addicts discuss their personal experiences, play indoor games and go on excursions. Both Anil and Suresh have been off smack since the last two months but the battle is far from won. Peddlars continue to sell drugs freely and the BVP has ample reason to fear danger to rehabilitation programmes. Says a dispirited BVP Executive Director Rajeev Kanitkar: "There very little hope for the child addicts. Many of them have lost their psychological balance and employers and schools are not willing to take them back. If these boys cannot find work or go back to school they will slip back again."

—M. RAHMAN



At 12 most children are bubbling with life but Suresh Gangurde of Ramabhainagar in Bombay looks glazed. Onto smack since he was 10, Devpude, son of a domestic servant soon dropped out of school. He took to stealing to get money to buy smack and almost died of severe withdrawal symptoms of heroin addiction.

"It's a dangerous sign and it's likely to degenerate."

DR G.C. MUNJAL
G.B. Pant Hospital

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ernment is taking measures to combat the menace. It has set up an inter-ministerial group consisting of officials from the health, welfare, education, finance and home departments to chalk out ways of checking the heroin spiral.

So far it has come up with very few answers. The Health Department had sent circulars too all government hospitals to convert a part of their psychiatric wards into de-addiction clinics but only few of them have taken heed because there are not enough beds for patients suffering from other afflictions. The Human Resources Development Ministry has asked schools and colleges all over the country to launch campaigns against drug abuse but has met with little success. The Welfare Ministry has sponsored seven de-addiction cells in Delhi where addicts can seek help.

But the government's efforts seem to be concentrated in Delhi where ministers are more liable to ask questions. Hardly any effort is being made to combat the problem in the other cities. Says Davinder Mohan: "Right now everyone seems to be only worried about keeping their own backyards neat. What is lacking is a national effort to halt the trend."

Fortunately prevention of drug peddling is at last getting the attention it deserves. In Delhi the police upgraded its narcotics cell by putting an assistant commissioner in charge alongwith six sub-inspectors and 10 constables. And action was not long in coming. Arrests of smack peddlars jumped up dramatically from 1,313 in 1984 to 2,559 last year. Bombay police too arrested 920 peddlars last year compared to a measly 250 in 1984. And in distant Imphal, the drug enforcement cell with a police superintendent in charge arrested 419 peddlars last year as compared to 79 in the previous year. But police all over catch only the small peddlars and not the big fish.

And even as measures tightened up, the peddlars became more professional and organised. A worried Delhi Police Commissioner Ved Marwah said: "There seems to be a growing nexus between narcotics and organised crime and terrorism." His worst fears about smack financing terrorism was confirmed when five months ago police arrested Jagdish Singh Narielwala, who is allegedly involved in the Delhi transistor bomb case, in a lodge in Paharganj whose owner is a well-known heroin smuggler. In Bombay Additional Commissioner of Police T.S. Sengarvel says: "Many of the traditional criminals like robbers and conmen are getting into the drug peddling business."

SYMPTOMS

Tell Tale Signs

NOTHING summarises the feeling heroin users get as the word smack itself. When its acrid fumes are inhaled either through a cigarette filter or by 'chasing' it—a fascinating technique by which powdered smack is placed on a silver foil and heated and its vapours inhaled through a pipe–the user feels an immediate "rush" of exhilaration. He may then go "on the nod" fluctuating between alertness and drowsiness.

Initially heroin gives the user a feeling of well being and even increases his sexual appetite. But within six months its ills start manifesting itself. There is a tremendous loss of weight and general weakness. Lungs could become congested, the heart lining is infected and gastric problems are frequent. Sexual appetite diminishes considerably. An overdose of heroin can lead to death.

It is difficult to detect a heroin addict except that the pupils of his eyes remain pinpoints even at night. But there are marked changes in his behaviour. An addict usual becomes an introvert, preferring to live in his own fantasy world, spends long times in bathrooms where usually most of them have their morning and evening doses and become restless and irritable when the effects of the drugs wear off.

While initially less than a quarter of a gramme could give a user the required high as tolerance grows he might need as much as one gramme. Once hooked a user has to have his daily dose otherwise he would suffer severe withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms, known as 'cold turkey', leads to the addicts' eyes watering, profuse sweating and severe body pain.

Treatment involves first detoxification by putting the patients on a week long regimen of tranquilisers to control the withdrawal symptoms. But the more crucial part is the follow up and rehabilitation because the craving for heroin can continue for as long as five years.

Psychiatrists are concerned and Delhi's Avdesh Sharma says: "If we don't cut down its availability then we would be just banging our heads on walls."

In a determined effort to curb peddling of smack in the country and check smuggling, the Central Government pushed through in record speed the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act last November. The long-awaited legislation strengthened the powers of enforcement agencies and introduced harsher penalties for drug traffickers.

While previously a convicted narcotics smuggler would get a maximum of three years imprisonment, under the new Act for the first offence itself he could incur a prison sentence of not less than 10 years up to a maximum of 20 years and a fine of Rs 1 lakh. For the second offence one could get upto 30 years. The Act has also given more powers to enforcement agencies like the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Customs and Excise Departments, Narcotics Commissioner and the Central Bureau of Investigation. Previously these agencies could only make arrests in exit points like ports and airports but under the new Act they can seize heroin and arrest offenders anywhere in country.

Already these measures have started paying dividends. In the past four months the various narcotics agencies have already seized 1,000 kg of heroin which is more than the total of 880 kg seized in the last three years. Much of this was contributed by the haul of 615 kg of heroin worth six crores made by the DRI from from an abandoned farmhouse in Talasari near Bombay in early January. It is now acknowledged as the world's largest ever and the DRI is thinking of submitting a claim to the Guinness Book of Records. But while seizures have risen dramatically, the enforcement agencies have not been able to arrest the big fish so far and till they do that there is unlikely to be any let up in the trafficking.

But among most officials combating drug trafficking, a sense of resignation about heroin has already set in. Says B.V.Kumar, DRI director-general: "We can probably curb heroin trafficking but we can't stop it altogether. We can only make it more difficult for smugglers to operate." And much the same thought is reflected by psychiatrist Davinder Mohan when he says: "The current steep rise of heroin may drop if checked but it would then reach a plateau and whether we like it or not heroin addiction is here to stay." And for India there couldn't be worse news.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA with bureau reports

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UNITED KINGDOM

Making News

ONE of the most enduring images on television screens in Britain in recent weeks have been that of small knots of people gathered in the lancing wintry chill outside a barbed wire fortress protected by the police.

Night after night, viewers watched as blurred figures walked past the coils of barbed wire and crossed into 10-foot electronically controlled gates covered by swivelling security cameras. Police, supported by private security men, guard the entrance. There are ramps to block vehicles, searchlights, shadowy, half-visible men photographing visitors from an empty factory next door.

This is no high-powered East-West exchange of spies on the Berlin border. The men, hunched up against the drizzle, are journalists of *The Times* and *The Sun* entering their new high-tech plant branded "Fortress Wapping" or "Fort Murdoch". The protesters are printers—some of the 5,000 sacked by the Australian press baron Rupert Murdoch when he decided to move his four titles—*The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Sun* and the *News of The World*—which constitute 35 per cent of Fleet Street's output—to his low-cost, high-tech east London citadel at Wapping signalling a revolution in Britain's print media.

However, the man actually responsible for destroying 80 years of Fleet Street tradition was not Murdoch but a newspaper proprietor named Eddy Shah, 42, whose audacious methods in defying the print unions showed the way for Murdoch.

Shah made national headlines in Britain three years ago when as proprietor of a small chain of newspapers in the North-West he fought, and won, a much-publicised battle with the hubristic unions. He showed Fleet Street's crusty and weak-kneed managements that there was a new way of dealing with arrogant unions. He also refused to join proprietors' associations. This month (March 4) Shah will launch his eagerly-awaited and aptly-named tabloid *Today* without traditional manning agreements with the unions—a launch that many predict will be one of the most far-reaching journalistic events in Britain.

Whether *Today*, priced at only 18 pence and in full colour, succeeds or fails, Shah has ensured that 1986 for Fleet Street is the year that will blow the clanking and often primitive national newspaper industry into the electronic age. The unions had tried to boycott Shah hoping to murder *Today* in the womb. But Shah ignored them and went to the electricians who offered him a single-union agreement.

The Guardian

Eddy Shah in his new plant with a dummy of his proposed tabloid

For a man who is one of the country's most talked about, little is known about his early past. Born in Cambridge, Eddy Shah's real name is Selim Jehane Shah. During his battles with the unions, Shah says the union bosses kept calling him Selim Jehane—"a tactic designed to make me sound like a dodgy trader".

Shah's father—Moochool Shah was a direct descendant of the First Aga Khan, Ali Shah. The First Aga Khan had revolted in 1838 against the Shah of Persia and had been subsequently chased out of Persia with his wife and family. He had helped the British General Charles Napier in Afghanistan and had been rewarded with asylum in India. Eddy Shah's grandfather opted for something more rewarding and became a surgeon. He went on to become the Dean of Grant Medical College in Bombay.

Shah's father worked for Associated Press of Pakistan and finally became a barrister. He married Hazel Strange—a daughter of a boat building family in Cambridge. Eddy Shah spent his initial childhood in India and then went on to Gordounstoun. He later worked for the BBC and Granada before he set up his own newspaper company in 1974.

Shah's *Today* is anticipated with excitement by readers and advertisers but with mounting palpitation by its competitors. Shah has laid down 13 governing principles for his staff and the paper. Most are unexceptional, a virtuous and seraphic guide to ethical journalism. Shah wants his paper to avoid sex and financial scandals that sensationalise and titillate. It will protect people from irresponsible intrusions into their privacy. It will not be influenced by extremists of the right or the left. Facts and comments will be kept separate. He wants to prove discriminating popular journalism can be lively. Shah's market research has discovered young readers aged 20-40 in social classes who would buy a middle-brow quality tabloid.

Whether these sterling, edifying qualities are attained is a moot point, but new technology does give *Today* a production edge over its competitors. As many as 21 of its 44 pages can be changed through the print-run so that late news will be included. Widespread use of colour especially in graphics and tables will give it a classy look. Foreign reporters are virtually non-existent with the paper relying on agencies and stringers. The staff of *Today*—1,500 journalists reportedly applied for 125 jobs—are young with the city editor just 38.

Shah himself has adopted a truculent air. He told reporters: "I have newspaper photographers following me around. Dossiers are being compiled on my board members. I have the establishment against me. Intimidation is the only language those people seem to understand. Why do they see me as a threat? I'm just bringing provincial technological know-how on to the national scene. The result will be to expand the newspaper market, not to reduce it."

—RAMESH CHANDRAN in London

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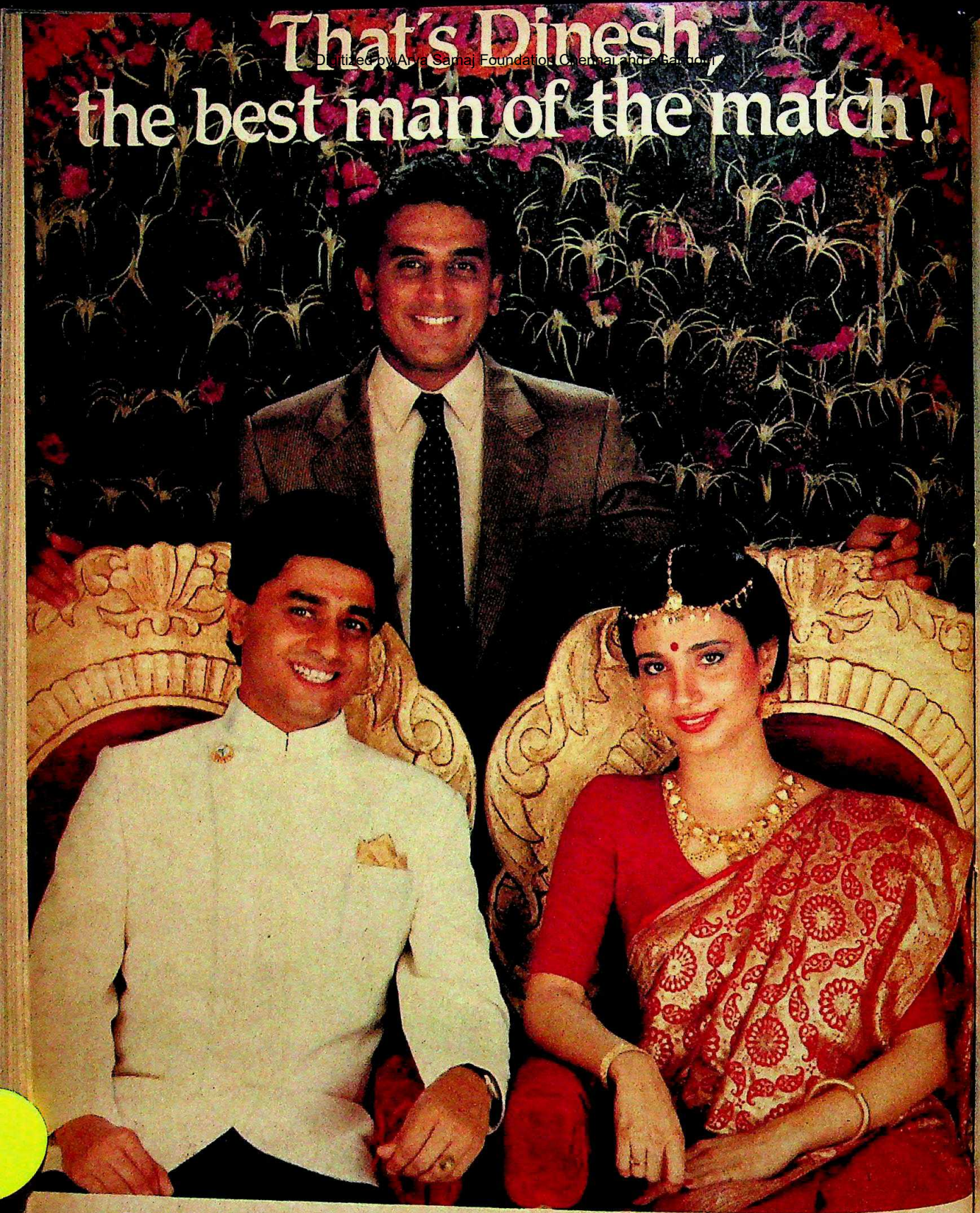

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SRI LANKA

The Secret War

THE CURRENT joke doing the rounds in Colombo is a remark attributed to President Jayewardene. "I have had 43 years of practical experience in politics. Rajiv Gandhi is not yet 43 years old." Despite the obvious truth of that statement, it has now acquired a macabre mien. While Colombo continues to keep stalling New Delhi on its supposed quest for peace proposals and a political solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic problem, the septuagenarian Sri Lankan President's security forces are already halfway through implementing a military solution in the eastern province which has left hundreds of innocent civilians dead and an equal number missing.

Jayewardene's secret war was launched last November when the Sri Lankan security forces escalated their offensive in the eastern province against Tamil militants, with one crucial difference—this time the targets were all Tamil youths between the ages of 14 and 40. The most visible scars of the new assault are to be seen in the small, decrepit town of Batticoloa, which today resembles a war zone with trenches dotting the main roads and machine gun emplacements at street corners.

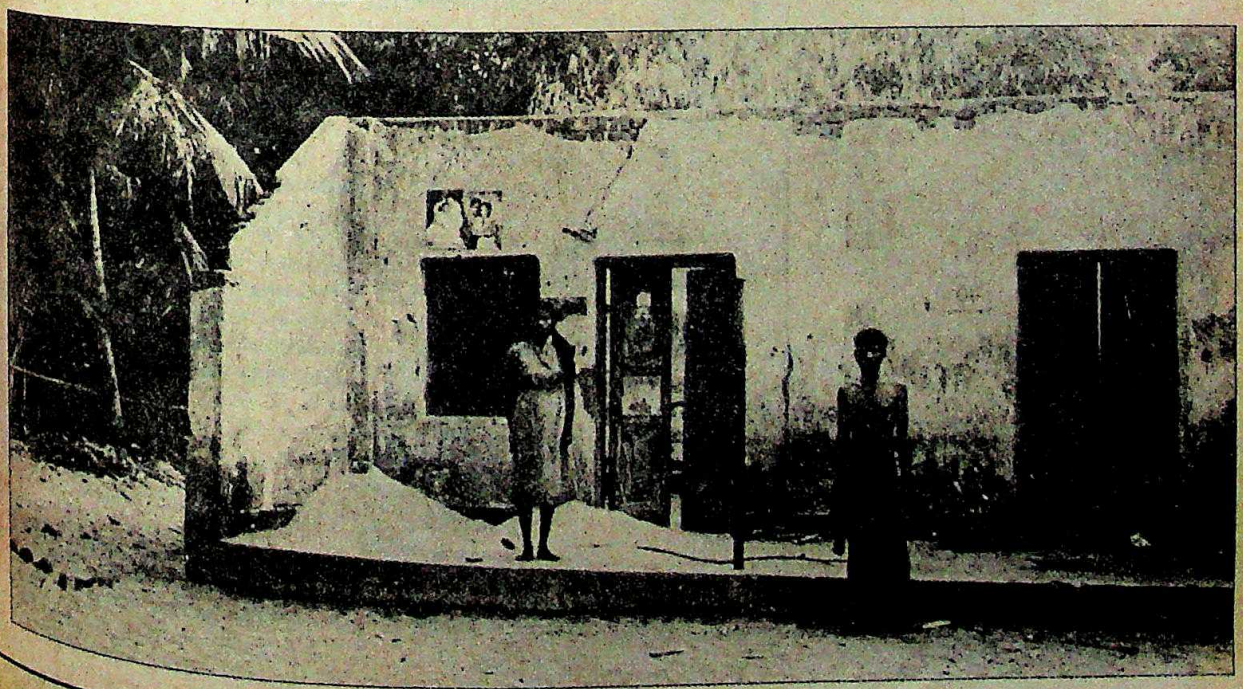
It is clearly a one-sided encounter. Under the state-of-emergency facade, all Tamil houses in the vicinity of the air base have been bulldozed overnight and their occupants herded into shacks. They were given compensation of a niggardly Rs 2,000 even though most of the houses were worth several hundred thousand Sri Lankan rupees. Further, all garden walls in the town have been demolished on the excuse that they could provide potential cover for an ambush, and replaced with barbed wire.

The body of schoolboy Jude (right); and houses gutted in Batticoloa: visible scars

Simultaneously, the security forces have launched a two-pronged offensive that is nothing short of barbaric. Any retaliation by Tamil militant forces is a signal for a sweeping search and cordon operation in the area. Security forces cordon off the area and swarm through all the houses in the vicinity and pick up any Tamil who is in the 14-40 age group.

The sequel is described in the words of a government employee from Trincomalee: "They took us to the army camp and made us stand in a queue according to age and occupation. Then a man with a sack on his head who they said was an informer but looked like a member of the security forces pointed to youngsters who were made to stand in a separate line. One of them was my nephew who had just finished his studies at a technological college and obtained a job with a Japanese firm. They said he was a terrorist and they were taken away to the detention centre at Boosa."

What happens there is anybody's guess. There is not a single family in the eastern province which has not had a brother, son or husband taken away to the detention centres. Sam Thambimuthu, head of the citizen's committee in Batticoloa, says that an average of two or three women come to him every day to report a missing relative in the Batticoloa area alone. "We



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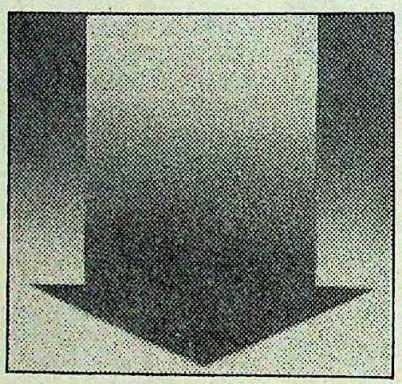

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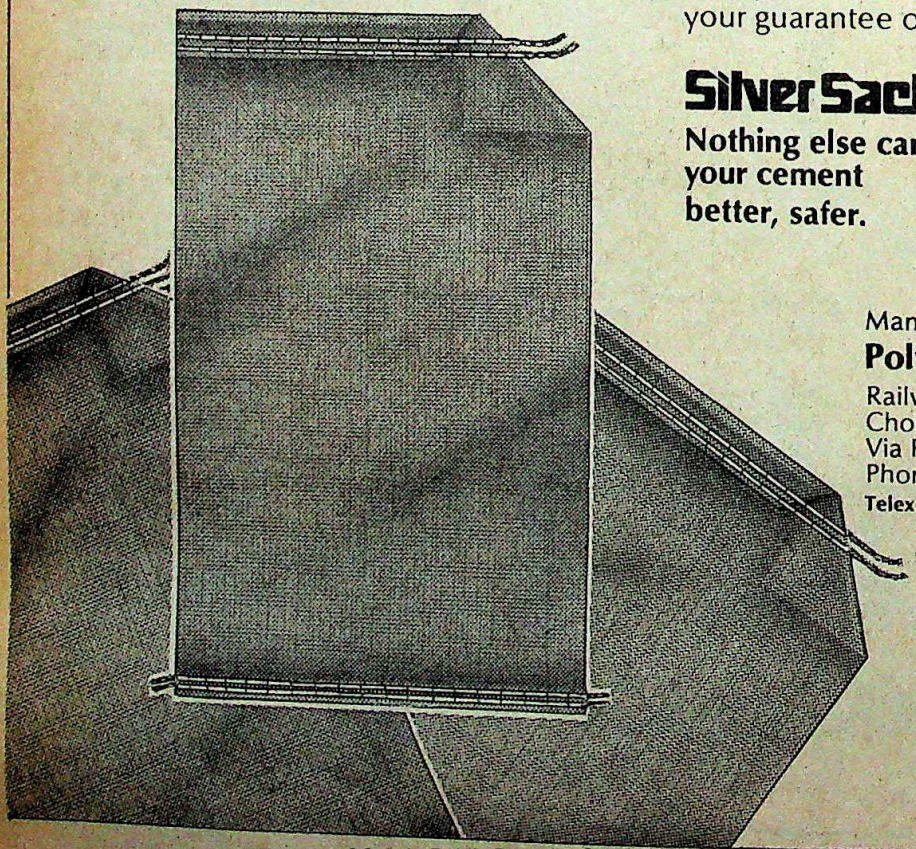

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only started compiling statistics about missing people about three months ago and we already have 186 names."

SO BRUTAL and reprehensible has been the crackdown and reprisals on the terrified Tamils that all they can do now is unemotionally list out the litany of the dead.

▶ On January 19, 1986, two policemen were killed in an ambush in Truthyapuram. In the cordon and search operation that followed, 23 youth were gunned down. They included labourers, students, watchmen and three church workers from the local Sacred Heart church. According to an eyewitness, the parish priest, the three church workers were told to run and then shot in the back.

▶ On December 1, 1985, a grenade thrown at an army jeep killed one officer. Subsequently, five innocent Tamil men were killed and their houses burned and looted. They were Kandapar Jeevanamdam, 40, Selvanayagam Kulanthavel, 34, Velupillai Ponnudarai, 35, Veerakulasingham, 30, Pillanayanthamby Kandaswamy, 36.

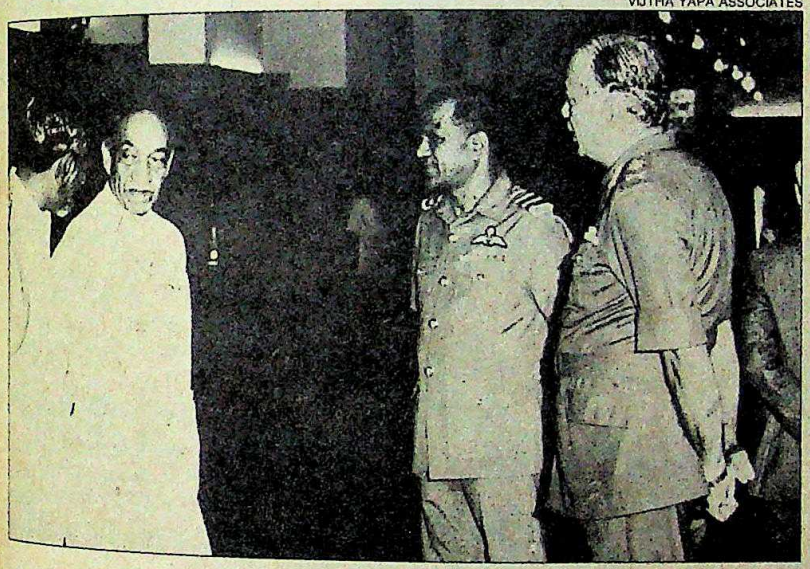
▶ Nine Tamil youths were shot dead on the Lake Road, Batticoloa, on November 11, 1985. Among them were two schoolboys studying for their A levels, Jude Koviliparampil, 17, and Sritharan Sockalingam, 17.

Says Father Chandra Fernando, whose driver was arrested and tortured so badly that he has lost the use of one hand: "The situation is so bad that I would say before we can talk of peace proposals all Tamils males between the ages of 14 and 40 must be taken out of the eastern province."

That, however, seems to be exactly what the security forces want. The Sri Lankan strategy over the last six months—to concentrate the repression by security forces in the eastern provinces rather than the Tamil-dominated north—has one basic and obvious objective. To dilute the Tamil demand for linkage of the north and east into a single linguistic province with this movement.

This is essentially why the crackdown and brutality on the Tamil population in recent months has centered around Trincomalee, the port city that holds the key to the success of the Sri Lankan strategy. The population of Trincomalee is equally divided between Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamils and in the past few months hundreds of Tamil settlements have been attacked and razed to the ground in an attempt to drive them northwards. According to Indian High Commission sources in Colombo, there are currently 8,645 Tamils in refugee camps in the Trincomalee district and another 19,800 whose livelihood has been seriously threatened.

VIJITHA YAPA ASSOCIATES



Jayewardene conferring with his service chiefs: double talk

What is less easier to understand is the strategy of the Indian Government in virtually turning a blind eye to the atrocities and banking heavily on the eventual success of the peace negotiations. The Indian High Commission in Colombo has been sending detailed accounts of the repression of the last few months but so far New Delhi has played a wait and watch game. Diplomatic sources say that Indian High Commissioner J.N. Dixit is becoming increasingly frustrated at New Delhi's ambivalence.

There is increasing agreement in Colombo's diplomatic circles that New Delhi is having the wool pulled over its eyes by the Jayewardene Government where the peace proposals are concerned. This was clearly evidenced by the last minute cancellation of foreign secretary Romesh Bhandari's visit to Colombo in early February when it was discovered that Jayewardene's 57-page response to the TULF draft proposals contained not a single concession to the three main demands.

Meanwhile, the hardliners in the Sri Lankan Government seem to be gaining increasing support in their call for a military solution to the problem from the majority Sinhala, the Buddhist clergy and the opposition parties. In Kandy, the Asgiriya Mahanayake, one of the five Buddhist head monks, told INDIA TODAY that the main Tamil demands were totally untenable. "Asking for the north and east to be linked is virtually creating a separate country containing two thirds of our coastline. As for their own police force, they will use it only to go to war with us." Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Anura Bandaranaike added that in his view military repression "was necessary to control terrorism".

National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali, however, continues to deny that innocent Tamils are being killed. Referring to the Iruthyapuram massacre, he exploded: "Who told you they were innocent? This is typical of the Tamil disinformation service in Madras. It is simply not true. Everyone who was killed in Iruthyapuram was a terrorist."

Clearly, the Sri Lankan Government is convinced that the Tamil militants will have to be dealt with as a military problem quite separate from the political negotiations for ethnic peace. The militants, on their part, are convinced that they can hold out and eventually win in an armed struggle. With both sides unyielding, Sri Lanka is further away from solving the ethnic crisis than it was a year ago. There was, however, some indication last fortnight that the Indian Government had finally woken up to the fact that Colombo's pious posturing on the ethnic issue is merely an excuse to buy time. The foreign office is now busy undertaking a major review of its Sri Lankan policy and there are indications that in its future dealings with Colombo, New Delhi will take an infinitely harder line than it has so far.

—TAVLEEN SINGH in Batticoloa

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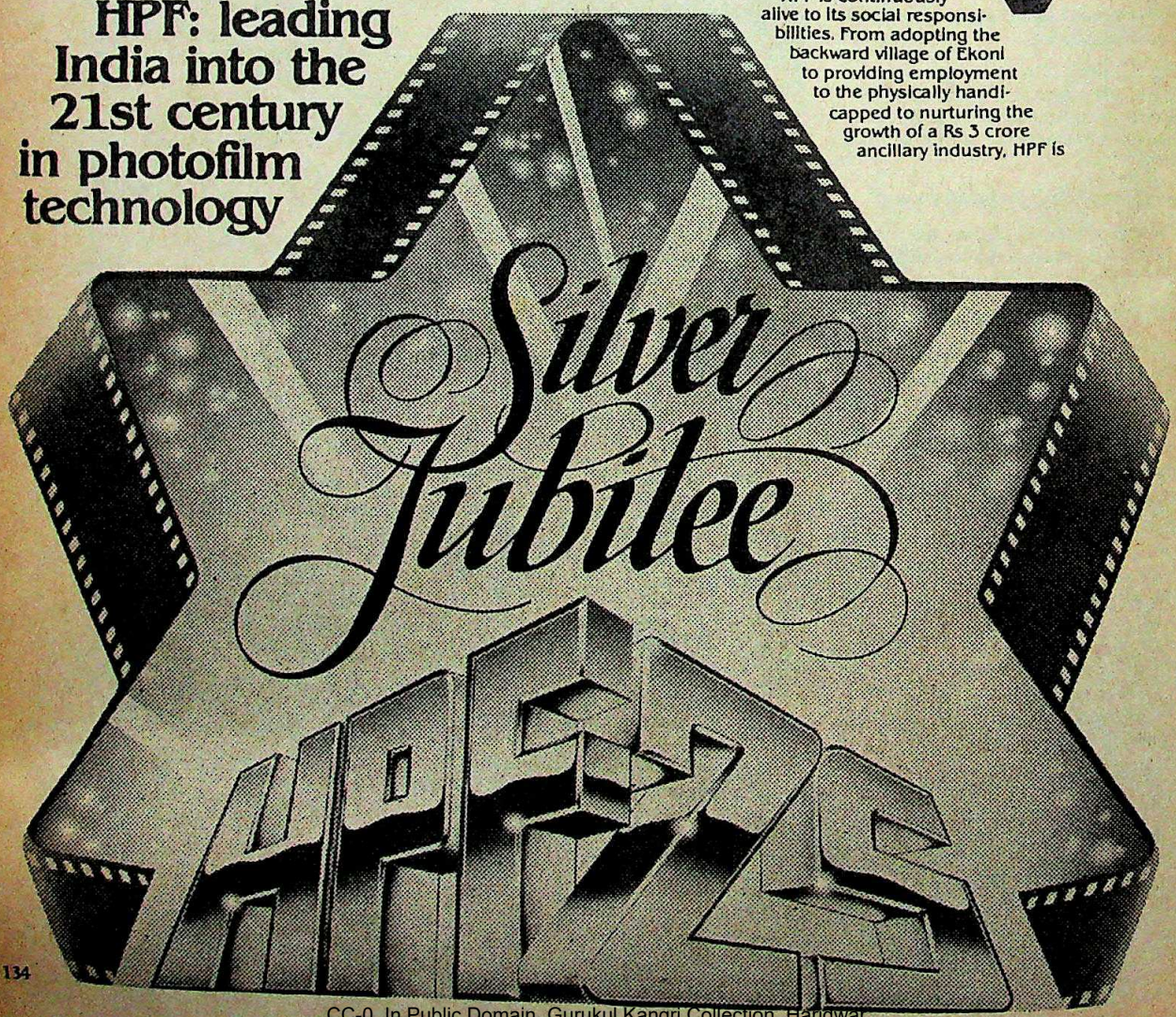

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HOCKEY

New Goals

NOT SINCE India was toppled from the pinnacle of world hockey by Pakistan two decades ago have the prospects in the national game looked so good. It isn't just the historic 6-3 whipping that the Indian team handed out to Pakistan at Hyderabad that has led to this optimism, though the fact that India has never scored as many goals against Pakistan or won by such a wide margin was cause for justifiable euphoria. It isn't also that Indian Captain Mohammed Shahid, whom Pakistan's Captain Hassan Sardar rates as the world's best forward, is finally coming into his own that accounts for the confidence.

It's all these and more. Everything seems to be coming together—responsive, active and far-looking administrators, dedicated coaches and a fine bunch of players with just the right mix of youth and experience. Irrespective of the final tally in the seven-Test series with Pakistan, it is now agreed that the Indian team has a sharpened cutting edge though it is possible that the team may fail to click on a particular day.

For India the series is part of a bigger plan to promote the game drawn up by the Indian Hockey Federation (IHF) President M.A.M. Ramaswamy. The first goal he has set before the team is the gold medal from the October Seoul Asian Games. Says Ramaswamy: "We have to give the big push from behind as hockey lovers and leave it to the expert coaches and players to get on with the job." Since the industrialist-racehorse owner slipped back into the saddle of the IHF less than a year ago, he has initiated several off-field moves to give hockey this "push", including:

- appointing a team of officials, including coaches and a doctor (former hockey player Susainathan Anthony Cruz), which will accompany the team till the end of 1986;
- launching a systematic talent hunt by organising the subjunior championship for under-15 at Lucknow in January and the juniors at Srinagar in May-June;
- increasing the daily out-of-pocket allowance of players from Rs 25 to Rs 40;
- giving former players only one-fourth of the earnings from a benefit match and stashing away the rest in the Players' Benevolent Fund;
- directing state associations and players' employers not to call the national team's players for other competitions before the Asian Games;
- chasing the Human Resources Ministry in Delhi and in the states to honour the offer of six synthetic surfaces made by the Society for the National Institutes of Physical Education and Sports;
- inviting foreign referees to supervise matches both in the nationals and internationals played in India.

Captain Shahid: driving force

Ramaswamy's calculated moves may seem more like a matter of logistics but cumulatively they are bound to have a great impact. Said the chef-de-mission of the team for 1986, D.S. Murthy: "Only if the same set of people accompany the players at least for a year can they build a personal rapport with the players and ensure they are in competitive trim." Added Manager Jhamanlal Sharma: "There have been embarrassing moments when a manager or a coach came a week before the team left Patiala for a major tournament and then tried to assess the plus and minus points of the players. Only a long-standing relationship in which we counsel players even on their personal problems keeps them free from worry."

The IHF has also appointed M.P. Ganesh, Harmik Singh and Charles Cornelius, all former Olympians, as the team's coaches and former India captain Ajit Pal Singh as an observer. Only this set of officials will travel with the team to all internationals this year. Shahid admits the incentives and encouragement "makes the player feel like a VIP and give off his very best". Says Ramaswamy: "Good sports administration means treating the player as supreme." Echoed *The Hindu*'s correspondent: "This touch of realism is necessary. It is only in hockey that we are in the top five bracket among 105 hockey playing countries."

The IHF has also launched a plan to build a second 11 which can last a full 70 minutes and, like coach Harmik Singh says, "move up and down the field like a piston engine." India is to send these players to Malaysia in July for competition experience. As Ramaswamy sums his intentions: "Hockey must be made an addiction and have a vice like grip on our youth. Hereafter, the nationals will be played on synthetic surfaces only, more international teams will be invited so that more players can watch them and a championship on the World Cup lines in the memory of the great wizard Dhyan Chand will be held in Delhi in December." This, the golden jubilee year of the hockey nationals, could well be the start of a new era in Indian hockey.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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PESTICIDES INDUSTRY

Poisonous Growth

THE ALARMING rise in cases of human pesticide poisoning in the country's agricultural belts has brought into sharp focus the workings of the pesticide industry. Research shows that formulators and factories have been blatantly violating the provisions of the Insecticides Act. The danger has been further compounded by the clear evidence of official negligence and control. Madras Correspondent S.H. VENKATRAMANI *and Hyderabad Correspondent* AMARNATH. K. MENON *report:*

GUNAPATI Pulliah, a 37-year-old farmer in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, was overcome by nausea one morning last November while spraying pesticide on his paddy crop just before it was due for harvest. Retching violently, he flung down his spraying equipment and ran to the nearest doctor. Ironically, he was partly a victim of his own actions—mixing just 10 litres of water to his usual brand of pesticide instead of the required 100 litres and neglecting to wear a mask. But while Pulliah recovered in due course of time, numerous others have not been so fortunate.

Some years ago, Harijan villagers in the Malanad region in neighbouring Karnataka, were crippled after eating crabs picked up from a paddy field—the crabs had consumed pesticide while feeding on the waterlogged paddy crop.

A study conducted by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University at Coimbatore released last fortnight, revealed that samples of mothers' milk and cows' milk taken from all over the state showed residues of BHC (Benzene Hexachloride). Other studies have shown up residues of BHC and DDT (Dichloro-diphenyl-trichloro-ethane) in butter and wheat flour samples collected from Ludhiana in Punjab. Studies by the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences a few years ago showed that on an average there were 4.7 parts per million (PPM) of DDT in the fat tissues of Delhi residents.

Pesticides have left traces of toxic chemicals in vegetables. V.N.Iyer, general manager (technical) of the pesticide formulation company Coromandal Indag, says: "Some of the vegetables in our markets look fresh because of the lingering veneer of DDT and BHC." An official of a pesticide-manufacturing multinational pointed out that "research in the West has shown that both DDT and BHC have a lot of residue toxicity. Both these pesticides are abundantly used and have, therefore, a chance of causing cancer since they linger on in vegetables, grain and plants."

The rising trend in cases of pesticide poisoning in the agricultural areas of Andhra Pradesh was admitted by a state agriculture department official who said that for every cluster of 10 agricultural villages in Guntur and Prakasam districts, for instance, there were apparently over 75 such cases of pesticide poisoning during the last agricultural season. And the incidence of such cases throughout the country has risen sharply with pesticide consumption which has gone up a hefty 25 per cent in the last four years to 60,000 tonnes last year. The exact incidence of pesticides poisioning is hard to track because most cases go unrecorded since victims go to village doctors who don't maintain any statistics.

The pesticide industry has to take a lot of the blame for the poison that seems to be increasingly turning up as research and studies undertaken by environment and health conscious agencies indicate. Formulators and factories have been blatantly violating the provisions of the Insecticides Act, 1968, to ensure that pesticides killed only pests without causing harm to human beings.

For instance, manufacturers have not provided data on the toxicity of 130 basic chemicals and 400 formulations which were in use when the Act came into effect in 1971. The Central Insecticides Board (CIB) made things worse by giving permanent registration certificates to nearly 360 pre-1972 pesticides without receiving complete data on their poisonous effects. Admitted a top executive of Indian Explosives Ltd, which was the first to introduce BHC in 1952: "The CIB has given us permanent registration for our BHC without getting complete toxicity data." Echoed another executive of Monsanto Chemicals in Bombay: "The main problem has been the CIB's indiscriminate grant of registration certificates."

Sources in the board lamented the lack of awareness of the danger to human life posed by such pesticides and an official admitted: "Whatever safe limits and dilution levels are prescribed now for pesticides are based on data generated outside by the WHO, Food and Agricultural Organisation, and the US Federal Drug Authority." And the CIB cannot recall the registrations as "a registration once given is given," said CIB Secretary M.L. Saini.

Official negligence has compounded the manipulations of the formulators. The various testing laboratories have a singularly shoddy record in analysing market samples to check if they conform to the registered formulae. For example, three identical samples of BHC 50 formulation produced by a Guntur unit, were taken for testing by an insecticide inspector in 1984. The first testing by a state laboratory put the active ingredient in the formulation at 5.14 per cent, which is far below the permissible lower limit of 6.175 per cent. However, another laboratory gave the high safety figure of 6.25 per cent, while a Central laboratory put it at 6.03 per

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cent—again within the permitted limits. The reason for such wide readings lies in the conditions of the laboratories. A sophisticated gas liquid chromatograph has to be kept in an air-conditioned room but in the Guntur laboratory, for instance, such equipment is not used for lack of proper hydrogen supplies. The analysts are not properly trained and instances of wrong testing methods are frequent.

Worse still, official agencies have not

Formulators and factories have been blatantly violating the provisions of the Insecticides Act which was to ensure that pesticides killed only pests without causing harm to human beings.

Workers handling chemicals in potentially dangerous conditions

SADANAND MENON

deceptively close to those of formulators who register a particular product based on a specific formula and manufacture and sell something else by using a different solvent. The law says that if a formulator wants to change his solvent, he must apply anew to the CIB for registration and furnish researched information about the new product's toxicity.

But as late as 1983, a Madras-based formulator issued newspaper advertisments saying that his company had changed the solvent in its '*monocrotophos*' formulation from cyclohexanone to acetone and the CIB confirmed that the company had not obtained registration for its new product. Yet no action was taken and the company must have saved Rs 10 on every litre by illegally using the cheaper solvent. Pesticides consultant Narayanswamy observed: "When a pesticide product, based on its registered recipe, is itself not properly analysed for its efficacy and safety levels, it is a criminal offence to change the recipe. The object of such changes is only to reduce costs and increase profits. These savings are never passed on to the farmer."

Formulators blithely change the suppliers of their basic chemical without bothering to register anew. This was clear some years ago when a few pesticide firms obtained registration for a set of products citing a Bombay-based multinational as their source of supply for the active ingredient even though the company itself confirmed that it was not willing to do business with them. Said a company spokesman: "We were not willing to associate ourselves with some of the intending formulators who had cited us as the source but they got their registration and began manufacture."

OTHER rules are similarly bent. Practically all pesticide containers in the market carry labels which only identify the active ingredient and its percentage even though the law requires "the kind and name of active and other ingredients and percentage of each." Argues K.S.Mehta, director of one of the oldest pesticide formulators in India, the Bombay-based Bharat Pulverising Mills: "To specify the complete chemical composition of every product we formulate will be to give away all our trade secrets." But the preservation of such secrets is not encouraged in the parallel drug industry where every drug manufacturer has to give his complete formula on the label.

Other violations are in areas like packaging. The Indian Standards Institute prescribes a "mild steel or tinplate container suitably lacquered from within" for Malthion and DDT 50 per cent emulsifiable concentrate. But formulators in Ambattur and Velachery in Madras use high-density polythene containers because they are cheaper. One such container costs just about Rs 5 while a metal container of the same capacity is Rs 8. Tamil Nadu's Agriculture Director N. Athimoolan explains this away in these terms: "In our market checks we only see if the containers are misbranded and if they contain the quantity or volume of the product they are supposed to."

To take only another example of how the legislation has been violated, the Act expressly forbids the reuse of containers used for storing poisonous basic chemicals since traces of it remain even after repeated cleaning. But hundreds of such barrels can be seen lying around in many pesticide factories and small-scale formulators even resell the containers at a profit.

Instances where such containers

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were bought by general merchants to store edible oils are not unknown, and even a single gramme, of say, phosphorus can cause considerable harm. Says a scientist working in a pesticide factory in Tiruchi: "One gramme of phosphorus can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and even paralysis." Observes a Gujarat Insecticides Inspector K.V. Kanjaria: "Used pesticide containers and packages are very much in use. No agency, not even the Government, has done anything to educate villagers on their harmful effects."

The industry is even more negligent of its responsibilities in ensuring the safety of its workers—25,000 of them employed in 400-odd pesticide factories and formulation units. The law requires that all workers wear protective gear like overcoats, helmets, gloves, gumboots and masks. But the case of 35-year-old Mohan, a worker in a small-scale formulation unit at Tiruvottiyur near Madras, is indicative of the situation prevailing in the industry. Half-naked, bare-footed and coated with fine sulphur dust, his condition is pathetic: "I get severe cough and bronchitis every now and then and my health is poor for my age. I don't know how long I can last out. I can't afford to consult a doctor and in our factory also, there are no facilities for medical treatment."

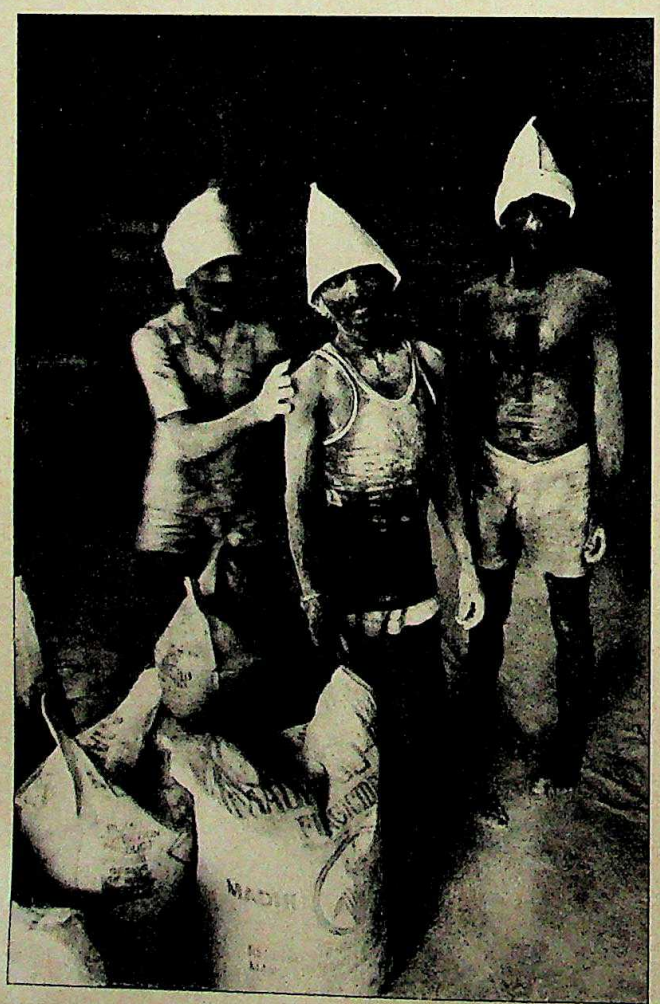
Most labour involved in pesticide applications is migratory and case histories are rare. A study by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, in 1980, revealed that 50 per cent do not use any protective clothing, about 20 per cent do not even wash their hands and even those who do, a staggering 80 per cent never use soap. Another study conducted by Dr S.K. Kashyap, also of the Ahmedabad-based National Institute of Occupational Health, showed that 73 per cent of 160 male workers in five formulation units showed toxic manifestations; 35 per cent of the male workers had cardio-vascular and gastro-intestinal problems and 40 workers of an organo-phosphorus unit suffered from eye irritation.

Notwithstanding the fact that they are operating in dangerous violation of the Act, formulators plead helplessness. Asks G.Murali Manohar, a small formulator near Madras: "What can we do? We give our workers all the protective gear but they don't use them." However, Chunduru Venkateswarlu, a formulator in Nallapadu in Guntur district said: "It is difficult to get skilled labour because the work is seasonal and the effort at educating workers to use gloves, masks and boots is a waste. Moreover, they consider these as obstacles in their work." Echoed a Karnataka government official: "We notice that the workers themselves are reluctant to wear protective gear. They find it inconvenient and so we are trying to talk to labour unions about this."

The industry is even more negligent of its responsibilities in ensuring the safety of its workers who daily handle poisonous chemicals in poor safety conditions.

An official in the Rajasthan Agriculture Directorate's Plant Protection Wing, summed up the situation succintly. "In the formulation units in our state, overalls are not uncommon but helmets and gloves are hardly worn at all." But Andhra Pradesh Agriculture Director P. Ramakanth Reddy was the most candid. "We tend to wake up only after a jolt on such issues and it is possible that we are not careful about safety conditions."

The tardy implementation of the Act has been raised in the Lok Sabha and government has admitted its limitations. During the sole occasion it was debated in Parliament in August 1981, the then agriculture minister Rao Birendra Singh admitted that false records were created in many states. Bihar, for example, claimed to have analysed 18,000 samples of pesticides and plant protection chemicals while in fact, no sample was at all collected for analysis. However, comprehensive legislation on the manufacture, import, distribution and disposal of hazardous substances is to be adopted by Parliament and officials are examining existing laws with a view to plugging the loopholes. But this remains a good intention, and if it isn't followed through there will be more suffering for the industry's 25,000 workers and countless farmers in the country.



SADANAND MENON

Sulphur-coated workers at a formulation unit near Madras

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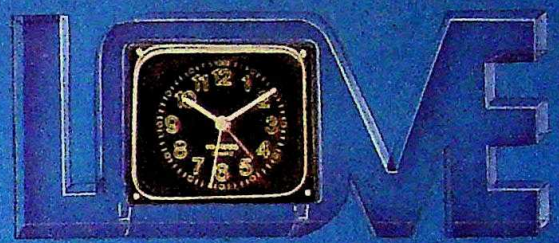

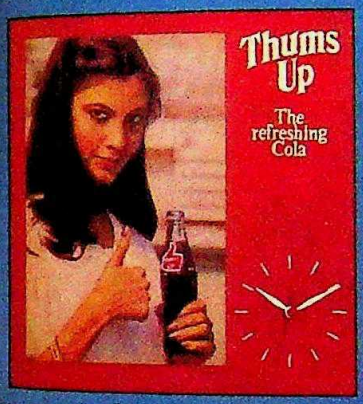

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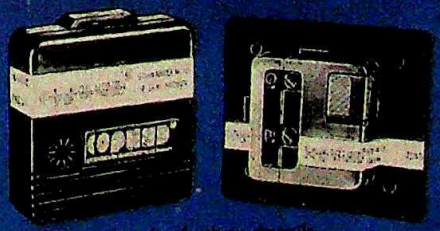

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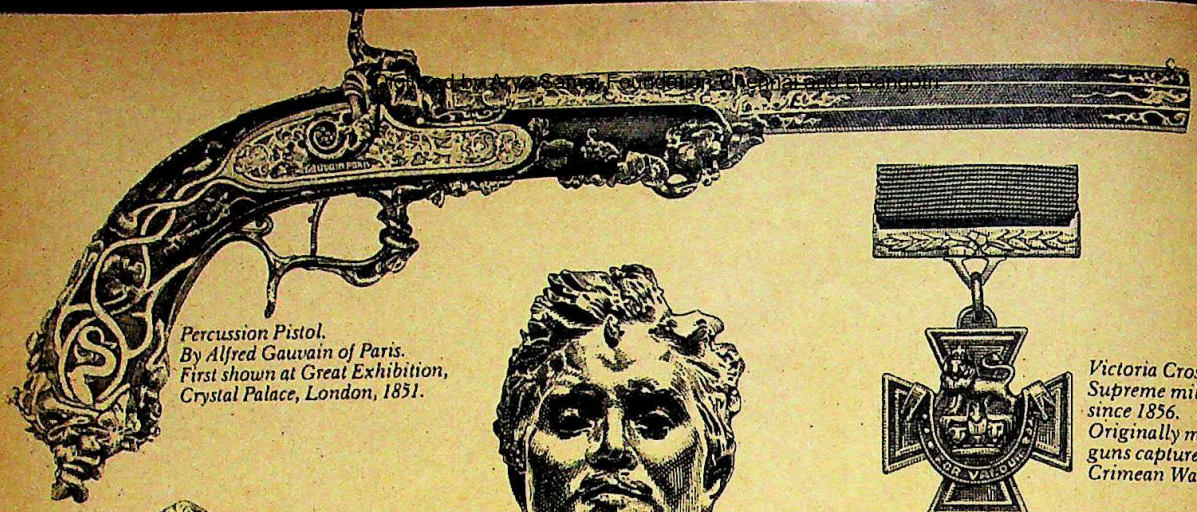

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First shown at Great Exhibition, Crystal Palace, London, 1851.

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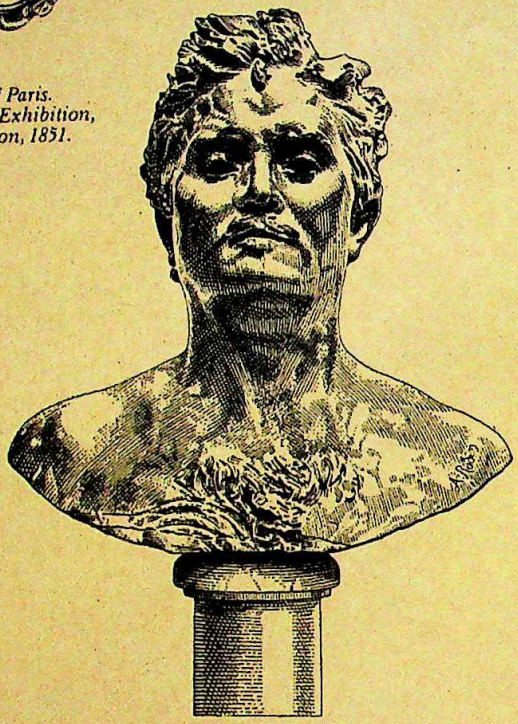
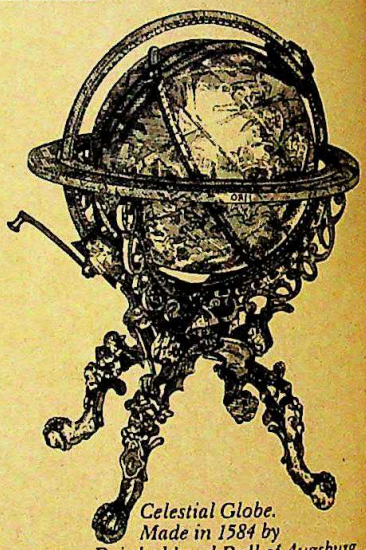


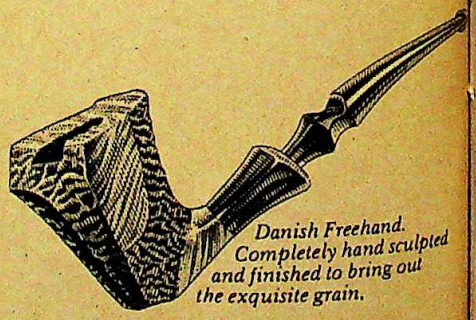
Head of Balzac.
Study in bronze by Auguste Rodin, 1840-1917.



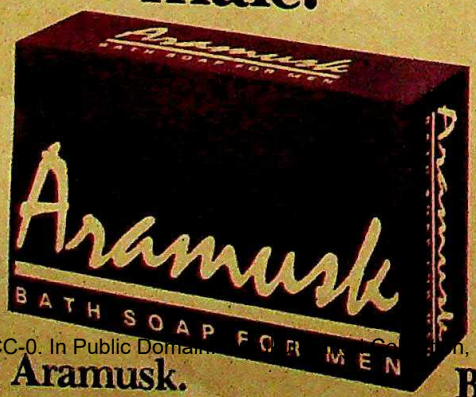
Celestial Globe.
Made in 1584 by Reinhold and Roll of Augsburg.
Almost certainly sold in 1854 to Emperor Rudolph II, Prague.

Waterford Decanter.
Classic full lead crystal brought to life by the breath of a master glassmaker.

Another certain something that's extravagantly male.



Danish Freehand.
Completely hand sculpted and finished to bring out the exquisite grain.



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AHMEDABAD

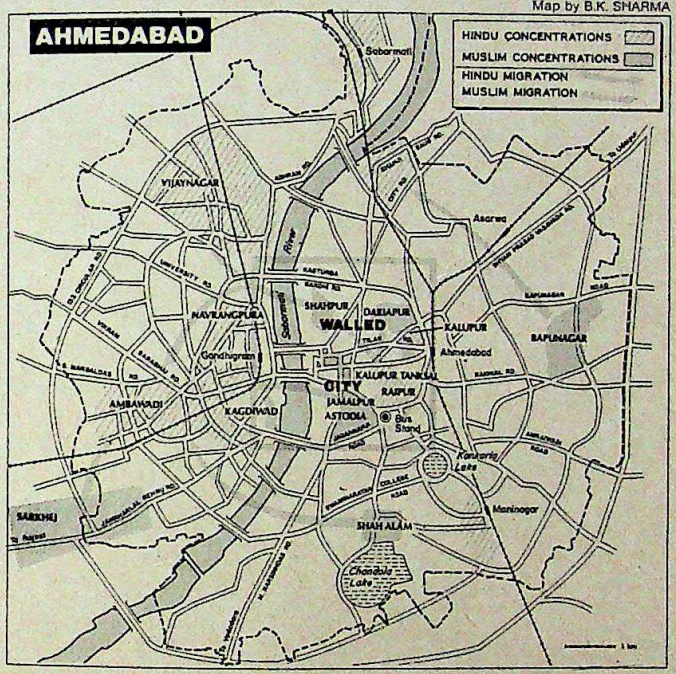
Dangerous Moves

RANCHODLAL Parekh, 36, a Gujarat State Transport employee, has just sold his ancestral house in Bhanderi Pole in Ahmedabad's Kalupur area, to a Muslim. He will take his family to live in rented quarters in Maninagar outside the walled city. "I do not want to shift," he says, "but I'll soon be the only Hindu in the area."

For Parekh, as for many others like him, the decision was not an easy one. It took more than just determination to break away from the house which his ancestors built and start life anew amidst strangers. But the choice was between familiar surroundings and the safety of his family; and he says he feels safer among people of his own community.

The trend is the same all over Ahmedabad. In a city where Hindus and Muslims always coexisted side by side, an increasing number of communal pockets are fast changing the demographic pattern. Over the past few months, scores of Hindu families living in Muslim-dominated areas like Sarkhej and Shah Alam Roza on the outskirts and in walled city areas have moved to Hindu-dominated areas outlying the walled city. Similarly, Muslims have moved within the walled city from Hindu-dominated areas like Bhanderi Pole in Dariapur and Kalupur Tanksal to predominantly Muslim areas like Jamalpur, Dariapur, Shahpur and Astodia; and from the walled city to safer areas outside.

Map by B.K. SHARMA



But little do the new migrants realise that this two-way exodus will only precipitate the growing communal divide. As Iqbal Khan, a resident of Astodia in the walled city, warns: "This is a dangerous trend. Soon Ahmedabad will be divided like Beirut." Nizamuddin Islahi, president of the state unit of the Jamaat-i-Islami Hind, echoes this sentiment: "We must live together and solve our differences. Both Hindu and Muslim leaders have to persuade their communities from migrating."

But the warning goes unheeded. The only thought is to get to the safe shelter of one's own kinsmen. "It has never been like this ever before," says Kalpana Khatri, whose family is thinking of moving from Lisa-ni-Khidki to some Hindu locality. "We lived all these years with so much affection. But strangely, people here have suddenly started mouthing communal sentiments. We cannot live here anymore."

The reasons differ from family to family. Some Muslims, for instance, moved because they felt that in the walled city, they were more vulnerable to persecution by the police, who they allege are communal and biased against them. Madina

"How can one live in the walled city? Most days it is under curfew and is tension-ridden."
MUMTAZ BANU

"People here have suddenly changed colour. We cannot live here anymore."
KALPANA KHATRI

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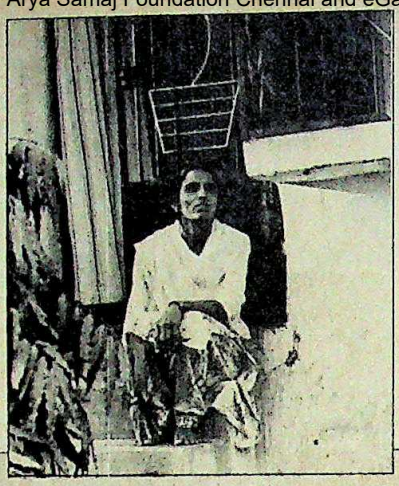
Laliwala, who moved from Dariapur to Sarkhej, says: "We had to shift. We are not as much scared of the Hindus as we are of the police. For no rhyme or reason our menfolk get beaten up." Adds Ismail Laliwala, 61, whose two sons have been in jail for the last seven months for allegedly communal offences: "I never dreamt that a stage would come when I would have to sell my three-storeyed building and start living in a small house because of communalism."

Not that the exodus was unforeseen. In mid-1985, soon after coming to power, Gujarat Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary, anticipating such a situation, had proposed an ordinance for declaring land transfers in the walled city null and void; but this never came about. The state Government was misled by its own records into believing that the problem was not so serious. The records showed that only 18 land transfers had taken place and Chaudhary, saying that it was "normal", decided to drop the ordinance plan.



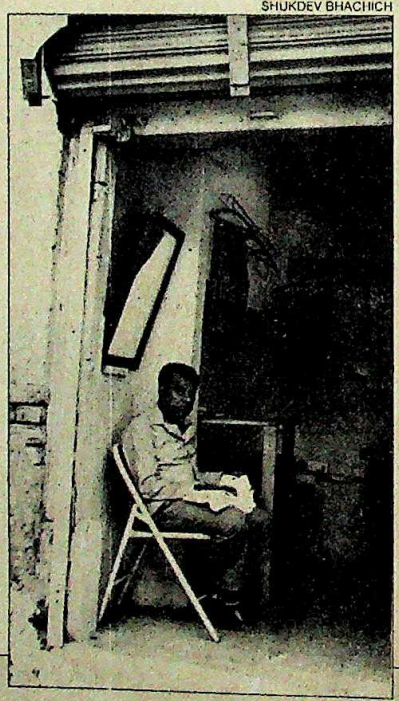
"We had to shift. We are not as much scared of the Hindus as we are of the police. For no rhyme or reason our menfolk get beaten up."
MADINA LALIWALA

However, the reality as usual is quite different. Though no records are available yet, unofficial estimates easily put the number of land transfers in the city at well over 1,000. A senior government official said that the possibility of clandestine transfers also could not be ruled out and the Government was now looking into it.

And yet, many people would have still not moved had it not been for the constant threat posed by communal hatred. Even after the riots had died down, local toughs went around threatening the minority in their areas and scaring them into moving to other areas. As a result, there were a number of distress sales but soon after this, prices of houses in the walled city went shooting up, as a natural corollary of the sudden demand. The fear psychosis had been built up so that both Hindus and Muslims in desperation were prepared to pay any price to move into a safer area. Mumtaz Banu, who has shifted from Dariapur to Sarkhej, says: "How can one live in the walled city? Most days it is under curfew and is tension-ridden."

Many businessmen are also planning to shift to areas outside the walled city since the frequent riots and prolonged bouts of curfew have left their businesses decrepit and battered. "The city has lost its charm," laments Rafiq Ahmed, who had to shut down his restaurant in Bhadra last year for over eight months. Says Ahmed: "Communal hatred has destroyed Ahmedabad. One does not feel like living here anymore."

SHUKDEV BHACHECH



Bipin Madhu, a tailor, is one of the few Hindus who stayed back in Astodia. But now he finds that his Muslim clientele refuses to patronise him.

The implications of this division of the city into Hindu and Muslim pockets are already making themselves felt, in trade and business and in everyday life. Bipin Madhu, a tailor is one of the few Hindus who stayed back in Muslim-dominated Astodia. But now he finds that he has very little custom left. His clients were mainly Muslims and they refuse to patronise him anymore. Miriambibi, who shifted from Delhi Chakla in the walled city to Rakhial on the outskirts, also stands to lose her livelihood. She used to make clay idols of Hindu gods and goddesses but her new neighbours will not let her practise her skill anymore.

Earlier, professional Muslim groups were concentrated in certain areas making for keen competition and a close social interaction. But ever since the intra-city migration began, these groups have been scattered all over the city, causing great inconvenience in everyday life. Many who moved from one area to another now find themselves far removed from their place of work and now have to commute over painfully long distances everyday.

More important, the change sweeping Ahmedabad threatens to alter the very fabric of the city, its basic structure—social, civic and economic. Asks an anguished Hidayat Memon, a doctor in Dariapur: "Will Muslims be forced to live in ghettos in the congested walled city because of communal hatred? Over the months, the gap between Hindus and Muslims has widened. Is there no hope?" On the other side, the Hindus sound equally troubled and helpless. But the division of the city continues, as vested interests stoke the fires of communalism.

What seems even more alarming is that the Government does not seem to be conscious of this threat at all. After the aborted ordinance plan of last year, the chief minister has taken little note of this ominous trend. The attitude of the administration seems to be that there is no cause for worry and even if there is, things will take care of themselves. Meanwhile, the demographic face of the city is changing forever and in a manner that can only deepen the divide between the two communities.

—RAMESH MENON

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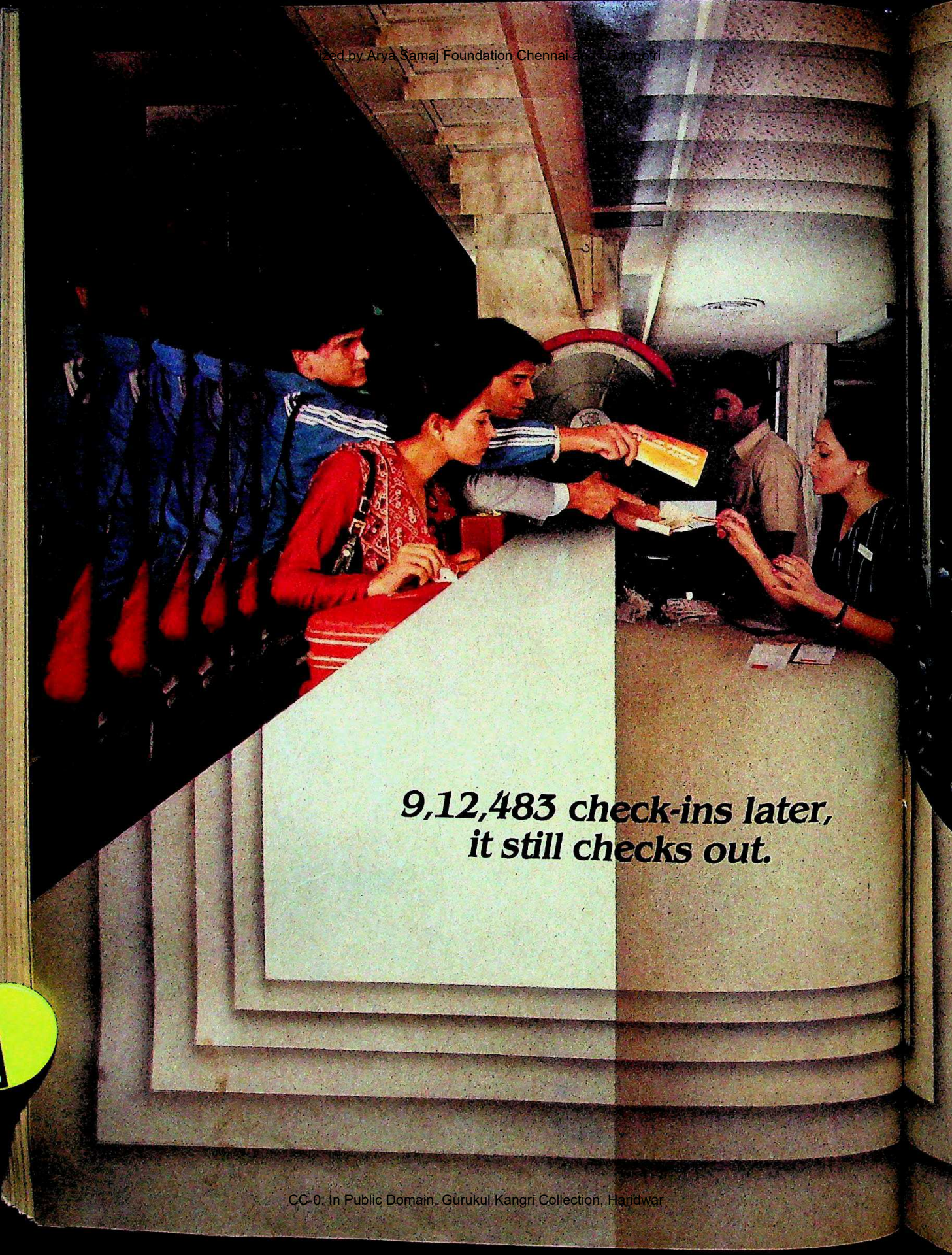

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Inner Sphere

THE CIRCLE OF REASON
by AMITAV GHOSH
Hamish Hamilton, London
Pages: 423; Rs: 125

FIVE years ago a thunderstorm named *Midnight's Children* burst over the Indian literary scene, overnight transforming the arid and stony landscape. With the new freshness in the air, greenery stirred and sprouted, possibilities opened and flowered and it was clear the landscape would never be the same again. With that one novel, Salman Rushdie proved that (a) modern India was as rich a source of material as ancient India with its familiar and accepted myths and legends, and (b) the ungainly, ungrammatical language invented and spoken in the streets and bazaars did not merely deserve print but had an earthy gusto and verve that made it peculiarly suitable to convey the Indian character and spirit, atmosphere and conditions. Of course Rushdie was not working in isolation but belonged to an international school of writing that included Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gunter Grass and Milan Kundera who are the acknowledged mouthpieces of the post-war, post-colonial ethos while continuing the ancient histories of their separate lands. Together they constitute a kind of warm gulf stream that has been coursing through the oceans and touching many shores, changing their climates and bringing about intriguing developments.

As might have been foretold, Rushdie's example set free the tongues of those young Indian writers who wished to express the contemporary spirit but had not found an authentic and relevant way to do so. His language proved one that could be imitated but none of them could marshal the historical and political ideas that gave his work its potency. An interesting new addition to such literature is Amitav Ghosh's first novel, *The Circle of Reason*. In a recent interview Ghosh failed to mention Rushdie but claimed as his literary forebears Cervantes and Melville. Candidly speaking, there is no novelist who is not indebted to these founders and innovators of the novel; Ghosh might have acknowledged the influence of a novelist closer to him in both time and space. Rushdie's spirit is everywhere. It is to be found in Ghosh's vocabulary—"spick-span", "Jaldi-toot-sweet", in lines like "a *khichri* of words—couscous, rice, dal and onions all stirred together", in whole passages—Ghosh's discourses on the cotton trade and weaving recalling Rushdie's odes to pickle-making and the embroidery of fabulous shawls in *Shame*, in the invention of bizarre characters with hilarious names like Kulfi and Dantu, and the extraordinary juxtaposition of ideas drawn from diverse fields, in Ghosh's case anthropology, science and economics. It is a literary enterprise far removed from the *bildungsroman* which most novelists must produce before they are free to proceed to something more objective.

EXTRACT

"Goat's Arse, the message said, had broken into and disrupted the most ancient of Ghaziri ceremonies, one that took place once every seven years, on the reigning Malik's birthday. This was the ceremony of the Ant-Frying, when the Ants under the Fort's south gate, a most ancient line of ants, were cooked in a shower of burning oil. The desecration of the Ant-Frying had placed the timeless traditions of the Ghaziri monarchy, and thus the prestige of the whole British Empire, in, yes, in jeopardy."

Like Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*—and Grass in *The Tin Drum*—Ghosh presents us with a hero who has an unusual distinguishing feature: while Rushdie's Saleem had a nose of uncommon size and sensitivity, Ghosh's hero has "an extraordinary head—huge, several times too large for an eight-year-old, and curiously uneven, bulging all over with knots and bumps" so that he is named, naturally, Alu. Unlike Saleem, Alu proves an oddly inert, unassertive hero, allowing subordinate characters to initiate and carry on with the action while he himself remains a quiescent and mostly overlooked spectator. In the interview mentioned above, Ghosh has come out in favour of fiction about the "outer" rather than the "inner" world, preferring the social to the psychological novel, and this may be the reason why Alu's inner world is left unilluminated.

The events in which he is involved, often peripherally, take place invisibly to the greater world—unlike the juggernaut of events in Rushdie's novels—in a small village near Calcutta, in the mythical town of Al-Ghazira, in Kerala and the Sahara, the journey—which proves circular—turning into a kind of quest for the Holy Grail which takes the unlikely shape of a sewing machine. At the end he learns "they make them better at home now".

On this seething, shapeless matter, Ghosh has imposed a form—like a *raga*, he asserts—by dividing the novel into sections entitled *Satwa*: Reason, *Rajas*: Passion, *Tamas*: Death, so it should have the categories endorsed by Hindu thought and philosophy. The divisions are not really so rigid and the narrative runs on from one to the other with the briskness that typifies the picaresque. He has a vivid sense of the dramatic and there are many memorable scenes—the attack by blood-crazed sharks on the hapless travellers in a small boat, the birth of the baby, Boss, below decks, and the advance of the "rationalists" armed with buckets of carbolic acid upon the cringing politicians clutching their banners under a banyan tree.

The book's chief strength lies in its rootedness in the soil of rural Bengal and the saltmarshes and souks of Al-Ghazira whose people, however eccentric and grotesque, display the energy and spontaneity of the creatures that dance and cavort, labour and struggle in folk paintings on village walls and the graffiti of city slums. Anyone who knows Bengal will recognise such types as Balaram the village schoolmaster whose god is Louis Pasteur and who believes in carbolic acid as other Hindus do in Ganges water, and Shombhu the weaver who steals toddy from the palms while singing the *raga* Lalit by moonlight, and such scenes as the second-hand book-shops, the tea-stalls and cinemas of Calcutta. Al-Ghazira, for all that it is an invention, convinces wholly by its salt and marine odours, its pullulating souk, its population of illegal immigrants and their entomological lives. Their histories, skilfully woven together in a pattern as complex as those created by Alu on the loom, have the engaging quality of the village folk-story-teller's pictorial representations or the modern-day comic strip in serial form. It will be interesting to see if they too take root and survive in the teeming Indian consciousness.

—ANITA DESAI

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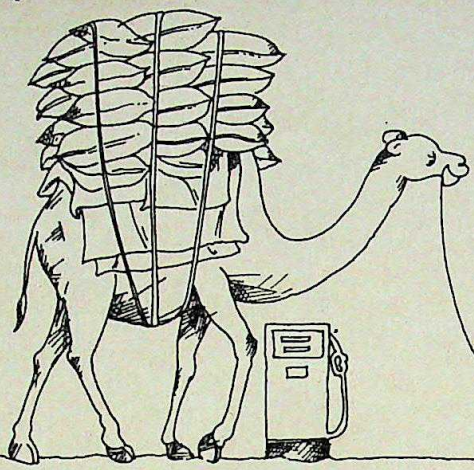

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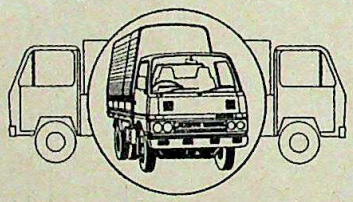

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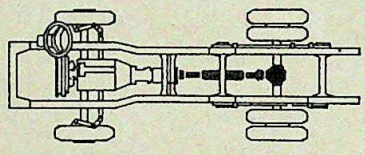

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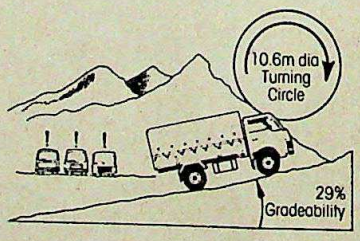

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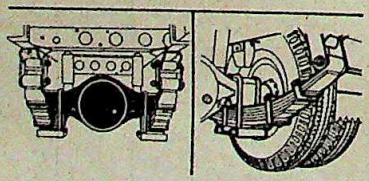

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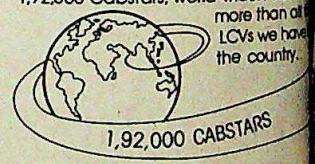

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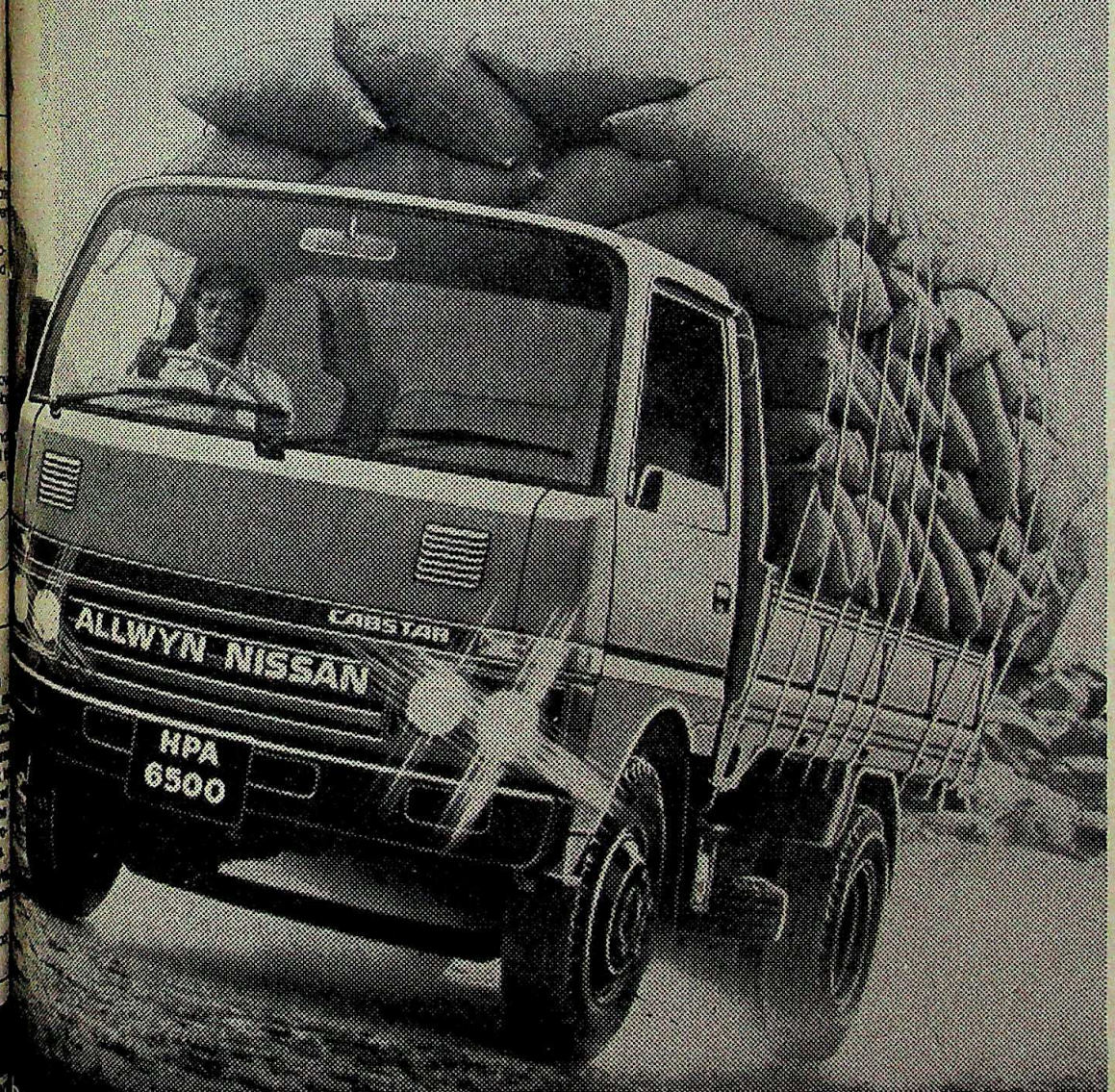

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

The New Awa

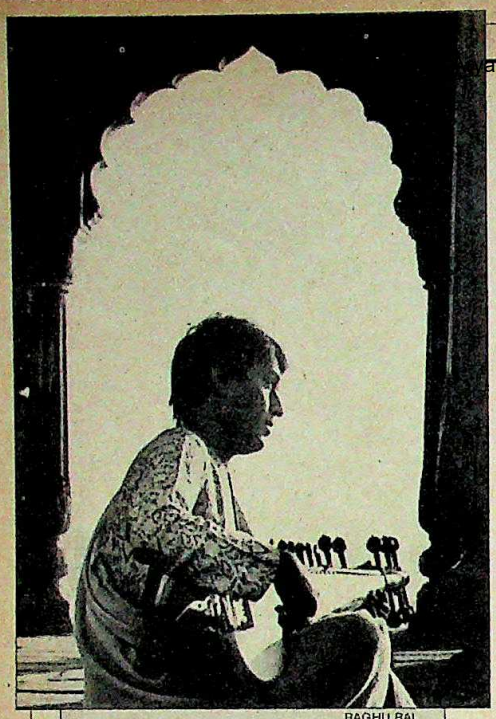
FOR DECADES, it had bloomed in isolation, the cactus flower of India's cultural heritage. From the gilded seclusion of princely palaces to the private homes of cultural dilettantes and sparsely-populated concert halls, Hindustani classical music had two decades ago seemed to be slipping out of the national cultural mainstream.

But today, the progress of Hindustani classical music has matched its musical imagery: the soft haunting strains of its exotic instruments building up with carefully measured tread into a gently cascading crescendo. Both its pace and its popularity are undergoing a remarkable transformation. Suddenly, and unobtrusively, Hindustani classical music has shrugged off its bonds of timelessness and dormancy and broken the commercial barrier.

Ragas are now all the rage and the signs can be seen everywhere—in the sales of discs and cassettes, in the number of festivals, in the star status that musicians enjoy, in the money they command, in the audiences that appear magically in the unlikeliest of places, in colleges where it enjoys a popularity so far reserved only for western music. From an elitist genre, Hindustani classical music seems headed for popular acceptability.

According to A. Salim, commercial manager of Music India Ltd, there has been a dramatic increase in the sale of classical music recordings in the last five years. He estimates that until the start of the decade, it formed only 5 to 7 per cent of total sales of discs and cassettes. But now, the figure has jumped to between 10 and 12 per cent. Says Salim: "Last year alone the increase was nearly 30 per cent."

Suresh Mathur, director-general of All India Radio (AIR), confirms the trend. "There is a distinct increase in the number of letters we get for our classical music programmes," he says, "and some major companies now want to advertise against



RAGHU RAI

AMJAD ALI KHAN

"Things have undoubtedly changed in the past decade. The students who hooted us in colleges, now welcome us with flowers."

SURESH PAREKH

PANDIT JASRAJ

"Every form of music—film, ghazal or any other—only clears another step for the advancement of classical music."

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New awakening

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...ehem—that's certainly new. Live performances organised by AIR—be it at Rohtak, Rampur, Varanasi or Lucknow—always draw full houses and there have been requests by commercial firms to market music from our archives."

Kaushal Bhargava, secretary of Jaipur's Shruti Mandal, remembers that 30 years ago it was hard to get even 50 people for a classical music show. "But now we have four festivals each year and almost every performance draws a full house." And Vinay Chandra Maudgalya, chairman of the Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, says that the number of institutions under the organisation's fold has gone up from 275 to 425 in the last six years.

But what has largely fuelled the change is the fact that the new audience for Indian classical music has predominantly been the youth and students, till now considered exclusively hooked on western pop or Indian film music.

In several prominent Delhi colleges, classical music has succeeded in elbowing aside the traditional fare of western music. The highlight of college annual festivals now is increasingly an all-night classical performance rather than rock concerts. "Things have undoubtedly changed in the past decade," asserts sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan, who has been performing publicly for about three decades. "The students who hooted us in colleges and could not be persuaded to sit quietly now welcome us with flowers and treat us with the greatest respect. They sit for hours on the floor, in the aisles, listening attentively."

Elsewhere, the signs all point in the same direction. A recent survey revealed that 60 per cent of the regular audience at Jaipur's Shruti Mandal were

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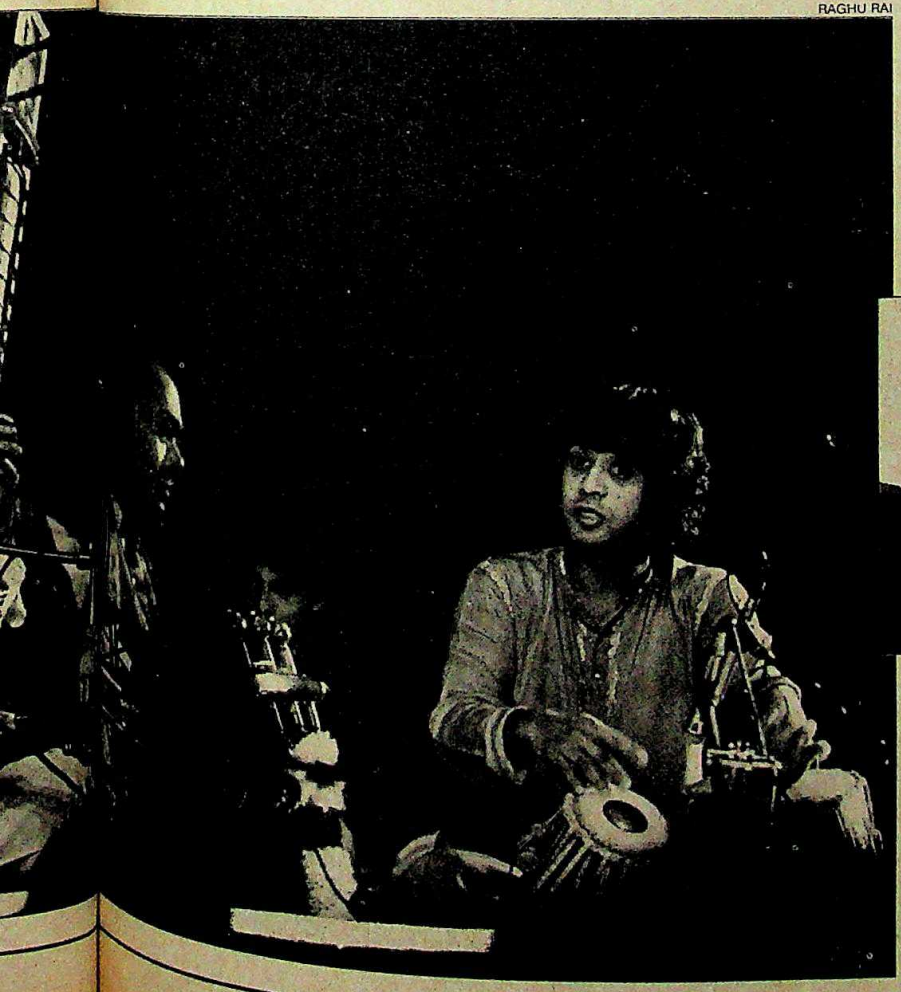
ALLARAKHA

"Because some established artistes permitted our role to grow, public recognition has finally come to us."



Allarakha, Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar and Zakir Hussain in concert: growing appeal

RAGHU RAI

SHIV KUMAR SHARMA

"Classical music can pull people by its sheer depth but generations never got to listen to it. Now its availability has multiplied."

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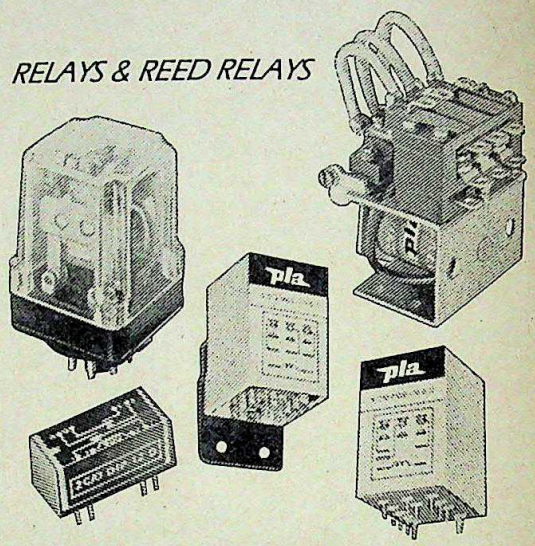

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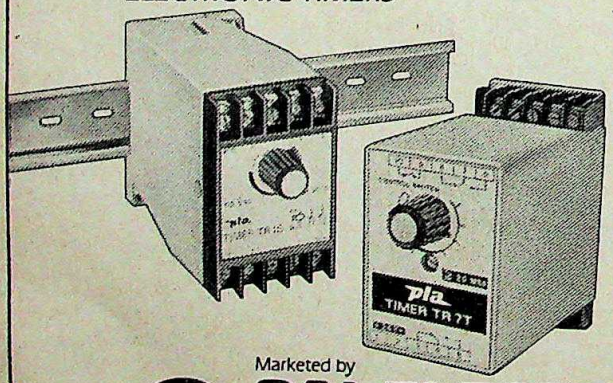

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under 25 years old. Sitarist Vajayat Khan, 25, was instrumental in introducing classical music in Calcutta's St Xavier's College and within just two years it has already become a major event. At the other end of the country, the Indian Music Group in St Xavier's College, Bombay, has already become something of an institution over the past decade. Other than a three-night festival which draws 1,700 people, the group organises lecture-demonstrations each month and has a music library with more than 850 hours of recorded classical music, the bulk of it live.

But to a larger extent, it is the artistes themselves who have made a collective effort to popularise their music—or face virtual extinction. It began with the 'export boom' in Indian classical music in the mid-'60s. The *dhrupad* style is now firmly entrenched in France and Nasir Zahiruddin Dagar recalls that his elder brothers Moinuddin and Aminuddin went to France for the first time in 1965 with an invitation to perform at two venues. But so enthusiastic was the response that they ended up staging 27 concerts. Ever since, the Dagars have been a regular feature in France.

But the most high-profile exporter has undoubtedly been sitarist Ravi Shankar starting with his much publicised association with Beatle George Harrison in the mid-'60s. Shankar was later to say that Harrison could never have learnt however much he may have tried because he was not "cut out for that culture"—but the duo did invite tremendous international attention to the sitar and through it, to Indian music.

MORE important, Ravi Shankar and other musicians made an impact not only abroad but also back home where youngsters have been influenced by western trends. As Faiyazuddin Dagar says: "When people here saw the reception Indian musicians got out there and its neglect in its country of origin, it made them conscious and curious about their own music."

But in many cases it was perseverance that paid. Nearly all the country's top flight musicians have performed to near-empty halls initially but returned regularly to the same venues. Vocalist Pandit Jasraj walked out disgusted from a noisy conference at Bhopal's Gandhi Medical College three years ago. But Jasraj, and his colleagues, have grimly gone back year after year and ultimately converted large masses of students.

But the major role played in attracting the new audience has undoubtedly been by the Society for Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Among Youth (Spic-Macay). It started as a student movement in 1972 when some Indian students heard *dhrupad* exponent Aminuddin Dagar at a function organised by the India Club of New York's Columbia University. What struck them was not only the quality of the performance but also the fact that they knew so little about their own music. When they returned to India they decided that if students were to appreciate classical music, they first needed an opportunity to listen to it.

The first show was in 1977 in the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), New

AVINASH PASRICHA

Kumar Gandharva performs for an appreciative audience: full house

Delhi, where Spic-Macay's prime mover Kiran Seth, a publicity-shy man teaches mathematics. Gradually, and in the last three years with increasing tempo, the group has spread out across the length and breadth of India. In the last season, it organised 275 performances involving nearly every single great name in the music and dance world in about 50 cities and towns, ranging from Guntur to Ajmer and Pollachi to Hazaribagh.

What is more, the whole of this massive exercise is managed almost exclusively by students. Apart from concerts, the meets include baithaks for small audiences, lecture-demonstrations and now on a smaller scale, an attempt is also being made to introduce classical music at school level. In the Delhi College of Engineering, says student Rajiv Ahal: "Just one year ago we were having to herd students into the auditorium. Today they come by themselves." The musicians have themselves helped convert large masses of students to the new music by performing for Spic-Macay at a fraction of their normal fees.

Through the lean years, however, it was the media that kept the music alive, with the radio broadcasting it into millions of homes. Few of the top artistes today are willing to go to the studio, because they no longer need it, but when classical music was fighting to stay alive, the radio was a crucial instrument. Over the years, the familiarity grew and the unease with a complex musical heritage disappeared.

The Madhya Pradesh Government too has played a conscious promotional role, and the state's secretary for culture, Ashok Vajpayee, says that it took him totally by surprise when a thousand people turned up in Sagar recently to listen to Kumar Gandharva. And in Maharashtra, the groundwork was laid by musical plays that began gaining ground two decades ago. The state's cultural director, Kamalakar Sontakke, says some of the singers became full-time vocalists because it paid so much better: Rs 3,000 for a show instead of Rs 250 for taking part in a play. But the plays created the audience

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which nationally known musicians like Amjad Ali Khan and others then tapped in district towns and tehsil headquarters.

The recent upswing is related quite directly to the decline in quality of film music. The disillusionment is reflected clearly in figures—today, this segment makes up only about 50 per cent of the total sales of cassettes and records. Many people in the music business feel that the ghazal boom actually became a vehicle to introduce people to classical music. Says Pandit Jasraj: "Every form of music, film, ghazal or any other, only clears another step for the advancement of classical music."

ing its roots. It has been happening increasingly ever since Independence and the post-1947 generation is more concerned with society's cultural values than its predecessors," he feels.

THE RESULT has been the almost unnoticed but dramatic rise in the audience for classical music in almost every corner of the country. Explains Shiv Kumar Sharma, the santoor virtuoso who almost single-handedly gave this Kashmir instrument the following it has today: "Classical music can pull people by its sheer depth but previous generations never got an opportunity to listen to it.

Vinay Maudgalya instructing the young: enthusiastic response

There is also no doubt that the present heightened interest is the result of current trends in fashion. Classical music is 'in', particularly among the younger set and the affluent. But there are also important sociological reasons that Sontakke calls "a response to the awful sound pollution". Faiyazuddin Dagar explains: "We have been racing ahead so hard and for so long that we are tired of it. After all the peace of mind lies not in running but in aesthetics." Kiran Seth of Spic-Macay says that "somewhere along the line youngsters seem to have become aware of the power of this music. It is also a kind of reaction to the terrible de-culturisation that has occurred in urban areas."

Harish Khanna, director-general of Doordarshan goes further. "This is part of a society's search for identity, of discover-

Now its availability has multiplied manifold. After Independence there were hardly any public concerts—today I have lost count of them."

The status of the accompanist, especially the tabla player, has also improved and there are people like Zakir Hussain and Shafaat Ahmed who are often greater draws than the main artiste. Says Allarakha, Zakir's father, who at 66, has now been playing publicly for an incredible 58 years: "Because some established artistes permitted our role to grow, public recognition has finally come to us."

Quite understandably, the new mass following has left neither the musicians nor their music untouched. Popularity, and the new audience, has compelled the music to adapt by shortening the extended time frame originally strictly adhered to. In concerts, the standard duration has now come down to about three hours. Amjad Ali Khan finds nothing wrong with this trend. Says he: "An artiste's quality can show in minutes—he doesn't have to take hours over it. Fifteen years ago it had become a fashion with us to go on for hours on end. What were we trying to prove? The real danger comes from repetitiveness, not a shorter performance."

The biggest change, however, has been in the status and commercial value of the musicians. Many artistes are now stars in their own right while some have even achieved the status of superstars with the attendant fan following and big money. Asking for Rs 5,000 for a single evening does not embarrass even little-known artistes; Rs 10,000 for a show does not faze the larger organisers and the big names have been known to ask for—and receive—as much as half a lakh rupees for a single performance.

Today, classical music means big money and more and more promoters are getting into the act, following in the footsteps of big corporations like ITC and the DCM group which started the trend. Says a Bombay enthusiast who has witnessed the classical music scene for more than two decades: "My guesstimate is that more than 60 per cent of the organisers are in it for money, compared to say 20 per cent in the mid-1960s".

But musicologist Ashok D. Ranade at Bombay's National Centre for Performing Arts points out the dangers of excessive commercialisation: "Because the audience has grown large but less discriminating, and because the stakes are very high, musicians are unwilling to take risks any more. The fact that less than 50 of the best known *ragas* are actually in circulation today proves this point. Their repertoire has become restricted and the aim is to provide minimal music in a purchasable fashion. If the fast tempo is more popular today than earlier it is because on the one hand it cuts time and, on the other, that is something the public understands easily. The main priority is effect."

Classical music today faces the dilemma that confronts any art form—adjust to suit audience taste and thus create an even greater audience or remain the total purist with little regard for response. But the fact that the questions being asked today relate to its growth and not survival is in itself a major achievement.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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SIXTH TRIENNALE-INDIA

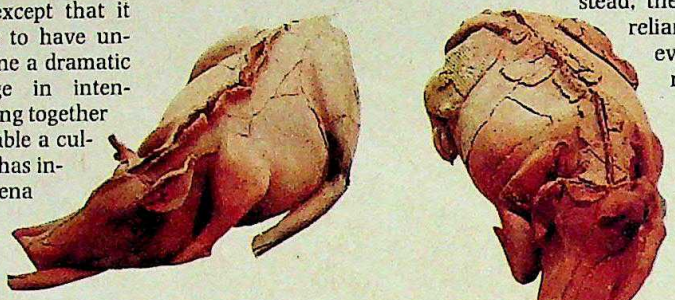
A Confused Picture

THE ANNUAL Triennale is the high point in the Indian art world's calendar, except that it seems to have undergone a dramatic change in intentions. Though meant to bring together artists from all over to enable a cultural exchange, the event has increasingly become an arena where the dissensions and differences that have turned the Indian art scene into something resembling Dante's *Inferno* are heatedly aired. The Sixth Triennale-India, which opened in Delhi last fortnight, was no different.

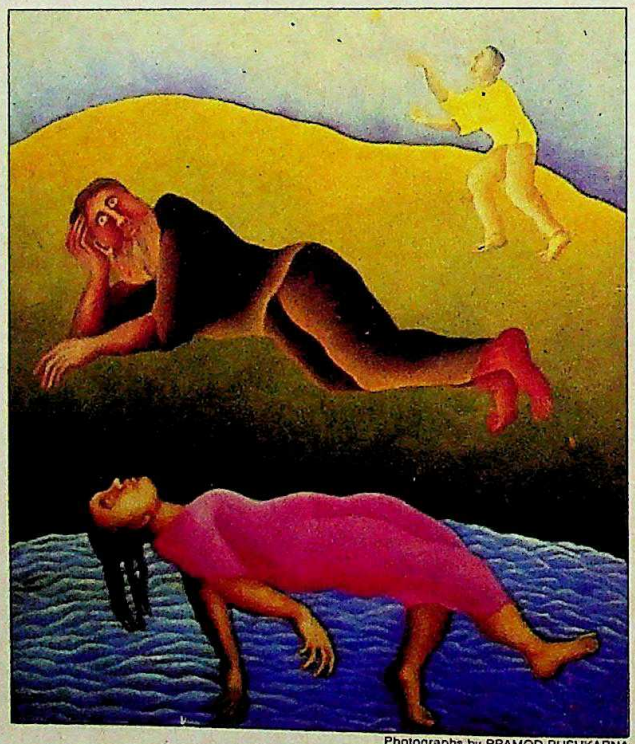
While some complained about the "unpardonable waste of money" (the ten awards alone were of Rs 50,000 each, out of a total budget of about Rs 35 lakh) others grumbled about the "pathetically bad organisation" (there were no labels identifying the works and their artists, and the lighting and projection were poor). Still others questioned the very validity and relevance of such an event even as various pamphlets made the rounds of the Rabindra Bhavan galleries alleging nepotism and gross discrimination by the selectors.

There were some embarrassing moments when some irate young artists burst upon a press conference minutes before the opening and gheraoed Akademi Chairman Sankho Chaudhary and the Triennale's Honorary Director Krishen Khanna, accusing them of having influenced the jury's decision and manipulated the awards.

On the other hand there were those who commended the organisers—the Central Lalit Kala Akademi and Triennale Director Khanna—for making the most of meagre resources. What emerged from all the praise and criticism, however, was the very multi-dimensional nature of such an exercise. Said respected artist Raza, who had come from Paris especially as a jury member: "It's something very good. It's a golden opportunity for our artists to meet artists from all over the world and exchange notes."



Pigs by Pushpamala; and *So What* by Caur



Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

With 776 works from 36 countries on show, the fare was naturally mixed and varied and the conflicting responses hardly came as a surprise. But there was little consensus on the trends that may have been in evidence. While Paris-based Indian artist Francis Newton Souza thought that the Triennale indicated the return of the figurative, a much younger Amitava Das and wife Mona of Delhi saw the prevalence of informal tendencies and environmental preoccupations.

Though the exhibits were certainly not representative of their respective countries, certain definite patterns did emerge. For one thing, the exhibition confirmed the artists' weariness with avant garde idioms the world over. Instead, there now seems to be a heavy reliance on tradition and heritage, even if the expression remains modern and contemporary.

This marriage between the traditional elite and modern concepts was evident in parts of the Indian section, by far the largest with 160 works of 76 artists. And artists as diverse as Pushpamala and Arpana Caur (the two Indian awardees), Shamshad Husain and Jai Zharotia, and Basant Kashyap and N.N. Rimzon. Said noted artist Satish Gujral, who found this section better than the rest: "One trend that's evident is the tendency among younger artists to use certain native techniques like ceramics and other crafts. The terracotta sculptures of some artists are especially good."

The sculptures were indeed good. Pushpamala's prize-winning *Girl with a Mask*, *Pigs* and *Girl Smiling* were steeped in traditional form and medium, and yet the organic simplicity of her terracottas was at once conventional and contemporary. The subtle clay folds of her *Pigs* especially spoke volumes and it must have been this that decided the jury. The terracotta tradition was upheld by C. Dakshinamoorthy too in *Meeting I* and *Meeting II*, but this is where the mode stopped. It did not proceed beyond the earthy realism of the clay, as did Pushpamala's.

There was certainly more of figure than form. Going around the Indian section, which he found the best, Souza remarked: "I see a return of figurative painting, after that brief phase of non-figurative, non-objective painting that was evident at the previous triennale."

It was Rimzon's *Man in a Chalk Circle* that reaffirmed this trend of figurative

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symbolism. The very nakedness of the fibre-glass statue conjured up a tangible defiance, enough to break the vicious circle encircling him. However, the artist failed to capture this vehement mood again, with the result that his other works almost bordered on the gross. The grossness of figurative expressionism came through most crudely in Basant Kashyap's *Aa Chal Bhaag Chala*, an awkwardly mounted assemblage of a wooden horse cart, its garishly dressed driver and a woman peeping through a door at a man who is about to urinate. The whole rig, perhaps, was intended to shock—which it did apart from assaulting one's senses with its misplaced grotesquerie.

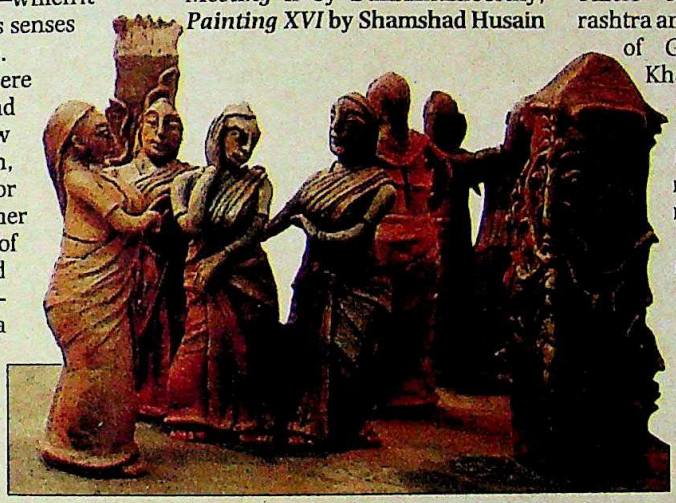
In soothing contrast were Arpana Caur's oils, *So What* and *Nirjan*, which seemed to grow in impact as one watched them, providing an effective metaphor for existence. The texture of her shades played with a plurality of expression that undulated simultaneously on various transcendental planes. Certainly a mature artist, Caur seems to be striving for a definite, individualistic expression. More or less the same mystique hovered over Jai Zharotia's water colours *Mystery I*, *Mystery II* and *Mystery III*. A similar sense of mysticism came through in some very different kind of works: M. Sonathipathi's colour ink creations, which relied heavily on conventional intricacies and had all the ornate appeal of a Tibetan thankha.

On a more organic plane, it was Shamshad Husain whose *Painting XV* and *Painting XVI* brought out the complete texture and fullness of oil on canvas. His schematic gestures and simplistic renditions were lyrical and absorbing, and once and for all reaffirmed his artistic status as independent from his famous father, the legendary M.F. Husain.

Of course, there were the inevitable forays into the cubistic and the surreal. But most of these were poor copies of the West—at best tacky, at worst pretentious. So one had Rekha Rodwittiya doing a juvenile Piccaso in *The Parade* and Prabha Sahai doing a pathetic Dali in her *Foliage*. Perhaps it was this that prompted painter Jatin Das to remark that "the Indian artists are merely aping the West". And he was not running them down. Said Das: "A lot of them are more competent, but in this the soul is missing. They are painting pictures instead of paintings."

This reaction was perhaps due to the fact that the exhibition was hardly representative of contemporary art and artists. Gujral felt that it was a wrong step to have debarred artists who had participated in earlier triennales. "The very idea leaves little scope for representation," he said. "It does not give a clear picture of what is being created here." Das agreed: "A triennale is for the best of Indian art. So they should have taken people who have exhibited earlier. As it is, the Triennale does not do good to Indian art. I think we should concentrate on our own art and artists."

Meeting II by Dakshinamoorthy; *Painting XVI* by Shamshad Husain



But Triennale Director Khanna thought that the selectors had taken in the most that they could. "You can't possibly accommodate everybody," he explained. "We have tried to take in as many as we can. We even made last-minute admissions. But we also have our constraints of space and funds. We can't please everybody."

Many artists, however, thought otherwise. There had certainly been discrimination, they alleged, both in the selection by commissioners and the award by the jury. Said a het-up Yusuf Arrakal, the painter from Bangalore who spearheaded the protest: "I know for sure that I was selected for the award, along with two others—sculptor J.K. Chillar of Maharashtra and ceramist Ranjana Thapaliyal of Garhi. But Chaudhary and Khanna influenced the jury and made them select those two girls who are very close to Khanna." Souza, while saying nothing as categorical as that, nonetheless supported Arrakal and his friends. Said the soft-spoken artist: "Their protest is valid. There is a lot of politics and groupism."

It was these very snafus that prompted some artists to question the propriety of such events. Some young artists were for abolishing it altogether. Instead, they felt that it would be more meaningful if the same money was used to send Indian artists abroad on fellowships and exhibit their works in other countries. But senior artists like Das and Gujral thought that this would be a folly. While Das advocated a triennale only for Indian artists, Gujral felt that the Government should sanction more funds and space for the event. Gallery owner Kekoo Gandhy suggested a permanent organising outfit for the triennale, which would exhibit the works not just in Delhi but all over the country.

It may be thoughtless to abandon the Triennale altogether. But if things are going to remain the way they are—considering that this was the sixth such bungle—it would be more judicious to have second thoughts about its organisational aspects and the question of representation. The Indian Triennale may be one way of showing the best face of Indian art. But it also seems to wind up showing the worst.

—MOHAMMED ASLAM

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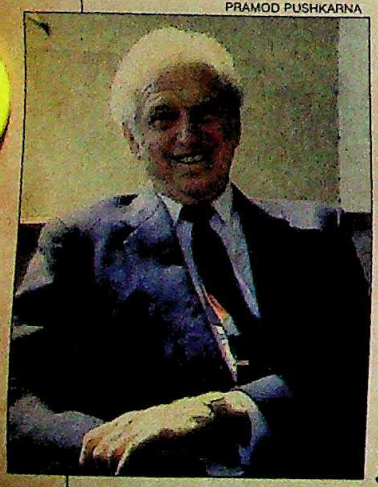
D.J. ANAND RAJ

Kumar and Sujatha with her parents: unusual alliance

◆ It rained torrents and yet, it was the dawn of a new era. One cloudy morning last fortnight, everybody who was anybody converged on Bangalore Palace for a most unusual alliance. The tie-up was between politics and media. And tying the knot were **Sujatha**, 24, daughter of Congress(I) leader S. Bangarappa, and **Tilak Kumar**, 32, director of the Deccan Herald group. Said the groom: "It's a little odd getting married into a politician's family. But I don't think that it is going to affect the paper's policy at all." The bride blushed: "I got married to him because he is Tilak Kumar, not because he is a newspaper magnate." The happiest was pa-in-law Bangarappa: "Naturally I am happy. As for people saying that now I will get more publicity in *Deccan Herald*, am I not getting enough already?" This is not all: Sujatha's sister will soon marry Shivanna, son of actor Raj Kumar. It's a small world, after all.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Sheldon: the Indian mystery

◆ If Ramesh Sippy can plagiarise *The Magnificent Seven* into a block-busting *Sholay*, he can also produce some pretty authentic stuff. Guess what Sippy has brought in from the other side of midnight? **Sidney Sheldon**, no less, the master of the pulp fiction game. On the books is a collaboration plan that calls for Sheldon to pen an Indian story for the world market, which Sippy might then make into a film. The best-selling writer, who was on a week's visit to Bombay and Delhi last fortnight, has a soft corner for India. "Yeah," said the frizzy-haired American. "India is a place of mysteries, it gives me ideas." Great ones for the box-office, to be sure. But until the deal is signed, neither Sheldon nor Sippy is spilling the bloodline.

◆ Now has it or has it not come to roost at the Bachchans? The stork, that is. For well over a fortnight now, there have been rumours that **Jaya Bachchan**, 36, petite and mother of two, is expecting again—a third time. The Guddi herself is seen at parties radiant and glowing, and when asked to confirm, gives a nod and a smile that says it all. But when the newspapers box the item, ma-in-law Teji Bachchan denies it hotly and lashes out at the press for selling itself to spice and sensationalism. "It's a lie—a silly rumour," said Mama Bachchan last fortnight. "She's not—not in the near future, not in the present future." But back to the parties again, and there Jaya is—all nods and blushes and mysterious smiles. Now who will break this pregnant silence?

Bachchan: mother in waiting

BHAWAN SINGH

◆ By now, **Shah Bano Begum**, 73, is a household name. But the Begum is not content with being the Muslims' *cause celebre*. Egged on by her ambitious son, she now wants more—a Rajya Sabha ticket, if you please. In the capital last fortnight, Shah Bano declared with a twinkle in her kohl-rimmed eyes: "We have always been staunch supporters of the Congress(I) and now that I am so well-known, the party can use my name." Of course, there has been no offer from the party yet. "But if Rajiv asks me, I'm willing to stand for election."

HARI OM GULATI

Shah Bano: aiming high

SIGNPOST

Died: Jiddu Krishnamurti, 90, in California. Thinker, philosopher and seer non-pareil, 'Krishnaji' was a unique spiritual teacher. Beginning with the Theosophical Society, this modest, uneducated man went on to evolve a profound yet simple credo. Though he did not want to be deified, his followers are sad that "the seer who walked alone" will walk no more.

—Compiled by MOHAMMED ASLAM

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The Crisis State

Maharashtra was once again plunged into political turmoil as chief minister Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar resigned following the mark-sheet scandal. The imposition of Home Minister S.B. Chavan as his successor seemed unlikely to solve the state's political crisis.

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Explosive Findings

The Justice Kirpal Commission handed in its report last fortnight on the tragic *Kanishka* disaster. The report confirms that a terrorist bomb caused the crash and also lays out in meticulous and damning detail the sequence of events that led to the disaster.

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The Gathering Storm

The Muslim Women's Bill is rapidly proving that the Rajiv Gandhi Government has painted itself into a tight corner. The issue has sparked off a heated national debate. But with growing opposition to the bill, the Government finds itself in an embarrassing position.

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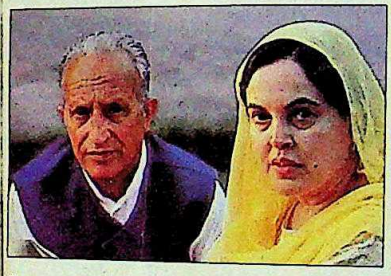
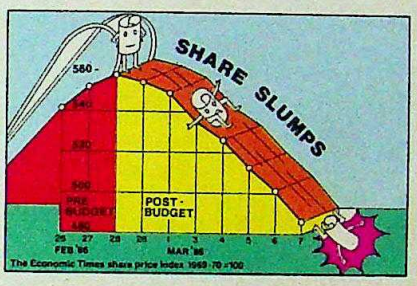


Suspended Animation

Bowing to mounting political and public pressure, the Congress(I) withdrew support from G.M. Shah's beleaguered government, paving the way for governor's rule. Jagmohan's efforts to streamline the administration have been widely welcomed.

SPECIAL REPORT.....82



The Balancing Act

The stock-market nose-dived, industry howled, and the middle class cold-shouldered new tax breaks while the Government slapped new taxes on consumer durables and made a determined bid to shed its pro-rich image. A comprehensive report on the Union Budget.

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The Master's Due

The paintings of Nobel Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore have always been undervalued, but now, decades after his death, his artistic endeavours have suddenly become sought after in art circles at prices well beyond those commanded by any other Indian artist.

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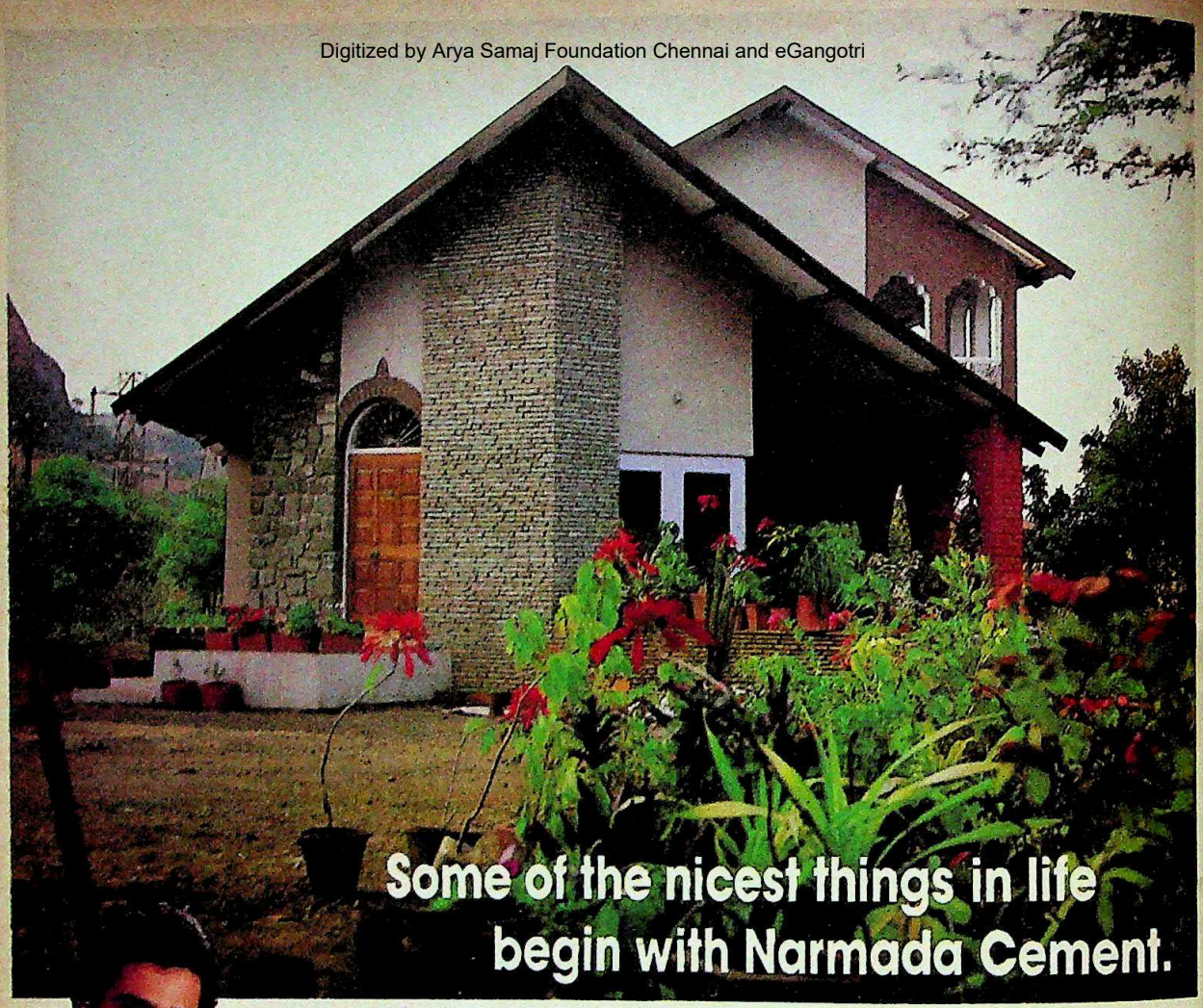

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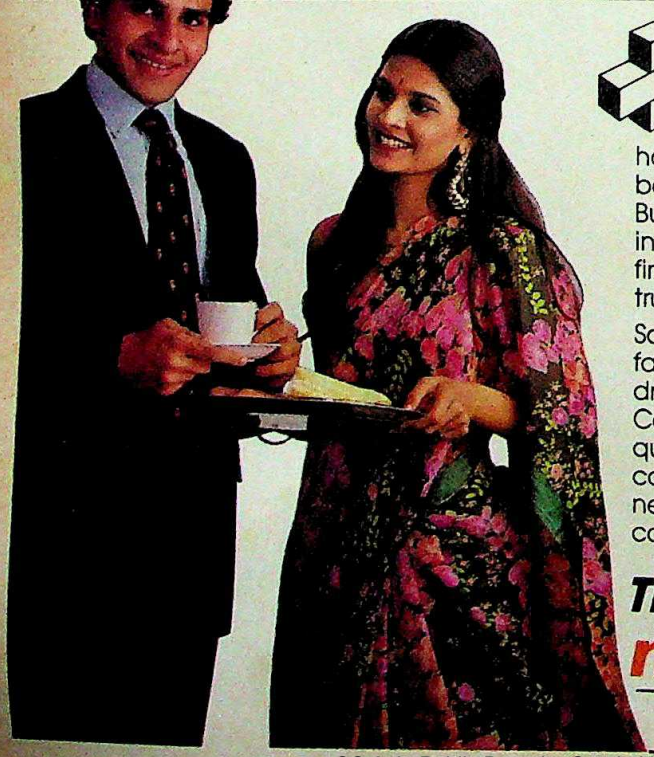

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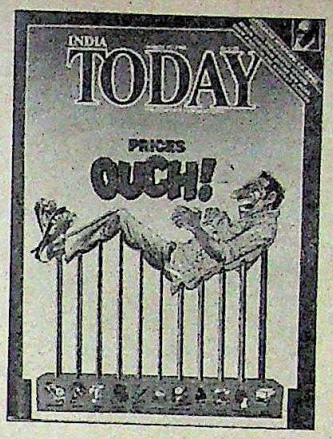

PRICE PAINS

In his cover story interview, Finance Minister V.P. Singh ("One bandh costs Rs 450 crore" Mar 15) lamented that while the extra revenue from petroleum products will be Rs 530 crore, one bandh costs the nation Rs 450 crore. In other words, there is no gain from the increase in prices, as it is offset by the bandh. What then has the Government achieved by persisting in this increase except stoking the fires of inflation by imposing a burden of nearly Rs 1,000 crore (Rs 450 crore of the bandh and Rs 530 crore of the price hike) on the people? By what canons of justice and logic can we term this an act of courageous and responsible leadership?

Hyderabad — K. RAJAGOPALAN

■ The real cause for the excessive taxes and increased prices is the tremendous defence expenditure. While a few years ago, it was Rs 2,500 crore, now it is over Rs 8,000 crore. The real reason for the propaganda of Pakistan making the bomb is to build public opinion in favour of buying arms.

Indore — M.J. ANSARI

■ Let us not get hysterical about the price rise. No doubt it will force us to tighten our belts; but at the same time it will force us to tighten the screws on our discipline too. Thanks to the astronomical price rise, there will be, by and large, less and less of drinking, drug-abuse, gambling, smoking, immorality and so on. We will have no option but to make a virtue of necessity. As Shakespeare wrote: "Sweet are the uses of adversity."

Ahmedabad — K.S. VISHWANATHAN

■ Sailing in Rajiv's dreamship to the 21st century, we Indians can't conjure up a picture of prices in the next century. Will someone tell our speeding prime minister that the price forecast is very critical ahead and he has to do something about it?

Bangalore — K. CHIDANAND KUMAR

SPARING THE ROD

I fully agree with Surjit Singh Barnala when he says: "The rod is the only answer now for these spoiled boys. If we don't send the police in now, tomorrow the army will have to go." ("Avoiding a Showdown", March 15). When Barnala came to power he not only released these youths but also gave them employment. He gave an opportunity to these spoiled youths to become ideal citizens. But as soon as they were released, Punjab again saw violence and killings. The Barnala Government should now take the help of all Sikhs and take the Hindus into confidence.

Surajpur, Ambala — KAMLESH PRASAD

WRONG BILLING

Apropos your Comment ("Stepping Backwards", March 15), I would, while in full agreement with you, like to add that if Muslim fundamentalists feel all that bad about the Shah Bano court judgement and if they truly and sincerely feel hurt, then I would welcome it if a Muslim thief's hand is chopped off, and an adulterer stoned, like it is preached in the scriptures. This acid test should take care of the controversy for good.

Shimla — PRAMOD SUD

■ You seem to be greatly hurt by Rajiv Gandhi's bold and realistic stand in introducing the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill. One thing I can't understand is how can the protagonists of women's rights call it liberation and maintaining the dignity of women when, to maintain herself, a divorced woman would have to look to and depend on the same person who threw her out on the streets? Can anything be more insulting and ego-hurting than this? I don't think any self-respecting woman would go to such a person and ask for alimony after going through all those humiliations. Further, as per the Supreme Court judgement, if the husband is bound by law to pay maintenance to his divorced wife, he would kill and burn her or reduce her to a doormat instead. It was this humiliation and indignity that the Holy Quran wanted to save women from.

Delhi — SAEEDA MASROOR KHAN

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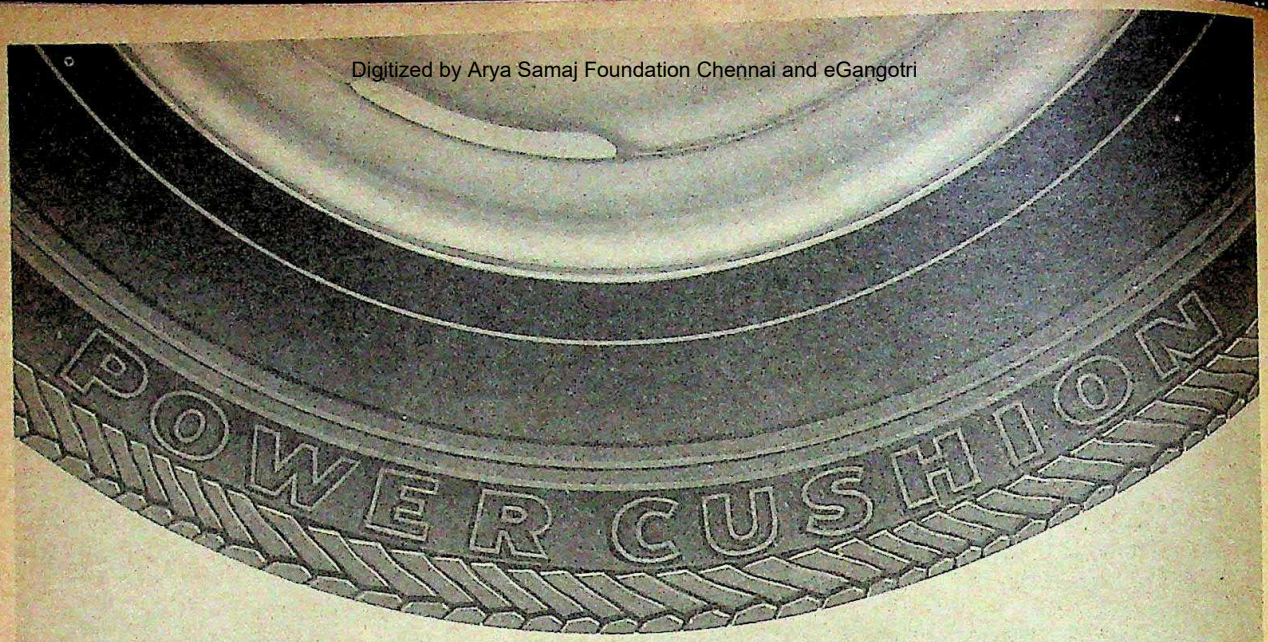

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■ Your editorial rightly concludes that the motivation for the Congress(I)'s volte face on the Shah Bano judgement is political. If the bill on Muslim women is passed, conditions like those prevailing before 1947 are likely to be created again. During 1940-46, the Congress kept accommodating one demand after another of the Muslim League. Ultimately it accepted the League as the sole spokesman of the Muslims, and agreed to the two-nation theory. The Muslims in India cannot be given the benefit of the doubt for being in a minority, because all of them had voted for the creation of Pakistan in the 1946 elections. They cannot be permitted to have their cake and eat it too.

Moradabad — V.S. GARG

■ I fully concur with your views on the bill. Section 125, CR PC is sustained by Article 15 of the Constitution and applies to all women equally. The exclusion of any religious community is a plain violation of the fundamental right to equality. It's high time our politicians started placing the interests of our 'secular' nation over their vote banks.

Bhopal — RAJNEESH BERDIA

■ Our young and dynamic prime minister wants us to reach the 21st century via the fifth!

New Delhi — P.K. MALHOTRA

MINORITY VIEW

The prime minister deserves to be congratulated for having introduced the bill on Muslim women respecting the sentiments of the Muslims ("The Muslims: Anger and Hurt", March 15). No country can prosper if its largest minority is isolated. The 125 so-called prominent Muslims referred to in your article can by no means claim to represent the overwhelming majority of the Muslims.

Adoni, Andhra Pradesh — SHER BANU

■ I think it is high time we stopped giving importance to religion and delinked it from politics to save our country from disintegration. By introducing the bill on Muslim women, I'm afraid Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has taken one more step towards this disintegration.

Angul, Orissa — NIVEDITA SARANGI

FALL FROM GRACE

The shabby treatment meted out to G. Parthasarathi ("The Resignation Story", March 15) was totally uncalled for. As India's foremost expert on foreign affairs, GP today should have been at the helm of the Ministry of External Affairs. But then GP never did sell shoe-polish or paint nor pilot an aeroplane. He was for years the de facto foreign minister, yet he refused the official title. Publicity never appealed to him. And today he is a pariah. Rajiv Gandhi should realise that if the current trend of ignoring good people continues, his aeroplane will soon crash. As it is, a lot of engine trouble seems to have developed already.

Calcutta — NIKHIL SRINIVASAN

EDIBLE POISON

Your report on the pesticide industry ("Poisonous Growth", March 15) is alarming. Comprehensive legislation to check violation of the Insecticides Act must be brought about and complete scrutiny of data on the poisonous effects of pesticides must be made early. Enforcement of rules and regulations must be tightened and monitored vigilantly.

Coimbatore — N.P. LAKSHMINARAYAN

BUSINESS BLUES

By swooping down on companies, businessmen and industrialists, income tax officials are only behaving in the worst manner possible for collecting more tax ("Tax Raids: Tightening the Bonds", March 15). The arrest of top executives is a bad reflection on national integrity. The raids will only make the finance minister unpopular and unsuccessful. Instead, the Central Government should take steps to help the private sector raise adequate resources and expand productive employment.

Madras — K.V. RAJAGOPALAN

MONITORING ECONOMY

I was taken aback by your comment in The Economy Monitor (March 15) that the rate of growth in the money supply (M_3) is one variable that the Government seems to be keeping under tight control, despite the fact that the annual trend actually increased from 17 per cent to 18 per cent, and the growth in productive output is well below 5 per cent—a case of too much money chasing too few goods! The manner in which we control our money supply reminds me of the Vector theory of systems, which states that systems run better when designed to run downhill.

Cochin — IMON GHOSH

MUSICAL PEOPLE

"Classical Music: A New Awakening" (March 15) is final proof, if proof was indeed needed, that you are still in a comatose state. Classical music may be a cactus flower in the arid desert of the Hindi-speaking, dust-laden cow belt of the north, but down south no soul breathes which is so dead that it can't essay a few breezy notes, pluck a few strings or tap out a fetching rhythmic pattern in percussion. Classical music is as much an integral aspect of our ethos as temple towers, filtered coffee, Mysore rasam, Kanchipuram silk saris and Gonkura chutney.

New Delhi — K. VENKATESAN

■ It is most heartening that some of our promising classical singers and instrumentalists are trying their best to popularise classical music. While some music directors are trying to induct more western tunes and instruments into Hindi films, there are others who are using Indian instruments like tabla, sitar, mridangam, sarod and bansuri in background music.

Jamshedpur — B.N. BOSE

HEROIN HIGH

The heroin addiction problem is really hitting new highs (March 15). The lack of adequate hospital facilities for heroin addicts indicates that the Government is more inclined towards curing the symptoms instead of the problem. Rehabilitation therapy should be given more importance than the detoxification programme as such cases tend to relapse.

Ahmedabad — KETAN YAGNIK

■ Your special report made thought-provoking reading. It's easy to crack down on big organised gangs than to keep a check on the 'freelancers' who do not carry more than 2-3 kg of heroin. The trafficking can be stopped only when the market is cut off.

Shimla — VIVEK MOHAN

WRONG PICTURE

Apropos the article "Sixth Triennale-India: A Confused Picture" (March 15), as members of the international jury we strongly repudiate the insinuation made by Yusuf Arakkal that the jury was influenced by Sankho Chaudhary and Krishen Khanna.

Paris — GAUDIBERT, MELEHI and RAZA

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"Which child has leprosy?"

The chances are you won't ever be able to tell

Leprosy carries haunting associations of missing fingers and toes — yet, these manifestations need never occur.

Early signs

It could start with a pale or a red patch; a tingling or an 'ant-crawling' sensation along an affected nerve; and numbness, loss of hair and lack of sweating in the area. Deformities appear later, at an advanced stage, only if the disease goes untreated.

It isn't always infectious

Most people believe that all leprosy patients pass on the disease. This isn't true. Leprosy is the least infectious of all infectious diseases. Besides, only 20% of all leprosy patients suffer from the infectious kind of leprosy. Of those who come into prolonged contact with infectious cases, only 5% catch the disease.

Not just a poor man's disease

Leprosy doesn't spare the affluent. It can — and does — occur in any social and economic class. What's more, 30% of all newly detected cases are children.

It is curable

Leprosy can be cured completely, even at an advanced stage, though serious deformities cannot always be remedied. A full course of medication and treatment is what the patient needs. The duration of the treatment depends on the severity of the case.

If treated early, leprosy leaves no physical or psychological scars.

All the patient needs is :

- Early detection
- Early intervention
- Sustained treatment
- Community support throughout

Drive away the stigma

Encourage leprosy patients to lead a normal life. Remind them — and yourself — that they pose no threat to their family or friends. Only you can help them retain their place in society.

All you need is an open mind.

React-0411/85 D

TATA STEEL

Issued in the interest of better understanding and support for the leprosy patient — by TATA STEEL and UNICEF.

The real healing touch must come from you

The true identity of the leprosy patient has been concealed for want of community support.

For further information, write to :
Leprosy Awareness Campaign, C/o UNICEF
Information Service, 73 Lodi Estate, New Delhi-110 003.

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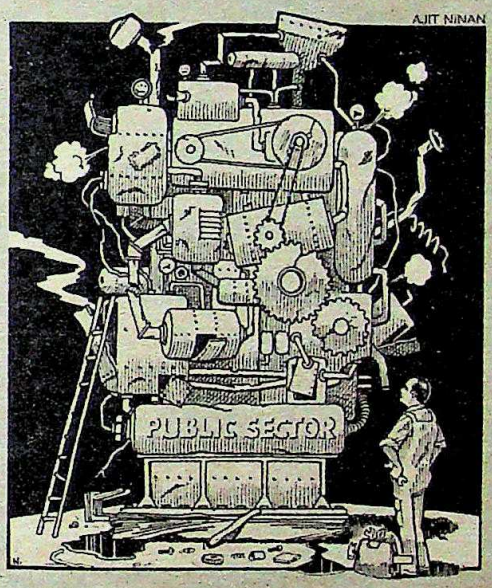
Public Issue

SUDDENLY, the public sector is in the news. The Government is talking of new initiatives on several fronts where action is urgently needed, and some of the ideas being tossed about come like a breath of fresh air. But so far there has been more talk than action, and decisions on clear-cut proposals have been debated endlessly without anything concrete emerging.

The public sector is important, and the Government is increasingly conscious of this, because its success in meeting the seventh plan's investment targets depends critically on the public sector generating more surpluses. Every third rupee that the Government will invest in the plan is supposed to come from public enterprises. If they fail to provide this cash for investment, the economy's future growth is in jeopardy.



Investment in the public sector now totals more than Rs 43,000 crore. Yet, if one leaves aside the oil companies, the Government gets absolutely no profit on its investment. A 10 per cent return would generate more than Rs 4,000 crore annually: almost equal to the total revenue from both the income tax and the corporation tax.

But it should be clear that these returns will be impossible without basic issues being addressed, issues concerning management efficiency and accountability, the closure of un-salvageable units, the choice of areas for public sector investment, the speedy completion of projects, cost control, corruption and leakages, the type of people appointed to head public units, the nationalisation of units rendered sick by private managements, and much more.

The Government has, in fact, been doing some refreshingly new thinking on many of these areas. Right now, for instance, it is busy working out a new pricing policy for key public sector companies so that the burden of managerial inefficiency is not passed on to consumers through higher prices. This is welcome, because the whole economy has been paying the price for public sector inefficiency: one example is steel, another is the increasing power tariffs that result because of the sorry state of the state electricity boards.

The Government has also talked of closing down unviable units, of privatising some of the better-run companies so that they can attract funds from the public at a time when money is scarce, and of introducing the French system of dealing with public sector managements: the Government negotiates a contract with the management on key targets, and then leaves the management free from day-to-day interference, instead of judging it periodically on the attainment of the goals agreed to.

The problem is that most of these initiatives have remained in the realm of discussion and debate, without any final decisions emerging. For instance, a decision on partly privatising at least some leading public sector companies, like Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd and Hindustan Machine Tools, has hung fire for several months; the industry minister first talked of this last year.

There has been even more toing and froing on the decision to close down a handful of government-owned companies, even though the Hindustan Steelworks Construction Ltd has had 5,000 idle workers on its rolls for the last five years, while Engineering Projects India Ltd has lost Rs 72 crore in the last three years alone. Other companies, like the Heavy Engineering Corporation at Ranchi, have wiped out their total capital with accumulated losses, but seem to retain the right to continue losing Rs 50 crore and more every year till eternity.

And, of course, there is no sense of direction concerning public sector investment. There is little reason for the Government to be investing in consumer industries, but it does—and loses money, to boot. There is equally little reason why Scooters India should be losing money year after year in the midst of a two-wheeler revolution.

There are other neglected issues, like over-employment, delayed projects, and corruption. The prime minister told some employees' representatives who met him some months ago that although he knew that a public sector company had 5,000 employees instead of 2,000, there was nothing he could do about this. As for delayed projects, the Vishakhapatnam steel project is a classic example of delays and cost escalations leading to a point where the project is doomed to lose money from the moment it starts production, and condemned to being dated technologically because of the long gestation period.

Equally distressing is the failure to rationally determine the level of government supervision required in the public sector. L.K. Jha made the eminently sensible point six months ago that greater governmental supervision of day-to-day functioning meant reduced accountability by the management. But the Government has still not put its relationship with public sector managements into a codified framework. The talk of introducing the French system has not been followed up with a decision.

All these raise key issues that must be sorted out. What is needed is a comprehensive look at the various problem areas, the speedy identification of solutions, and quick action aimed at getting to the end objectives. So far, what has been in evidence is the desire to get moving in at least some areas. But action itself has been at a premium.

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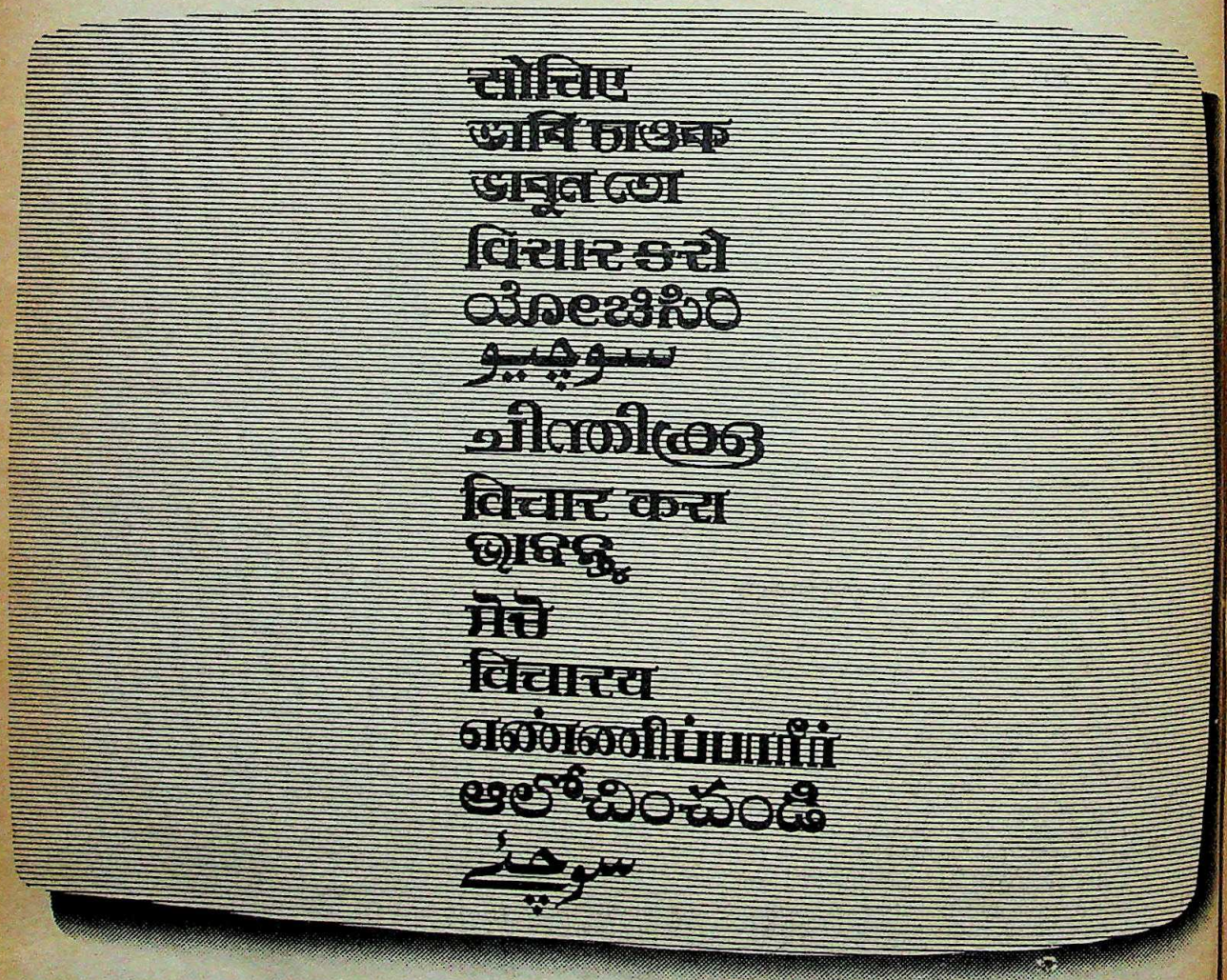
Think of machines that help you think.



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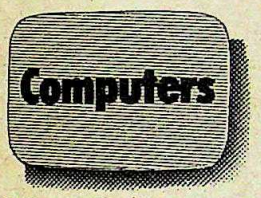

A computer multiplies the power of the mind. It is a very effective tool at man's disposal. It helps in decision making, be it in commercial or scientific areas. It is really an extension of man's thinking power and helps to increase it many, many times. For growth. And for excellence.

And this technology is no longer something very expensive or exclusive, the preserve of a few. It is becoming available to more and more people, at prices that they can afford. The increasingly sophisticated technology makes possible higher performance at lower prices.

A computer today, however, is not just a piece of electronic hardware. It requires instructions that tell it what to do. Broadly, these instructions are known as Software. Good Software can vastly improve the usefulness of a computer, just as poor Software can shackle it.

Then there is the training and education of the people using the computer, so that they can make full use of it.

To make sure that the computer is up and working, it is essential to have trained people, test-equipment and spare parts available as and when needed. A regular supply of Printer Ribbons, Floppy Diskettes, etc. is also required for the smooth running of your computer.

It is also possible to use a computer without buying one. In a Computer Centre facility, one can get access to large, powerful computers, and professional help to make use of these. For the first-time computer-user this means the ability to step into computerization without the need for investment in equipment, space and staff.

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Computers. And much more.

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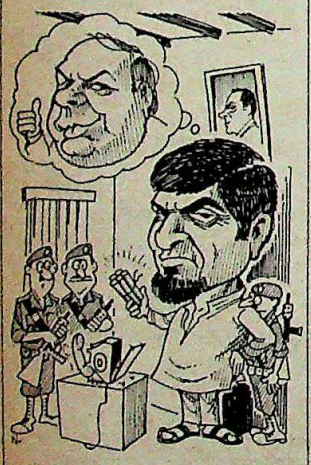
Security Holes

● VIP security is a tricky thing these days, as the hapless men posted at Vice-President R. Venkatraman's house discovered recently. For, unknown to them, three men from one of the intelligence agencies were sent to check on the effectiveness of the security ring around the house. They posed as employees of the Telephones Department and landed up at the vice-president's residence on Maulana Azad Road, claiming that they had come to check VIP telephones.

As per usual procedure, the security men at the gate took them to the vice-president's secretary, who in turn passed them on to the vice-president's personal assistant, who took them into the house and showed them where all the phones were. He then left them to their devices.



Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

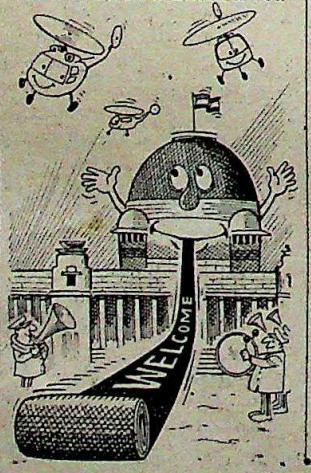
The intelligence men placed a dummy explosive device in Venkatraman's bedroom telephone, left, and reported to their chief. The chief rang up the vice-president's secretary and said there was an explosive device in the bedroom phone. The incredulous official refused to believe it at first, but then checked and found the story true.

Similar checks at the residences of Central ministers Buta Singh, H.K.L. Bhagat and Jagdish Tytler also testified to the poor quality of the security net around VIP's. In fact, Arun Nehru—who organised the checks—won a bet with Tytler that he would penetrate the security ring around him. But there would have been no fun and games if VIP security had been made fools of, not by intelligence men on the prowl, but by potential assassins.

Protocol Plans

● The red gravel front yard of the stately Rashtrapati Bhawan is going to be put to regular use—for the formal arrival and seeing off ceremonies of heads of state and VVIP's. The External Affairs Ministry is "rationalising" the procedures for ceremonial arrivals and departures, and the grounds of Zail Singh's imposing official residence have caught the ministry's eye.

The first dignitary to be so welcomed last fortnight was the South Korean Prime Minister. In his case the change of venue was dictated by necessity; he arrived and left by commercial flights and there was hardly any scope for ceremonial parades at the airport terminal, say MEA mandarins. Moreover, the Rashtrapati Bhawan on Raisina hill is a convenient and elegant setting for such ceremonies, surpassing the White House lawns where the US President usually welcomes visiting dignitaries. There is another reason for the switch. It will save the necessity of motorcades toing and froing from the airport.



Toiletry Training

● The Congress(I)'s proposed code of conduct exhorts abstinence in the face of temptation to buy such imported goodies as video cassette recorders. But it is silent on after-shave lotions and talcum powders. But a fresh set of directives from Rajiv Gandhi, albeit in a different context, affects toiletry items too.

The latest directive, in the form of a circular from the Home Ministry, concerns "courtesies to be shown to the dignitaries visiting states and union territories", and says that the "prime minister has given the following instructions regarding arrangements made for him during his tours".

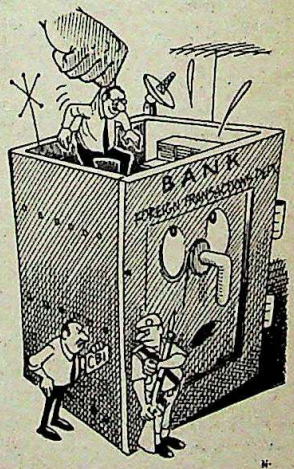
The instructions say that "expensive after-shave lotions, talcum powders, etc should not be supplied in the room where he stays for the night". Also, "felling of trees for VIP visits is to be strictly avoided". Rajiv does not want the red carpet treatment either, for the circular adds that "there is no need to lay out red carpets for his reception at helipads". (The over-zealous may please note that there is nothing against red carpets at airports).

Bank Spies

● Policemen began finding their way into universities as vice-chancellors some time ago. Now it is the turn of officials collecting economic intelligence to be nominated on to the boards of public sector banks, but perhaps with more justification than policemen had in trying to run universities.

Quite a few times in recent months, the Finance Ministry's enforcement directorate and the Home Ministry's CBI have had to ask government-owned banks for details regarding various international transactions with clients who may have transgressed the law. Invariably, however, the banks have refused to divulge the information asked for, and cited laws concerning the secrecy of banking operations in various countries.

Frustrated by this, the Government is now considering appointing officials from the enforcement directorate and the CBI as directors of the banks, so that they can then ask for this information as members of the bank's top management. But whether this will turn out to be an effective way of getting all the information that the Government wants, and whether, as a result, the banks will lose their standing with the clients who want secrecy remains to be seen.



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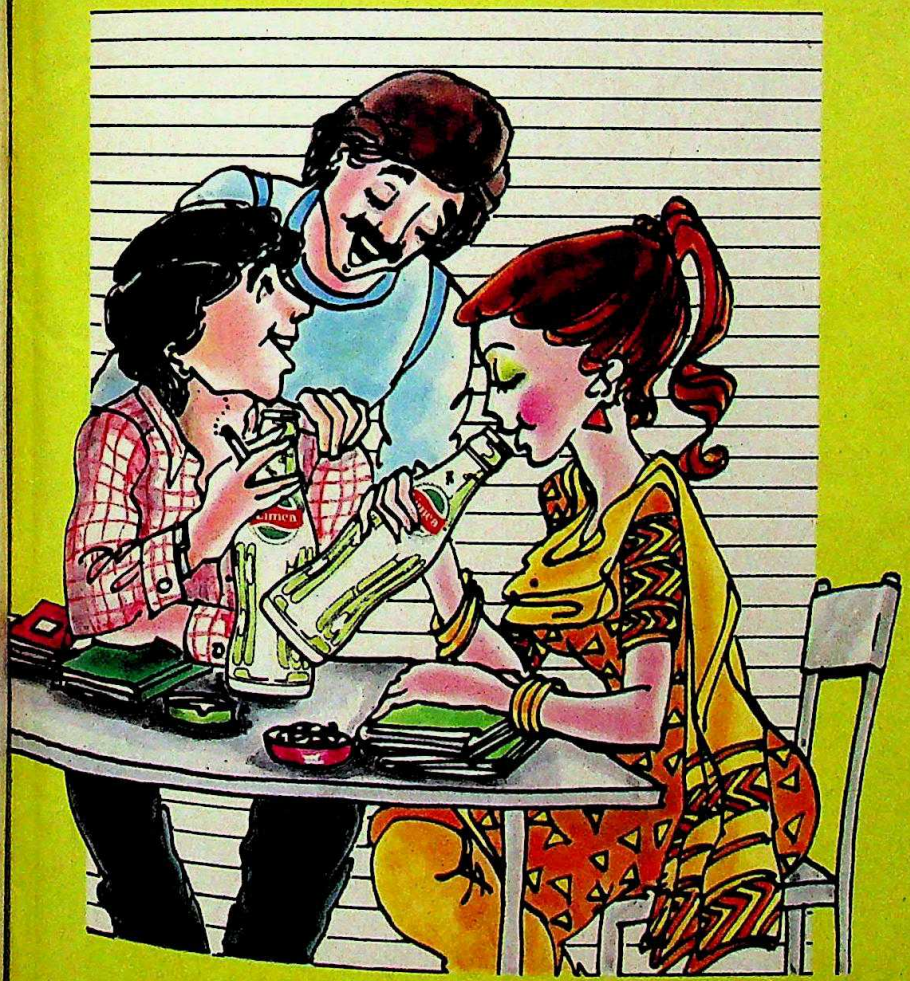
Remember your thirst day in college?

Remember your joy? The sense of freedom you felt? Remember your thirst Limca in the canteen? You can still taste that zingi **lime 'n' lemoni** flavour each time you have a Limca. The experience is unforgettable. Just like the thirst time.



Limca. Each time is the thirst time!

is veri veri lime 'n' lemo

Limca

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ARTIFICIALLY FLAVOURED. CONTAINS NO FRUIT JUICE OR FRUIT PULP

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The other side of beautiful Nature isn't so beautiful.

Beautiful Nature. More than anything else ,it has inspired poetry, paintings in this world.
Unfortunately, there's more to nature than evocative daffodils and sun-dappled, placid rivers. Floods, for instance. And there's hardly anything poetic about floods. Or, artistic.

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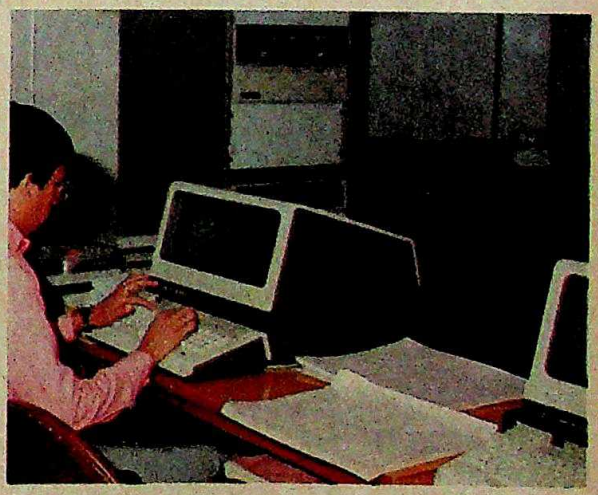

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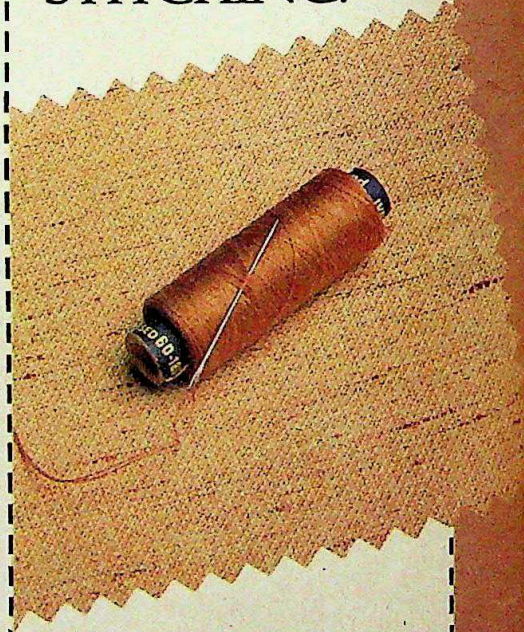
EVER SINCE
I DISCOVERED
RAYMOND'S
READYMADES,
IT'S GOODBYE
TO POOR
STITCHING.



Trousers
•
Safaris
•
Shirts
•
Suits
•
Blazers

RAYMOND'S Mens Wear

Location courtesy: The Taj Mahal Hotel, Bombay.

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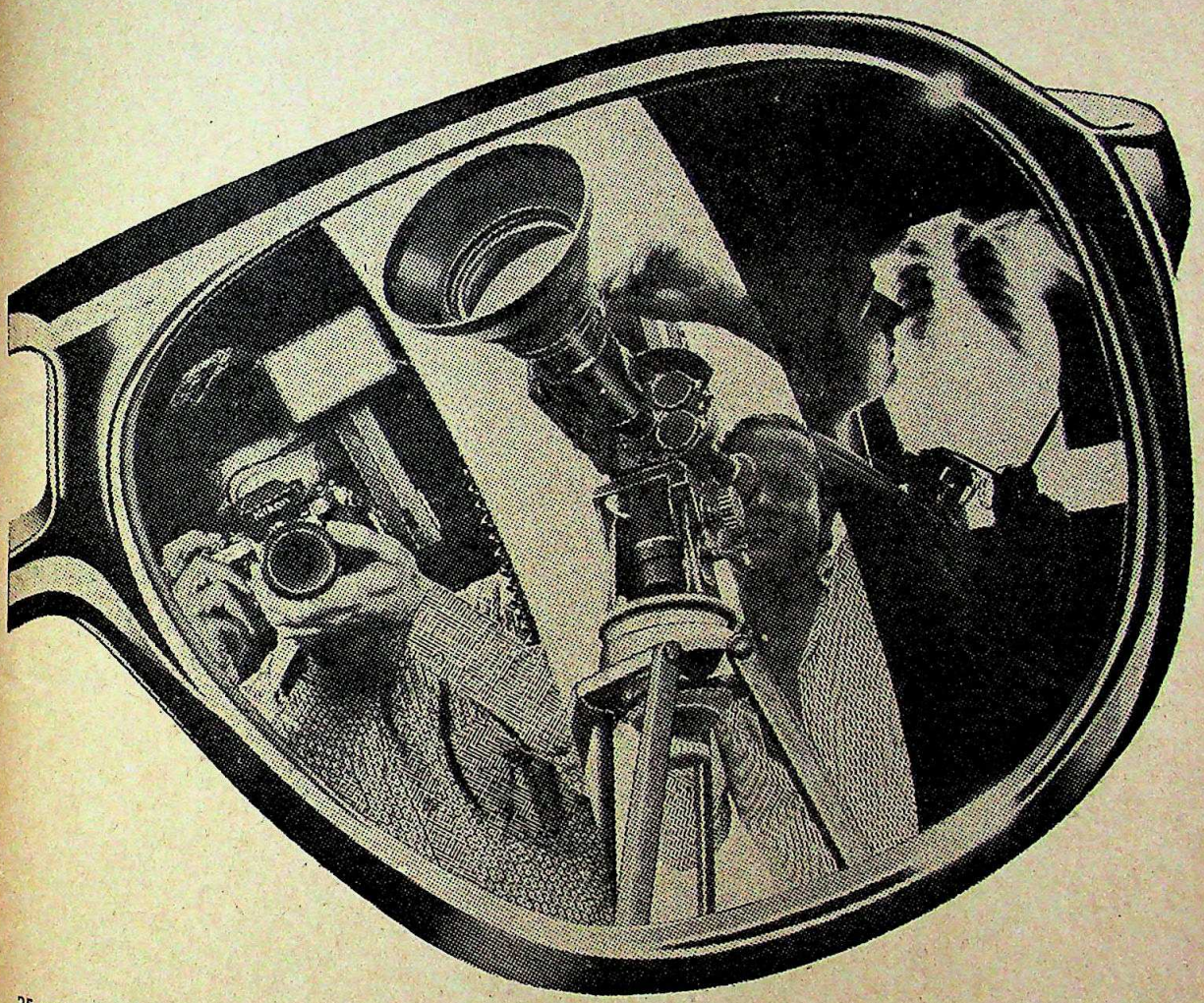
How HPF, a silver jubilee hit, is reaching for the gold



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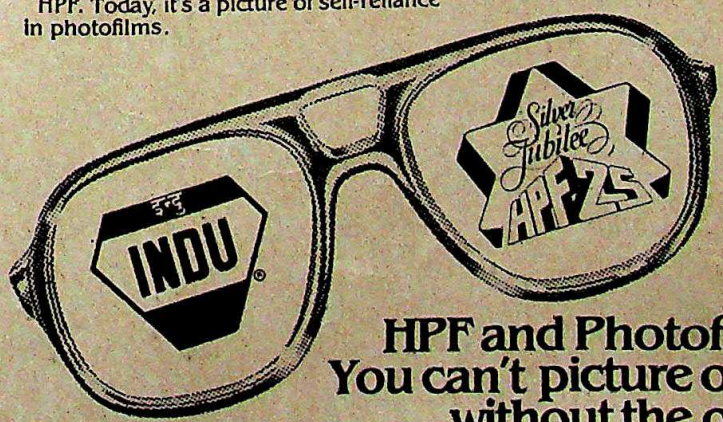

HPF and Photofilms: You can't picture one without the other

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● *I give them (Sikh terrorists) at least another couple of years. Meantime, I am confident that the (Punjab) accord will work out and that the Barnala Ministry will face the extremists.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI in *Blitz*

● *You did display remarkable resilience and refreshing freedom from inhibitions while handling difficult issues...although I am afraid grave errors haunt your naive steps. Optimism is not opium.*

■ JUSTICE KRISHNA IYER, former Supreme Court judge, in a letter to Rajiv Gandhi on the Muslim Divorce Bill

● *The budget pulsates with the aspirations of the people and we have committed ourselves to their service.*

■ V.P. SINGH, Union finance minister, in *Indian Express*

● *In the 39 years that this country has been independent, no government has used the budget to make so blatant a play for popularity as that of Mr Rajiv Gandhi in its second year in office...It has given tax reliefs to those who neither needed nor deserved...and piled on fresh taxes on those who desperately needed some kind of relief.*

■ Editorial comment in *The Times of India*

● *I am a nice guy...Last year I paid Rs 33 lakh and was the largest individual tax payer in the country. By asking why I am not raided, you try to make me look like a thief.*

■ AMITABH BACHCHAN in *The Hindustan Times*

● *Any person who talks of the glory of Sikhs will not be spared by the Government and the Hindu-dominated press. All these years the Centre has been trying to break the Akali Dal.*

■ G.S. TOHRA, former SGPC president, in *The Week*

● *(Army officers are becoming) increasingly careerists, opportunists and sycophants. The standards of integrity have fallen and honour and patriotism are becoming unfashionable.*

■ GENERAL K. SUNDARJI, chief of army staff, in a letter to all officers

● *Our secularism does not mean that every man or woman must follow his creed or religion in the same manner. Our secularism is that there should be no persecution of those following their creed or religion in their own way.*

■ ASOKE SEN, Union law minister, introducing the Muslim Divorce Bill in the Lok Sabha

● *No one here ever sees my best work. The Bunuels. The Mahabharata of our times. The Ramayana series...All they are interested in are those stupid horses.*

■ M.F. HUSAIN quoted in *Gentleman*

● *I begin my day by seeing Laxman's pocket cartoon. Then I kick myself for not having thought of his idea.*

■ BEHRAM CONTRACTOR in *Bombay*

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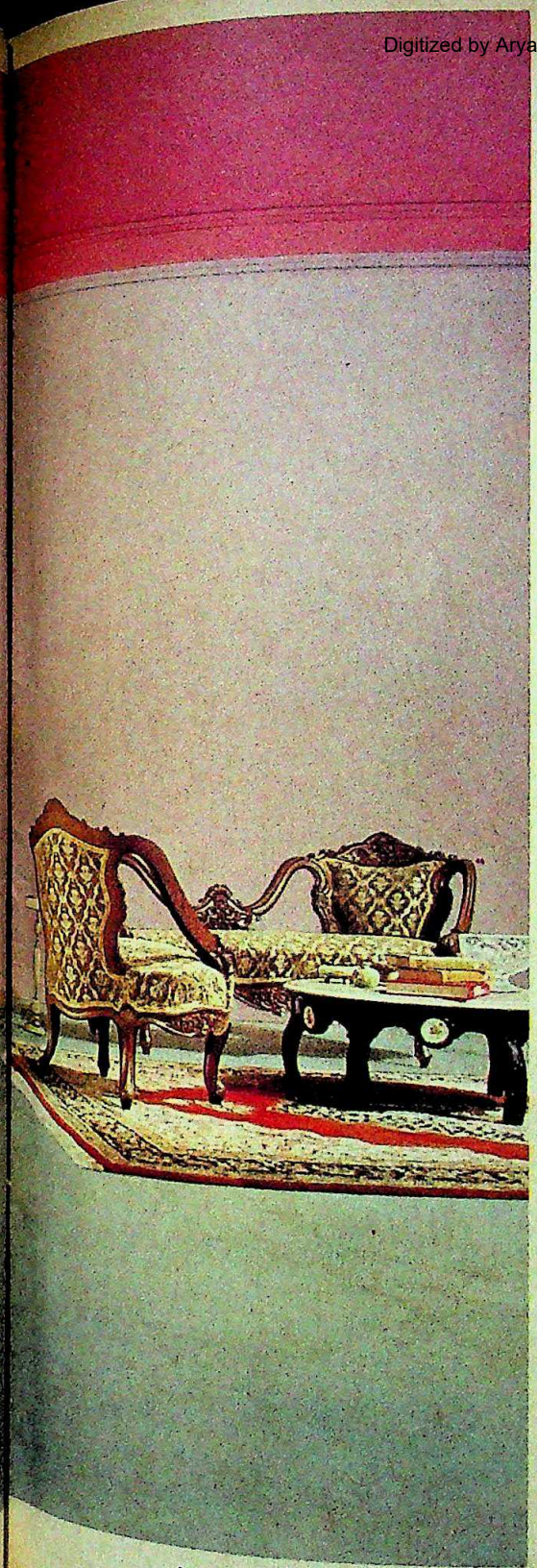

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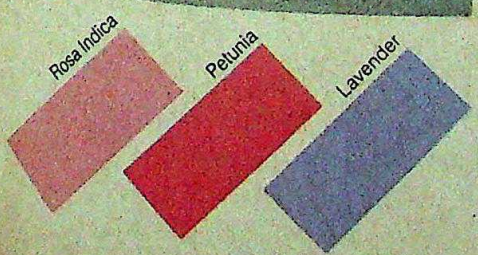

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POLYESTER FABRICS

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DAY OF THE DOG

■ Manmohan Desai made much of the colonial slur 'Dogs and Indians not allowed' in his masala monster *Mard*. One gentleman who would sympathise with Amitabh Tangewala when he rubs an *ersatz* Englishman's blood into the signboard is J.C. Akare, a Rajya Sabha member. But his circumstances were different.

For one thing, he was travelling in free India where dogs and Indians are allowed, even it seems, on trains. How else could the fiery Rajya Sabha jewel explain the fact that on the Nagpur-Dadar Express last month, another gentleman was occupying the adjoining coupe with not one, not two, but four dogs all yapping in the infuriating way dogs have. Akare ordered the conductor to get the beasts off, but received the spunky answer that the dogs had permission to travel. Akare saw red, shouted for a few seconds, then reached over and pulled the emergency chain.

The train screeched to a halt and a couple of hundred policemen piled onto Akare. He was eventually arrested under Section 108 of the Indian Railways Act for illegal chain-pulling. The train was delayed by 45 minutes. Just shows that every dog does have his day.

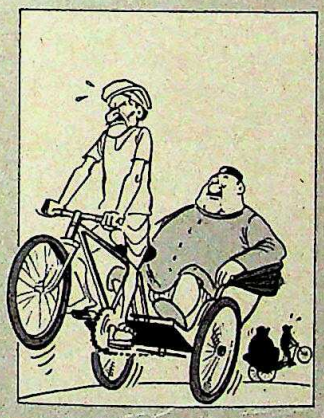
BIDDING POLITICOS

■ India is the world's largest democracy, as everybody is tired of hearing by now. But it is a functioning democracy which is something to be proud of. What is less cause for pride is that Indian political sophistication can take curious twists, as Manmangalam, a sleepy little village near Karpur in Tamil Nadu, demonstrated recently.

Manmangalam wanted a school but the *thirus* in Madras were either unaware of its existence or did not have the money, so the children played unlettered in its streets. However, the countryside has a genius for improvisation and somebody remembered that the panchayat president elections were to be held soon. *"Eureka!"* shouted Archichandran and leapt out of his bath.

That is how the post of panchayat president came to be auctioned one fine day in February with the proceeds to go to the school building fund. Auction it was, if not quite Christie-style—bids began at the figure of Rs 1,000, but when the auctioneer brought his gavel finally down R.K.Muthuswamy took the lot—for Rs 16,500. Well, elected representatives of the people have their uses too.

FLAB FLAP



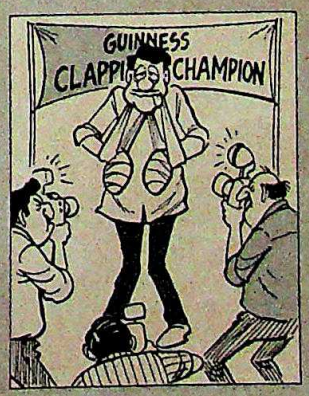
■ 'Fat is filthy.' Going by the number of advertisements offering to starve or squeeze the obese organisms into shape, that is the slogan of the century. In India, however, with its diet of pure *ghee*, *vanaspati* and sugar-laden sweets, fat is a way of life. But fat people are still the object of ridicule and discrimination, which explains the events in Giridih, Bihar, last month.

Satya Narayan Dalmia is a young Giridih businessman who makes even the strongest scales shudder and shake when he steps on them. But Dalmia is not apologising for his girth and in fact, has formed the Fat People's Association of Giridih to strike a blow for flab. The association is going to carry out a campaign against discriminatory treatment and one of their drives is aimed at getting the authorities to issue strict directions to rickshaw pullers not to refuse fat fares. (The rickshaw pullers, not having pure *ghee* as a diet, have a point). The association is also demanding fruits, milk and fruit juice at concessional rates. In a bold move, it has despatched copies of the resolution to the requisite departments of the state Government, who, no doubt, wondering if this conceals a new political threat, are huffing and puffing over it.

A BIG HAND

■ If any tourist goes to Veppur in Tamil Nadu, he should go to the Indian Overseas Bank branch and ask for V. Jayaram. When he meets him, he should be careful not to shake hands, not because Jayaram has some dreadful disease but because his palms are likely to be extremely sore. For this modest rural development officer is not your usual run-of-the-*bigha* rural development officer.

After December 15, 1985, Jayaram is a *Guinness* candidate—from 7 a.m. on December 13 until 1 p.m. on December 15, Jayaram clapped continuously, and fairly violently, for 54 long, noisy hours. If one takes two seconds for one handclap as the average speed, then Jayaram produced 97,200 claps, which is something even the robots at Supreme Soviet assemblies—where everybody is the first to clap the leader and no one dares to be the first to stop—would be proud of.



What now for the Clap Champion? A place in *Guinness*, perhaps: The previous world record was 50 hours and 17 minutes. No doubt everybody is applauding Jayaram in the south—after all, he taught them how to do so.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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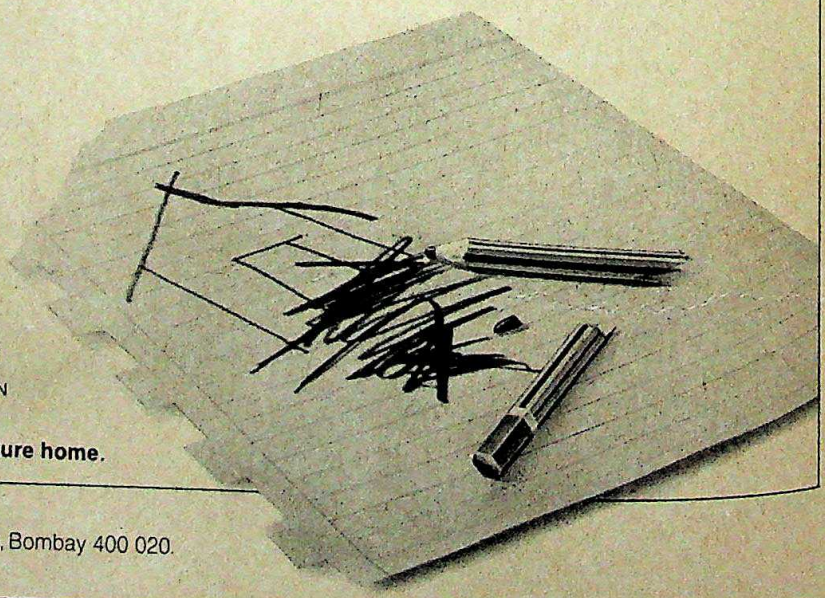

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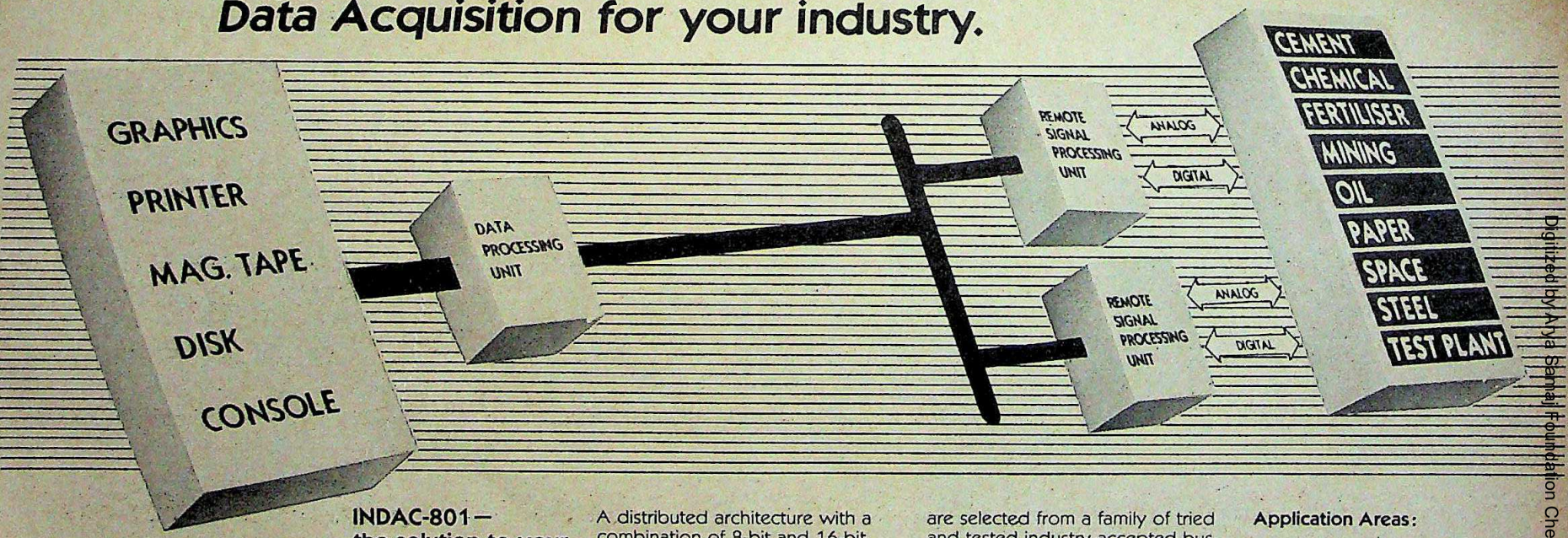

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JUSTICE KIRPAL COMMISSION

Explosive Findings

THE CRASH of Air-India flight 182 into the Atlantic nine months ago was the worst in Indian aviation history, and speculation since then has focused on a number of possible causes. The Kirpal Commission has now submitted its report on the subject to the Government. Assistant Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *managed to get a look at the top secret findings of the commission and the various submissions made to it. His exclusive report:*

HARI OM GULATI

The events that Justice Kirpal recounts in meticulous detail leaves little room for doubt that the one person who could have prevented the tragedy was a harassed Canadian Pacific Air agent in Vancouver.

THE FINDINGS in the 220-page report that Justice B.N. Kirpal submitted to the Government last fortnight are clear: the crash of Air-India flight 182 into the Atlantic last June was because of an explosion on board, and not because it was carrying a fifth engine, or because of the kind of structural problems that have been detected on Boeing 747s in recent weeks. The explosion, which sent 329 people to a watery grave, occurred in the forward cargo hold.

Though Kirpal does not say so, the events that his report recounts in meticulous detail and the various submissions made to the commission leave little room for doubt that the one person who could have prevented the tragedy was a harassed Canadian Pacific Air agent in faraway Vancouver. The agent allowed someone identified as M. Singh to book his baggage through on the connecting Air-India flight from Toronto even though Singh did not have a confirmed reservation.

That error was probably compounded by the failure of the X-ray baggage security system at Toronto, the use of a hand-held sniffer that had earlier been shown to be ineffective in detecting explosives, and the failure to correlate boarding passengers with checked in baggage. These allowed the suitcase carrying the explosive to be boarded on to the flight at Toronto, with the explosive undetected.

These revelations have come after six months of in-depth investigations during which the commission, assisted by a four-member assessment team and scores of advocates, visited Cork in Ireland, Canada and Japan (where a related explosion had taken place at Tokyo's Narita airport). Kirpal sifted through over 500 documents and 50 written statements, and spoke to more than 100 individuals and organisations involved.

In India, the commission was assisted by experts at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), the National Aeronautical Laboratory (NAL) and the Explosives Research and Development Laboratory. Abroad, it received cooperation from the Canadian Aviation Safety Board (CASB), the Canadian transport department (Transport Canada) and security agencies involved in airport safety.

The commission's basic conclusion, that the crash was caused by an "explosion in the forward cargo hold", is based on the findings of chemical tests and other examinations done by expert bodies:

► Metallurgical examination by BARC found that the forward cargo hold areas of the aircraft had been subjected to explosive force;

► S.N. Seshadri, an eminent BARC scientist, said that the noise heard on the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) was caused by an explosion;

► Chemical analysis by Dr S.Beweridge, a British scientist who submitted a confidential report showed evidence of explosives in the wreckage;

► And according to A.J. Laflamma of CASB and H.S. Khola of DGCA, the distribution of the wreckage and analysis of the CVR and flight data recorder (FDR) indicated that the aircraft had been subjected to an explosion. A Boeing expert came to a similar conclusion.

It was on the basis of Seshadri's report that the commission concluded that the "explosion occurred 40 to 50 feet from the cockpit". And BARC's report concluded that "various signatures of explosive fracture have been identified on the recovered structural members and fittings from the forward cargo area". The report added that metallurgical investigations "clearly indicate that the aircraft has been damaged by a powerful explosion in the forward cargo hold".

BARC's conclusion that the explosion occurred 40 to 50 feet from the cockpit are based on the analysis of holes in the metal pieces recovered from the Atlantic. For example, one piece from the front cargo section had as many as 25 holes in which multiple petals were curling outwards, indicating sharpnel shooting outwards. In the forward belly skin of the aircraft, BARC noted nine holes, with the "deformation" being from the inside outward. The BARC report concluded: "Even though only a small fraction of the wreckage was available for detailed examination, it was clear from the nature of damage to the forward cargo skin... that this section of the aircraft has suffered a severe damage due to powerful explosion inside."

With the cause of the crash established beyond reasonable doubt, the commission's second and equally crucial task was to pinpoint responsibility. But here, it has carefully refrained from any final judgement, apparently because none of the agencies involved—ranging from Air-India to Canadian officials—was

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willing to admit lack of vigilance. In fact, each agency has been trying to pass the blame on to the others.

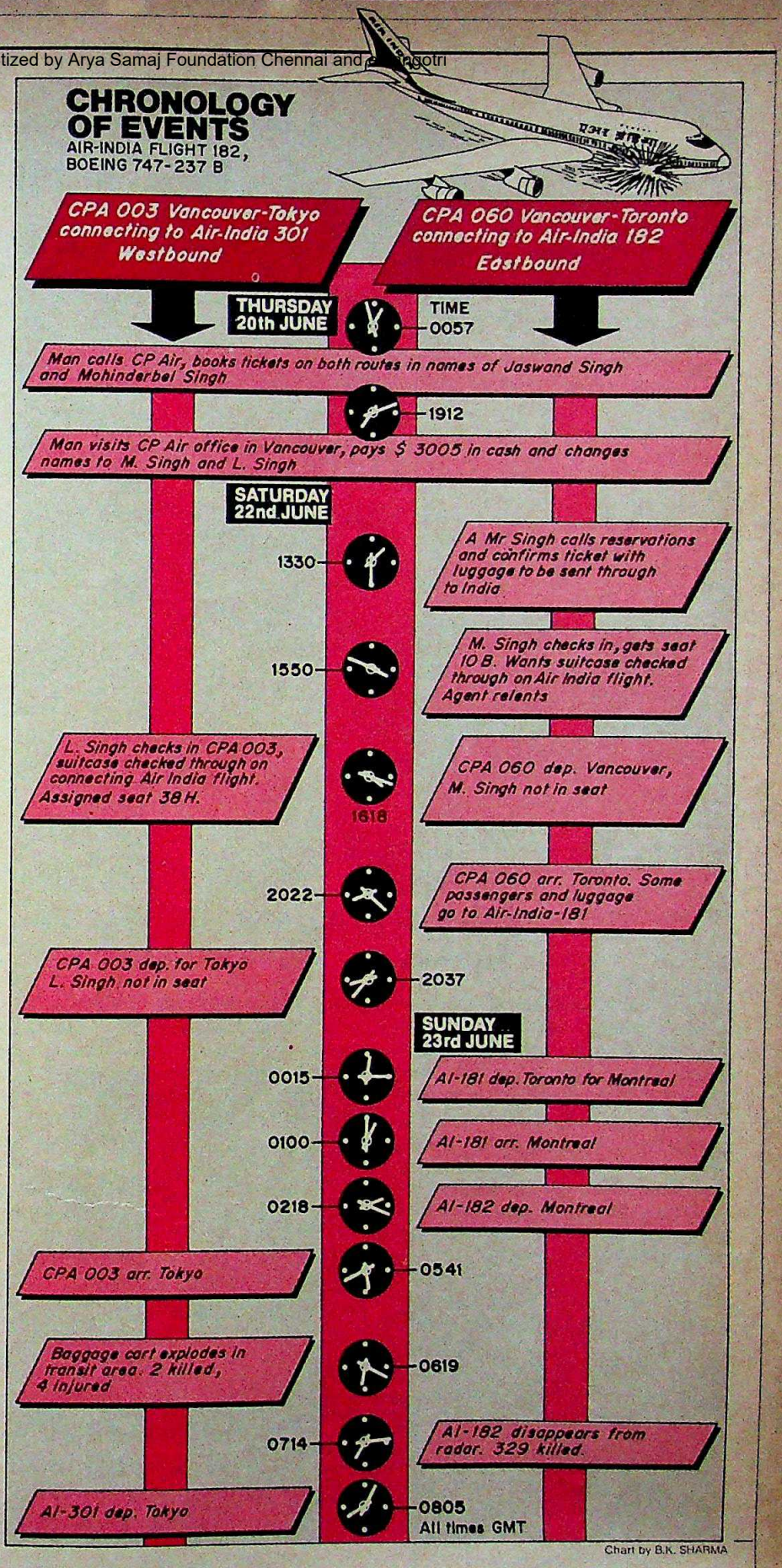
Thus, Air-India's advocate, Lalit Bhasin, submitted to the commission that Canadian officials had commended the airline's security 'programme', submitted in October 1982 when it began operations in Canada. The airline, nevertheless, reviewed its security arrangements and adopted a new security manual which according to Transport Canada had met the "requirements of Canadian legislation". Not satisfied, Air-India introduced additional measures like the X-raying of cabin and checked in baggage, neither of which was mandatory under Canadian law. Air-India has also argued that "It is implicit that primary security check of the passengers will be carried out by the airport authority or its agency and not by Air-India. This position is undisputed and uncontroverted."

IN CONTRAST, the Canadian Aviation Safety Board, in its own report submitted to the commission, implicitly suggests that a lot of the responsibility for the explosive being loaded onto the aircraft rests with Air-India.

The chronology of events that eventually led to the crash and the related explosion at Narita makes for a chilling account. The story began on June 20 in Vancouver, at a little before 1 a.m. GMT (6 pm, local time the previous day), when a man rang CP Air reservations and, after discussing a number of routings, booked a one-way ticket by CP Air to Toronto and onward on Air-India 182, under the name of Jaswand Singh. He also booked a ticket on CP Air to Tokyo, connecting with an Air-India flight to Bangkok, in the name of Mohinderbel Singh. Seventeen hours later, a man showed up at the CP Air ticket office and paid $ 3,005 in cash for the tickets, but changed the names to M. Singh and L. Singh.

On June 22, at 1.30 p.m. GMT (6.30 am, local time), a Mr Singh called reservations and confirmed his ticket to Toronto with luggage to be sent through on Air India. And two hours later, M. Singh checked in and was given seat 10B to Toronto on CP Air. Although he did not have a confirmed seat on the connecting Air-India flight, he insisted that the baggage be checked through to India. The agent resisted, but with a long queue of passengers getting impatient with the argument, eventually relented.

In less than an hour of this, L. Singh checked in on the CP Air flight to Tokyo, with the baggage checked through on the



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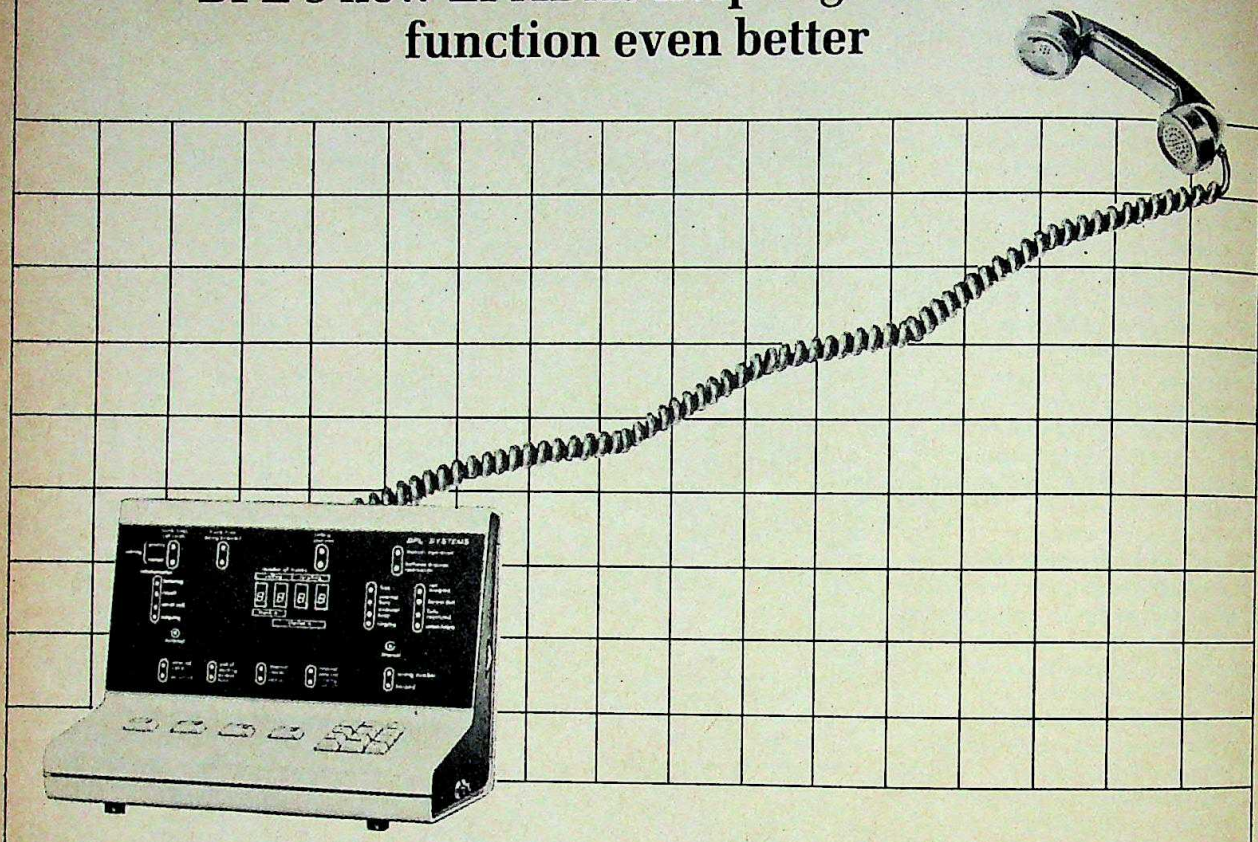

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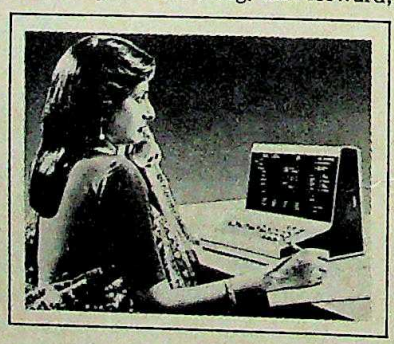

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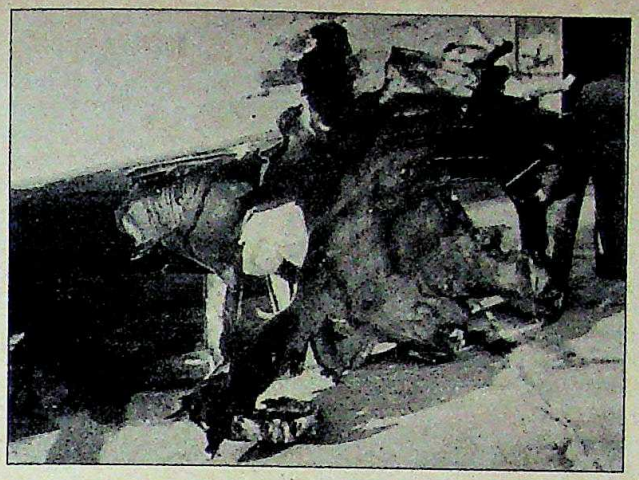
connecting Air-India flight to Bangkok and given seat 38H.

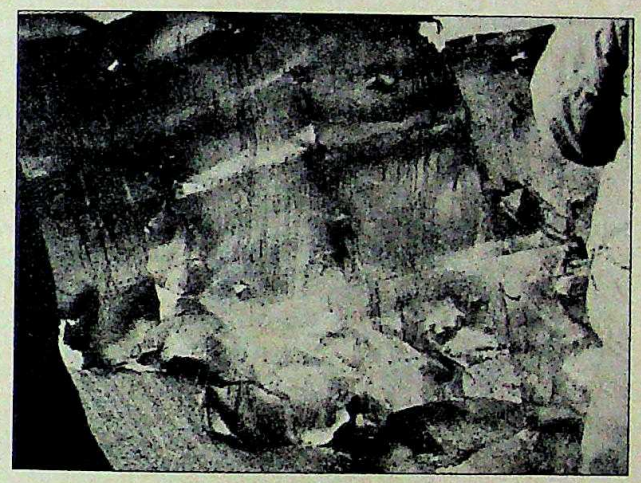
Both planes took off within a short while: neither Singh was on either plane. While Air India was not expected to do the headcount for its passengers because none of the Singhs was holding a confirmed seat in its plane but CPA allowed its Tokyo flight to take off without Singh on board which is normally not permitted in aviation rules. The CPA could have offloaded Singh's baggage when it was found that he was not in the plane. There probably were not two persons involved, but just one acting in various names.

The CP Air flight offloaded baggage at Toronto, and the suspect suitcase was to be loaded on to the Air-India flight. And here, the security breakdowns begin. The X-ray machine being operated to screen all baggage broke down around the time the explosive-bearing suitcase would have gone through, but it is not clear from the submissions whether the breakdown occurred before or after the killer suitcase would have gone through. The Air-India security officer on the spot had meanwhile asked the staff of Burns International Security Services (hired by Air-India for passenger and baggage security checks) to use a sniffer.

It turns out, however, that the same or a similar sniffer had been tested five months earlier by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which found that the sniffer "could not detect a small container of gunpowder until the head of the sniffer was moved to less than an inch from the gunpowder".

The Canadian Aviation Safety Board says that "Rather than using the (hand-held) sniffer, it would have been more effective to open all bags and physically inspect them." It adds that "Had a passenger-baggage correlation been carried out in Toronto, the suitcase...would have been detected." Such correlation was in fact done at Montreal, where the flight halted before taking off for London, but this was restricted to passengers boarding from Montreal, and could not detect the missing passenger who was to board from Toronto.





Wreckage of the ill-fated aircraft indicating an explosion

Within a few hours, flight 182 crashed off Cork, and a baggage cart explosion killed two handling operators at Narita in Tokyo, shortly before the Air India flight to Bangkok took off.

Even if this chain of events is revealing, the commission does not pass any final judgement on who bears the responsibility for having allowed the baggage to be loaded on to the various aircraft. And given the conclusion that this was an act of terrorism, the terrorist(s) still remains at large, undetected.

The commission report does, however, show the mounting threats that had been faced by Air-India after Operation Bluestar in June 1984. The first warning was given to the authorities by Air-India as early as January 8, 1985, when the airline requested Transport Canada to provide a dog for sniffing baggage. The request was turned down. Again, on May 17, 1985, the Indian high commissioner in Canada presented a diplomatic note to the Canadian foreign office regarding the threat to Indian diplomatic missions and Air-India. This was followed up by Air-India in June 1985 with a request for "full and strict security coverage and any other appropriate security arrangements for the protection of our aircraft".

Normally, such a request should have led to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police taking full charge of security but this did not happen. Meanwhile, subsequent inquiries by the Canadian Government have confirmed that the procedures followed for baggage check-in were not foolproof. For example, the Canadian attorney-general admitted in his statement to the commission that "procedures followed on June 22, 1985, were unable to detect whether an explosive device was lodged in checked-in baggage". He also admitted that the "procedures followed were unable to prevent unaccompanied baggage reaching Air-India 181."

Nevertheless, the commission refrains from fixing responsibility for the baggage getting through. According to legal sources attached to the commission agencies like the Boeing company, the Canadian Government and Air-India were able to make strong cases to show that they were not culpable. And the stakes are high, because an adverse finding would lead to loss of prestige and, the inevitable law suits.

Even before Kirpal could submit his report, the relatives of the crash victims had filed a suit for $ 200 million against Air-India, Lloyds Insurance and the Canadian civil aviation authorities. And Lloyds, acting on behalf of Air-India, filed a case against the Canadian Government, suing for damages.

Meanwhile, back home, Air-India has already spent more than Rs 3 crore on the payment of damages to the relatives of the crash victims. But while the dead rest in peace, the Kirpal Commission's findings are likely to add yet another dimension to the fight between the various organisations involved in one of the biggest disasters in aviation history, while the man or men responsible for it remain at large.

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MUSLIM WOMEN BILL

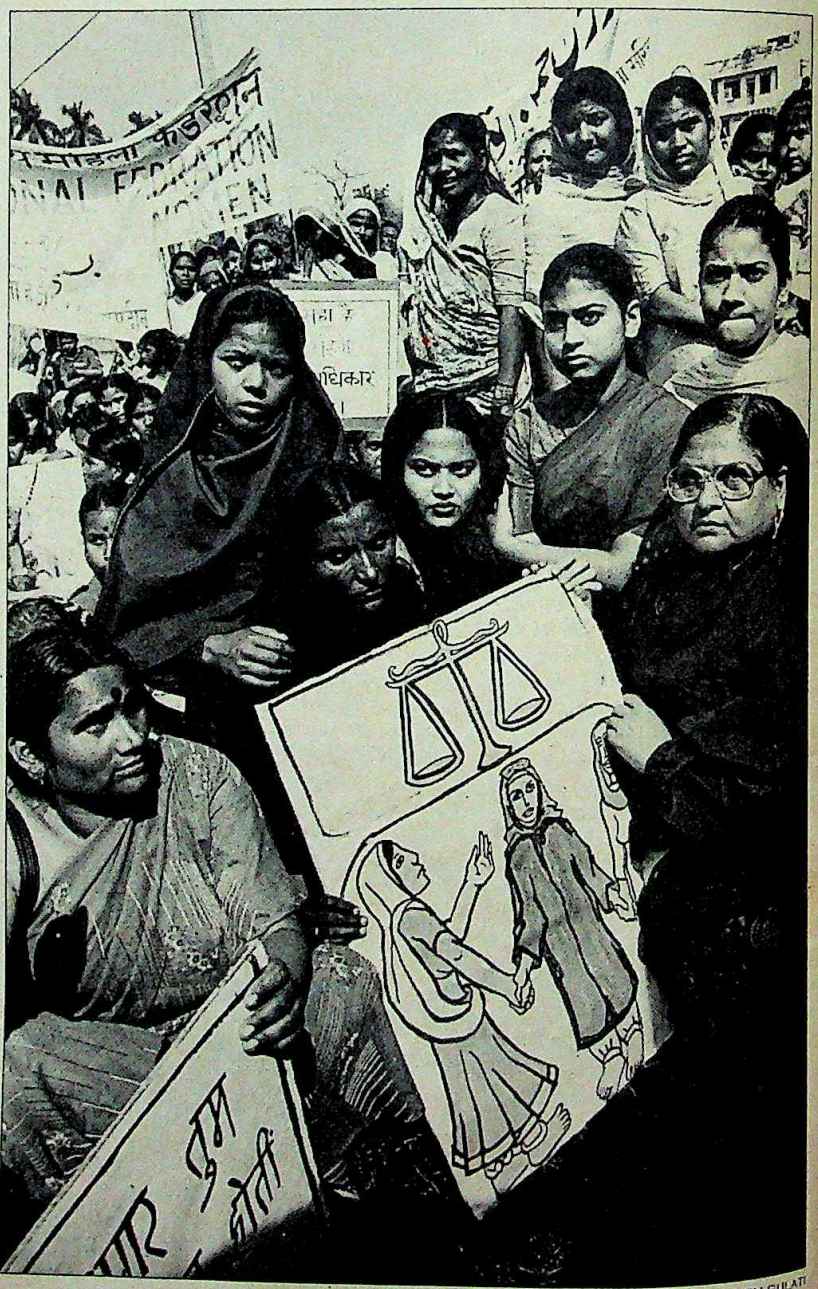
The Gathering Storm

NOTHING else that Rajiv Gandhi has done in his 16 months in office has earned him so much opprobrium. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill has already provoked the resignation of a Central minister, Arif Mohammed Khan, triggered unrest in the Congress(I) and set off an avalanche of criticism in the press. With neither the Government nor Muslim leaders cogently justifying the bill till late last fortnight—save for a spirited defence by Rajiv in the Lok Sabha—the impression quickly spread that not only was the Government on the defensive, but that most Muslims were not in its favour. Coming a bare three weeks after the controversial price hike, the bill left the Government with an even bloodier nose.

Arun Shourie took up the cudgels on behalf of the vast majority of people opposed to the bill. In two cogently presented articles in *The Times of India*, he showed that Rajiv had not merely done a turnabout with Khan (first encouraging him to defend the Shah Bano judgement and then abandoning him when Rajiv decided to buy peace with the Muslim fundamentalists), but that he had ignored the advice of the law ministry and the home ministry. Both ministries had said that the judgement did not contravene Muslim personal law in any way. Arif, argued Shourie, had quoted the Quran in support of his argument that a Muslim husband should provide maintenance to his divorced wife, and that nine Muslim countries provided for this in law. He also pointed to a Pakistani Alim's argument in a Lahore paper that the Indian fundamentalists' charge that the Shah Bano judgement was against the Shariat is derogatory to Islam. Since the Government did not bother to counter Shourie's arguments, the impression stuck that the Government had no case.

In his Lok Sabha reference, Rajiv gave the bare outlines of the bill's rationale and its positive aspects—that the Supreme Court judgement had caused "certain uncertainties in the minds of certain communities" who were "afraid that certain guarantees given at the time of Independence were being diluted"; that acknowledging the right of communities to have their own personal laws did not weaken but strengthened secularism; that Muslim women would get more under this bill than what Section 125 of the Criminal Penal Code (under which Shah Bano won her case) gives them; and that while the personal laws of other communities were codified, Muslim laws have not been and Parliament should welcome this first step towards that. But the reference was so brief that virtually no supporting arguments were given. Most important, neither the prime minister nor any of his ministers explained how the bill had been worked out and who had been consulted.

Apparently, Rajiv was convinced as early as last October of the need for such a bill. His appreciation for Khan's 90-minute speech in the Lok Sabha (made on September 23) was genuine but this was before intelligence reports had established the point that the overwhelming feeling in



Women protesting: sharp reaction

HARI OM GULATI

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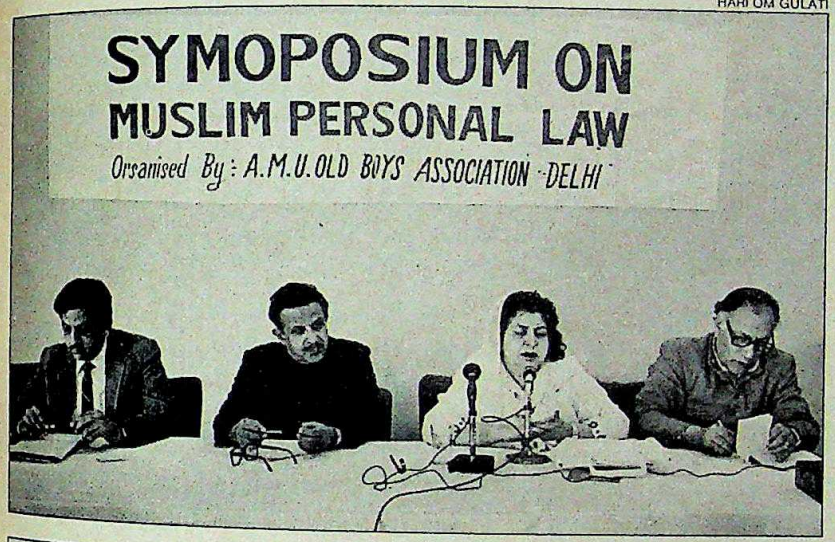
the community was against the Shah Bano judgement. It was thereabouts that Tahir Mehmood, an acknowledged expert on personal laws, met Rajiv and explained the Islamic concepts of marriage, family relationships, divorce and maintenance, and their adaptation into the Shariat laws. Islam's stress on equality between the sexes, he argued, had been doubly distorted: first by faulty interpretations of the personal laws by British jurists and, more importantly, by their loose implementation by ignorant *maulvis* in the thousands of mosques across the country.

HARI OM GULATI



A pro-bill seminar: weak defences

With neither the Government nor Muslim leaders cogently justifying the bill the impression spread that the Government was on the defensive and most Muslims were not in its favour

Says Mehmood: "No other aspect of Islam has suffered so much misconception and distortion as its personal law. Today, the common Muslim in India naively practises an awfully distorted Shariat law."

Rajiv was soon convinced of the socio-legal case for the bill, and of the need to work with the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB). It was against this background that he promised at the Momin conference in early December that the Government would not interfere in any communities' personal laws. But he had one important concern—that the interests of Muslim women should be protected. When 17 AIMPLB members, along with Mehmood and a Supreme Court lawyer, the Cambridge-educated Salman Khurshid (son of Khurshid Alam Khan), met him in the third week of December, it was this aspect that Rajiv wanted them to look at. He wanted a "package deal". If they could suggest measures that would give the Muslim women more than what Section 125 gave them, they could draft the bill in accordance with the provisions of their personal laws.

In return, said one of those present at the meeting, the AIMPLB members asked the prime minister: "Are you looking for safeguards for divorced Muslim women or do you want the husband to be punished?" Once Rajiv emphasised that it was the former he was interested in, they got down to specifics. Rajiv hinted that he would like an ordinance to be issued before the Congress(I)'s centenary session in Bombay, a bare four days away. Within three hours of this meeting, the AIMPLB had presented its draft of the bill to Union law ministers A.K. Sen and H.R. Bharadwaj.

But the Government was halted in its tracks by *The Pakistan Times* article which Shourie referred to. Rajiv was sent the article with a note saying that this was the correct interpretation of what the Shariat says and that he was being misled by Indian fundamentalists. Rajiv gave the article to Najma Heptullah to check out. By the time Heptullah got the clarification from Mehmood—that the argument was not only against the tenets of Islam but represented the view of a "microscopic minority" among Muslims—a month had passed. All doubts clarified, Heptullah went to Rae Bareli with a draft of the bill to be shown to the president of the board, Ali Hussan Nadwi, an Islamic scholar of international repute.

Muslim opinion-makers interviewed, including Mehmood, journalists Shahid Siddiqui (editor, *Nai Duniya)* and Ahmed Syed Malihabadi (editor, *Hind Azad*), and politicians like Janvadi Party leader Syed Ahmed Hashmi and Sulaiman Sait, say the bill is an honest attempt to offer more to Muslim women by not only drawing on the Shariat but even going beyond it. Specifically:

- Instead of one man being made responsible for an indigent Muslim woman under a law which is an insult to a woman's dignity (Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code deals with vagrancy), here a whole chain of blood relatives is being made lawfully responsible for her, thus giving teeth to what is anyway an Islamic injunction.
- Section 125 gave her a pittance after a long and costly court battle (Rs 179.50 to Shah Bano after six years in the courts) and has been difficult to enforce. The bill enjoins the magistrate to give within 30 days all the woman's dues—including money equivalent to the *mehr* (dower) and the value of her properties before and after her marriage. Earlier, she had to fight a costly civil suit to get her rights.
- Where there are no relatives and the woman has no property, the Wakf boards will take care of her. It is incorrect to say that all Wakf boards are bankrupt.

They also have a cogent defence against the major criticism of the letter of the bill—that it lets off the husband too easily. According to the bill, he is only required to pay maintenance for the *iddat* period (roughly three months) if the woman is not pregnant and for two years if she has children. Khan had argued that this was contrary to the Quranic injunction that the husband must provide a "reasonable" maintenance to his divorced wife.

Mehmood and others maintain that Khan's interpretation of the Quran represents a minority opinion as it is based on only one of the seven accepted schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Besides, they argued, he wants the husband to pay mandatorily what the Quran only enjoins the "pious" to do. No Muslim country grants maintenance to divorcees beyond the *iddat* period. Further, Islam's concept of family and marriage differs dramati-

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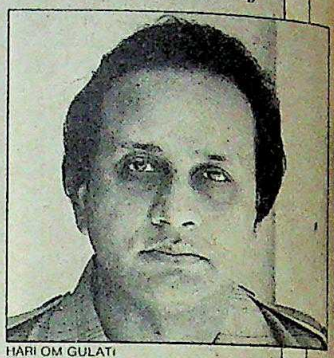
HARI OM GULATI

ZOYA HASSAN
associate professor
Jawaharlal Nehru University

"Rajiv Gandhi has gone back on his promise to bring out a background paper and consult all sections of Muslim leadership."

TAHIR MEHMOOD
Law Faculty Professor
Delhi University

"Only one man in the government is convinced of our case and that is Rajiv Gandhi. All Muslims should rally behind him."



HARI OM GULATI

cally from the Hindu concept. Said Mehmood: "There is no *kanyadaan* in Islam. Unlike among the Hindus, a Muslim girl never severs her relations with her nuclear family. All that marriage does is to temporarily shift the responsibility for her maintenance from her family to her husband. Once the marriage breaks, the liability is restored." The bill implicitly acknowledges this.

Far from giving in to obscurantists, the bill shows that the Muslim leadership is not resistant to change, even if it means going beyond the Shariat, to find a solution to the genuine social problem of poor and helpless Muslim divorcees. The Shariat merely says that the *umoom* (Muslim brotherhood) should look after indigent women but the AIMPLB agreed to let the Wakf boards shoulder that responsibility, if nobody else could help her. This spirit of accommodation is indicative of the attitude of moderates like Nadwi, who is opposed to any agitation on the Ram Janmabhoomi temple-Babari masjid issue. Said Siddiqui: "I welcome the bill not because it is a surrender to so-called fundamentalists but because it strengthens the hands of moderates like Nadwi saheb."

The other reason why they are supporting the bill is that it marks the beginning of the codification of Muslim Personal Law. In fact, Rajiv had wanted them to do this in tandem with the bill, but the AIMPLB leaders felt that the bill could not wait. More importantly, the dust the bill has raised will compel the Muslims to have a look at the admitted defects in their society, like the inferior status of women and the ridiculously easy divorce provisions. Says Siddiqui: "Reforming the divorce laws is the real battle and you can take it from me that we will fight it." Like the critics of the bill they blame the *maulvis* for their social ills: instead of trying to reconcile divorce-seeking Muslim husbands with their wives, as the Quran enjoins them to, they grant divorces too easily. Says Mehmood: "Muslims need to set their house in order."

For them, Rajiv is more than a saviour. Says Mehmood: "There is only one man in the Government who is convinced of our case and that is Rajiv Gandhi. If for no other reason than this, I think all Muslims should rally behind him." Adds Siddiqui: "Rajiv is a hero among Muslims today. The Muslim who was fast losing faith in the system now feels reassured that there is somebody who cares for them."

But, of course, virtually all other sections of society see no justification in the bill whatsoever. The most important concern voiced was that the bill gave in to communal elements when the country's secular fabric was already strained. The bill would widen the divide between the two major communities when the cancer of communalism was spreading. Said former Supreme Court justice V.R.Krishna Iyer in an emotional letter to the prime minister: "Secularists will be a sore minority at the elections, and should the sleeping Hindu giant be provoked into communal frenzy? Every measure to buy the Ayatollahs' pleasure alienates the 'Vishwa Hindu' incendiaries."

Others voiced related concerns. Zoya Hassan, associate professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and convenor of the Committee for Protection of Rights of Muslim Women, argued: "Under the guise of freedom of religion and personal law, Muslim women are being denied human and constitutional rights." More, the move towards a uniform civil code, enshrined in Article 44 of the Directive Principles, would now receive a setback. Wrote S.Sahay in *The Statesman:* "Article 44 may be considered as good as dead." Said Upendra Baxi, former dean of the Law Faculty of Delhi University: "This bill is a fraud on the Constitution."

That was not all. Instead of moving towards the 21st century, said the critics, Rajiv Gandhi is taking the country backwards. The Government has struck a deal with the fundamentalist Muslim leadership to win back the support of its one-time vote bank. Said Baharul Islam, Congress(I) MP and former Supreme Court justice: "If the bill is passed, divorces among Muslims will shoot up." Women will find it even more difficult to get sustenance since the responsibility does not devolve on one person, unlike in Section 125. Fumed N.Krishnan, national council member of the CPI: "The so-called protection is nothing but an impractical hoax, adding insult to injury."

Worse, it seemed that the Government was trying to bring in the bill through the backdoor and then ram it through on the strength of its steamroller majority in Parliament, stifling all, including intra-party, dissent. Said Hassan: "Rajiv has gone back on his assurances that the Government would bring out a background paper and that all sections of the Muslim leadership would be consulted." While partymen had been kept in the dark, the prime minister had only consulted the 'fundamentalist' members of the AIMPLB, who have always opposed any

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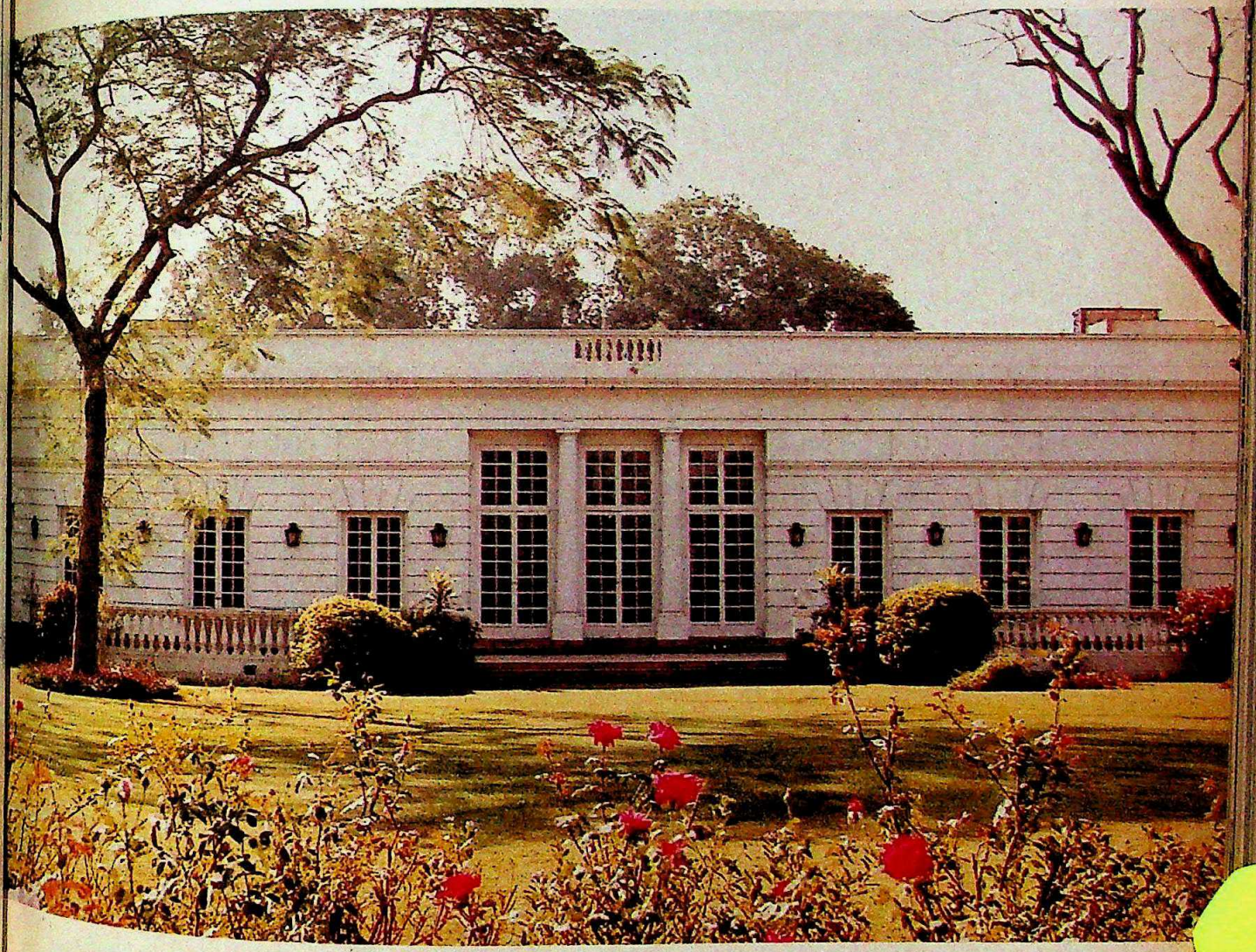
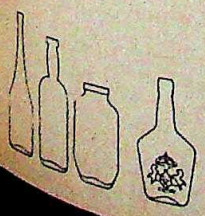
When the immaculate taste of aristocracy spills beyond classic cars and stately mansions...



...it finds colour in **Aristocrat**



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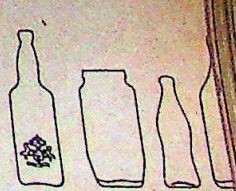

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"Rasna... three times a day!"

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To compensate for different expansion characteristics of centre electrode and insulator under heat

③ **Long insulator nose**
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progressive measures.

Leaders of all the major political parties, including the BJP and the two communist parties, were equally critical. At the very least, demanded opposition leaders, the bill should be sent to a select committee, effectively putting it in deep freeze. But the greatest upheavals came in the Congress(I). Several Congressmen, prominent among whom was Baharul Islam, openly congratulated Arif Khan. The 41 Muslim Congress(I) MP's supporting the bill were isolated. Said one MP: "I feel sorry for them. They huddle in one corner of the Central Hall, talking to one another. Nobody has anything to say to them."

Partymen demanded, and were granted, a full meeting of the parliamentary party. But the meeting was postponed for a day during which three Union ministers met MP's to convince them of the Government's viewpoint and ward off a threatened revolt in the meeting. The hour-long meeting itself was adroitly managed with only 12 handpicked members allowed to speak. The party agreed to do as Rajiv desired, but dissent simmered and the brave agreed with Shourie that there should be a conscience vote.

There is little doubt that Rajiv's image as a man of the times with an eye on the future has taken a battering. The middle class is agitated that its saviour seems to have feet of clay—first the unjustified petroleum price rise and now this. Women, his greatest fans, have begun wondering if he really has their interests at heart. Worse, he is seen as a man who is willing to set aside his own convictions in order to woo an electoral minority. And finally, he has for the first time found the more liberal, modernist section of nationalist opinion ranged vehemently against him.

While critics of the bill have had a field day, the Government has been deafening in its silence on its rationale and Muslim leaders seeking to justify it have not been able to make the same impact as its detractors. Hindu communalists are sure to exploit this void. The bill, which is to be taken up for discussion after the budget has been passed, is like a communal time bomb. Unless the Government and the responsible sections among the Muslim opinion makers strive to defuse it, it will continue to send off sparks till it explodes. A government white paper is a must: the bill has raised too many shackles and created too many misapprehesnions.

—AJAY KUMAR

HIMACHAL

Log Jam

IT WAS a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Kewal Ram Chauhan, a disgruntled former Congress(I) politician facing prosecution on charges of illegal felling and smuggling of timber, sprung a major surprise last fortnight by hurling identical charges at Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh and his family. The matter would have received only cursory attention but for the widely known fact that Chauhan, a former MLA who was denied a Congress(I) ticket and was subsequently defeated when he ran as an independent in last March's assembly elections, is a protege of former chief minister, Ram Lal Singh's arch foe.

"This is a last ditch effort by the organised forest mafia to damage me," fumed Singh, the portly and affable former raja of Bushair state. "I'm not going to be cowed down. If anything, my determination is further strengthened to enforce the law of the land no matter who is involved." Singh described Chauhan as the "kingpin of the forest mafia" who was responsible for all the political patronage. "He controlled the bureaucracy and the spoils system," he said. All cases of violations of forest laws, Singh said, "are now being vigorously pursued. They think Virbhadra Singh is a menace. Our biggest asset is our clean image in this state so they keep slinging mud in the hope that some will stick."

"If he's clean," Chauhan retorted, "I can throw tons of mud and it won't stick. Why doesn't he sue me for defamation? If I'm the mafia, he should remand me to police custody or try me in court." The former Congress(I) politician insists that he has exposed "only the tip of the iceberg. I'll go all the way to the Supreme Court if I have to. I am being persecuted because I was close to Ram Lal."

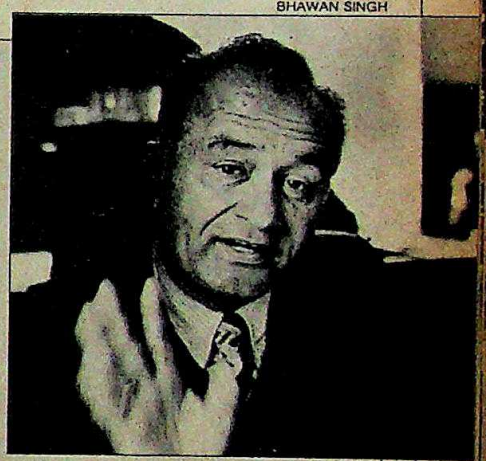
The chief minister denies any political vendetta. "Why should there be one?" he asks. "After all Chauhan is a defeated politician. The fact is that raids in Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh have produced incriminating documents against him. He has been arrested in one case. There are atleast 10 other investigations pending. New *challans* will be filed in court by the end of April."

Interestingly, public sympathy in Himachal Pradesh by and large appears to be with Singh who is widely applauded for pursuing the "forest mafia" which, according to several sources has amassed crores of rupees in wealth through the exploitation of forests, illegal felling and smuggling timber.

Meanwhile, Singh has submitted a comprehensive reply—not yet made public—to the prime minister's office on the charges levelled against him. According to documents examined by INDIA TODAY Singh appears to have a substantial defence. Examples:

In an attempt to circumvent land ceiling laws Singh is charged with gifting land, which should have been surrendered to the Government, to his two daughters who illegally sold trees which were planted on that land.

BHAWAN SINGH



"I have exposed only the tip of the iceberg. I'll go all the way to the Supreme Court. I am being persecuted because I am against rajas."

KEWAL RAM CHAUHAN
former Congress(I) politician

Documents reveal, however, that after implementation of land reform Singh was left with 3,494.12 bighas of ceiling land. After surplus land was vested with the Government, Singh was left with 205 bighas under law. Of this he gifted 39 bighas to one daughter, Jyotsana, and 38 bighas to Abhilasha, the second daughter. Under the state's laws, trees standing on land can be exploited for commercial purposes only after a 10-year cycle. Some 80 trees

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standing on the land gifted were sold only after completion of the 10-year cycle to the state forest corporation in the open market.

The chief minister is also charged with protecting his brother, Rajendra Singh, who has auctioned, for commercial purposes, trees standing on his land.

But documents show that Rajendra, was given some land by the former ruler—before merger of the states. Rajendra's guardians later auctioned the trees. The auction was disputed by the state Government on grounds of legal ownership of the trees in the late 1950s. The state high court ruled in favour of Rajendra but the judgement was repealed by the divisional bench. Rajendra has now appealed to the Supreme Court. The money from the auction is being held in escrow.

Two kilometres of road were allegedly constructed specially for the convenience of Singh's apple orchard, and the PWD spent an additional Rs 2 lakh to erect a breast-wall.

Documents show that the chief minister's orchard does fall on the road in question but construction of the road was completed before Singh became chief minister. In fact, the road cut Singh's orchard in half. In such cases, the PWD is duty-bound to construct a breast-wall to protect the orchard as well as the new road. The cost of the wall was about Rs 17,000.

Kunwar Bhawani Singh, "a relative of the chief minister" supposedly failed to comply with the requirements of the Land Reform Act under which land was to be ceded to the tiller.

Singh denies that Bhawani Singh is any relative. In any case, the dispute over the land is currently being handled by the high court.

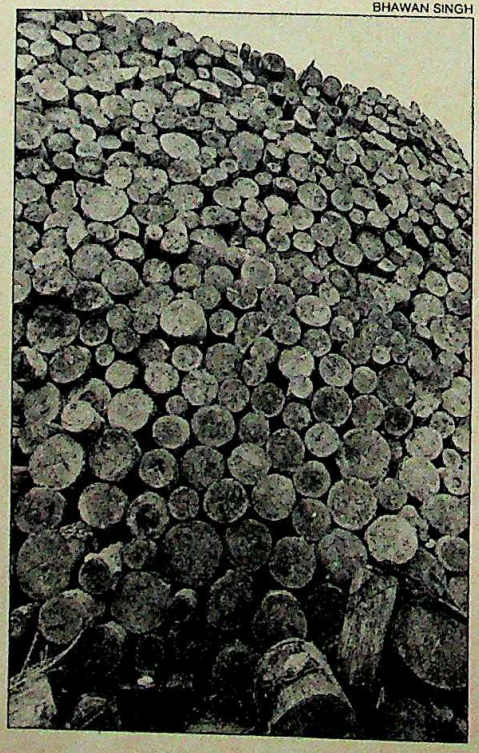
The chief minister is accused of maintaining four residences at government expense in Shimla and Delhi, and his properties in Rampur and Sarhan have been renovated at official expense.

But the record shows that Singh's only residence in Shimla is Holly House, his ancestral home for which the Government only pays telephone expenses. A second house in Shimla is used by the chief minister as his office, while Himachal Bhawan in Delhi and a house on Mathura Road—allotted to him when he was a member of Parliament—are used by state officials as guest-houses. The house at Sarhan belongs to his mother and has not been renovated for the last 10 years. Rampur House, which belongs to the chief minister, has been fitted with new bathrooms for which Singh has paid himself.

BHAWAN SINGH

> "This is a last ditch effort by the organised forest mafia to damage me. I am not going to be cowed down."
> VIRBHADRA SINGH
> *chief minister, Himachal Pradesh*

BHAWAN SINGH



Smuggled timber in Himachal

The chief minister is accused of receiving a kickback, in the form of an artificially high contract bid of Rs 4.6 lakh for his apple orchard, from a firm represented by an R.S. Thadda, in return for the chief minister's helping the firm acquire a forest for commercial exploitation after an auction.

But the record shows that the Punnan Forest in the Kotgarh Division had been given more than 10 years ago to a private contractor for exploitation. The contractor had left his work half finished. The Forest Department wanted to auction the forest off again for completion of the work. The firm represented by Thadda made a bid of Rs 39 lakh for the forest but it did not get the contract. Another firm, Sanjay Kumar and Company of Yamunanagar, offered Rs 42 lakh for the forest and won the auction.

None of the charges, however, appear to have succeeded in casting any doubts on the chief minister's integrity. During the 1985 mid-term poll, the Congress(I) bagged 58 seats in the 68-member Assembly, 22 more than the last time around. Consequently, the Himachal Pradesh Assembly is full of fresh Congress(I) faces, most of them young and below 40—and educated. Their legislature party statement backing Singh against the charges made by Chauhan added: "Virbhadra Singh's name is a byword for honesty and integrity. Any attack on him is not a personal attack. It is an attack on decency and morality in public life."

A clearly weary but undaunted Singh said: "I've been a politician for two and a half decades. But I seem to have created more enemies in the three years I've been chief minister than in the past 25 years. They are threatening my reputation and they are even threatening my life. But I cannot let sleeping dogs lie."

The Himachal Pradesh imbroglio could become a test case for Rajiv's "clean image" politics, part of which calls for keeping politicians with a "bad" image out of positions of power. But in continuing to support his "clean" colleagues, Rajiv must walk a fine line in seeing that corruption charges are not summarily whitewashed by the Centre.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR in Shimla

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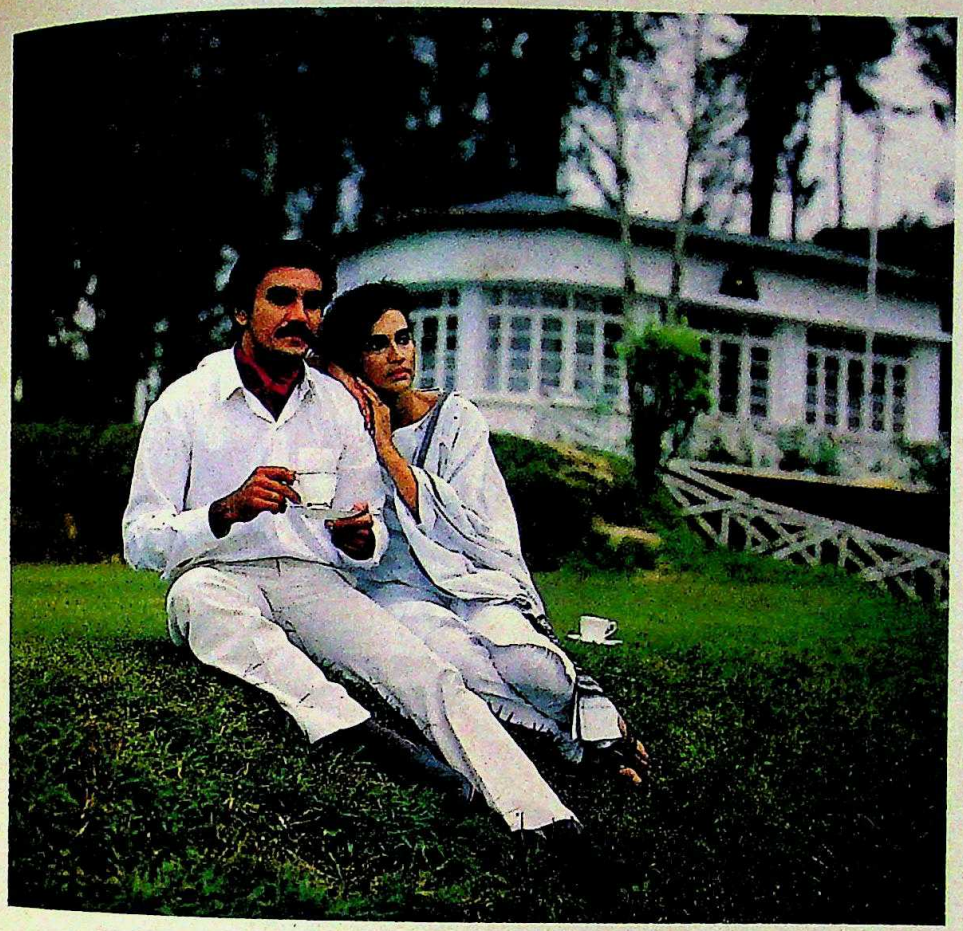

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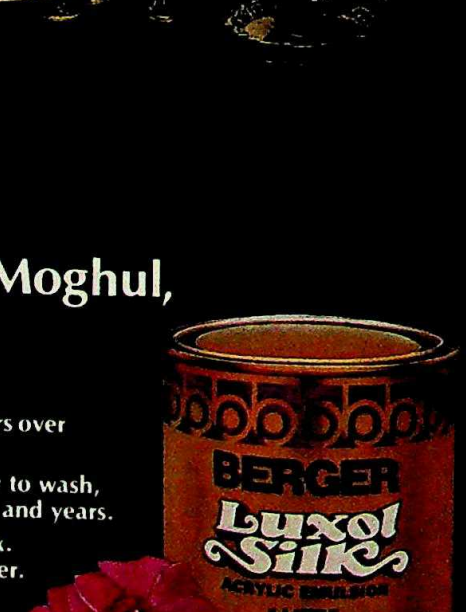

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PUNJAB

Mounting Pressures

ON THE face of it, Punjab Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala has never been more firmly in command. Over the last fortnight, the inheritor of the troubled state constituted the Akali Dal's working committee to his liking, expanded the ministry by co-opting five hand-picked members and removed the all-powerful Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) president Gurcharan Singh Tohra. No other Akali leader has simultaneously been the chief minister, the Akali Dal president and the effective religious head of the Sikhs. What is more, say his aides, Barnala is finally becoming very much his own man. At no stage did he consult his number two, Finance Minister Balwant Singh.

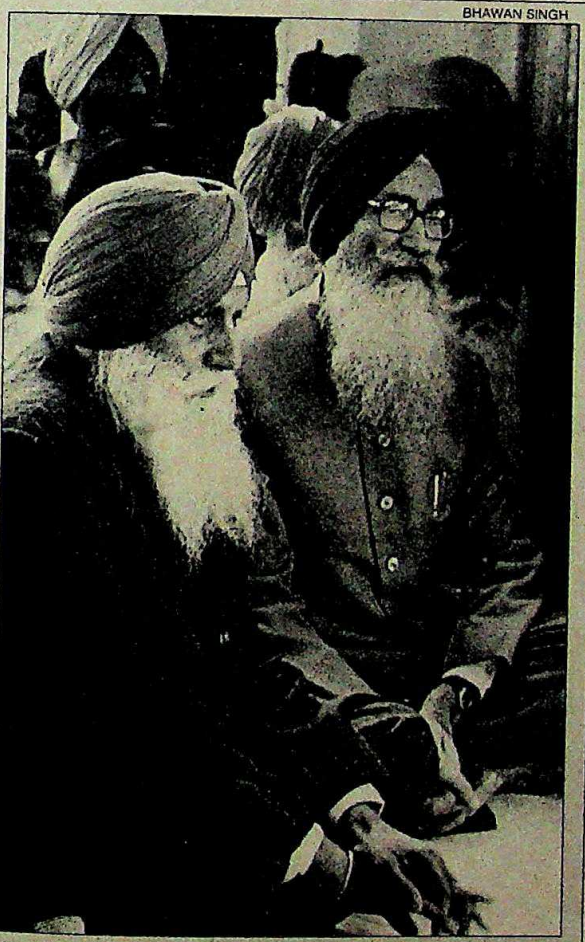
Undoubtedly, Barnala is successfully exploiting the contradictions between his rivals, Tohra, former chief minister Prakash Singh Badal, Speaker Ravi Inder Singh and Agriculture Minister Amarinder Singh. As long as they keep feuding and the Sikh masses support him, he is safe. But his perch at the peak is fraught with danger. Directly holding three reins, he has nobody beside him. Any slip-up and he takes the blame. And he has yet to show that he can walk three tightropes at the same time.

The flak has already started mounting. The pre-budget meeting of the Akali Dal's Legislature Party was unusually stormy with the party's growing impatience with the non-implementation of the Punjab accord featuring prominently. "Don't play second fiddle to the Centre or you will come to grief," many MLA's told Barnala. Today, Barnala has twice as many detractors within the party as he had six months ago.

Tohra, too, is far from neutralised. His offer to resign was so timed that he came across as a martyr being sacrificed at the altar of panthic unity at Delhi's bidding. The 14-member SGPC executive debated the offer inconclusively at Amritsar for three hours before they agreed that Barnala should take the final decision. When they next met at Chandigarh, nine of the 14 were still in favour of retaining Tohra. Even Kabul Singh, vice-president of the SGPC who later became the officiating president, was against removing Tohra.

Ultimately the executive fell in line but only after Barnala promised to personally look after the SGPC. In fact, two senior executive members, Shiv Singh Khushipur and Darshan Singh Issapur, bluntly told Barnala: "Nine of the 14 here think that the acceptance of the resignation of Tohra is being done at the behest of Delhi. You can do it but you will have to make it clear this sacrifice will not go waste. You will get the accord implemented in letter and spirit. Get the detained Sikh youth released and the deserters back to the army."

Tohra's group of 18 MLA's, including two ministers, is still steadfast in its loyalty. Barnala knows that Tohra has the wiliness of a fox and the patience of an elephant. Even his critics are nervous now that Tohra has no responsibilities. Says Balwant Singh: "I wanted Tohra to be retained." The AISSF and the Damdami Taksal leaders have welcomed Tohra's resignation but their support can only be poor consolation.



BHAWAN SINGH

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Badal does not have Tohra's guile or as much public support, but he too continues to hold out. Barnala even offered to make him executive president—No. 2 in the party—but Badal said the party should elect him to the post. "I need no position to work. I am with you," he told Barnala. His actions, however, spoke otherwise—he did not attend the first meeting of the working committee nor was he present at the swearing-in of the new ministers.

Barnala's continuing grip over the vitals of the Government—he still holds the major portfolios of food and supply, irrigation and power—is also causing resentment. Kasturi Lal, one of the five new ministers and the only Hindu in the ministry, has been given the relatively unimportant charge of labour and employment. None of the other four has been given independent charge.

With the pressures mounting, Barnala has increasingly been forced to harangue Delhi leaders. After Lok Sabha Speaker Balram Jakhar referred to Punjab as a "butcherland", Barnala asked angrily: "Where was he when 4,000 Sikhs were killed in Delhi and other places? Where was he when the

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army marched into the Golden Temple to kill scores of innocent people?" He said in the Assembly. "We in Punjab are fighting the battle on behalf of the country. We have an unfriendly neighbour who is trying to destabilise the country. Operation Bluestar caused grievous wound to the Sikh psyche and resulted in scores of young men crossing over to Pakistan. These brainwashed young men, whom the BSF is letting in through Punjab and Rajasthan, are creating all the trouble. Whose fault is this? A small bit of violence in Punjab is splashed across the newspapers and on TV, but why is everybody keeping mum about the worst carnage in the history of the country?"

The attack on the Centre was calculated to assure his critics that he is no stooge. But Barnala knows his real challenge comes from the terrorists. As he declared: "We have geared up our efforts. We are equipping our forces with good weapons and training. I have inherited a totally mismanaged state where the rulers were a party to terrorism." But the odds on his success are only getting longer.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

KAPURTHALA

Ambushed

IT WAS around 7 p.m. on March 6 and the residents of Kapurthala, a bustling town (pop:60,000) 20 km off the Grand Trunk Road, were hurrying indoors. Kapurthala district is one of the four worst terrorist-infested districts in Punjab. Here, only the brave venture out at night. Suddenly the peace of dusk was shattered by the burst of Sten-gun fire. When the shooting stopped some 20 minutes later, the terrorists had fired over 250 shots and left eight innocent people dead over a 3-km trail. Never have more people been killed in a single terrorist attack in Punjab.

The political reverberations were felt immediately. Thundered Gurbinder Kaur Brar, Congress(I) Legislature Party leader, in the Assembly: "The Barnala Government should resign or the Centre must dismiss it." It was an undoubtedly severe setback to the Barnala Government's new strategy to combat terrorists. Under this, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, and parts of Kapurthala and Ferozepur districts have been divided into 16 sectors which are now policed by the Central Reserve Police Force.

Admitted Barnala: "It's a very tragic incident," but, in the same breath, vowed: "We will gear up our efforts to isolate and crush terrorism." The good news was that the five-member committee of the Damdami Taksal and the AISSF looking after the Golden Temple condemned the killings as a "crime against Sikhism and humanity". This is the first time the hardliners in the two bodies have condemned terrorism.

The terrorists' target was Deputy Superintendent of Police Jarnail Singh Brar, a marked man because of his incisive interrogation of terrorists. He was returning home when five terrorists in a green jeep sprung the ambush. Brar related what happened: "We were a short distance from the SP's house when we had to slow down because some rickshaws were parked on the road. Just then came a burst of Sten-gun fire from a jeep parked in a lane on the right. I told the driver to speed up but the green jeep followed us. Just then a car carrying Kabul Singh, acting president of the SGPC, came between the two jeeps. They fired at his car also, thinking it was a police vehicle (since it has a flashing red light, like the one on police cars). His bodyguard returned the fire but his driver lost control of the car. We rushed into the SP's house, took position and returned the fire. They fled, spraying bullets along a 3-km trail. A police jeep chased them but they dipped into an alley and got away."

Kabul Singh in hospital

The unlucky victims were Ravel Singh, manager of a gurudwara who was travelling in Kabul Singh's car, Nazar Singh, a driver, Kanta Devi, a stenographer in the Development Department, Balwinder Singh, of Damogranwala village near Kapurthala, Hiralal, a businessman, and Ram Lal and Manohar Lal. Brar and three other policemen were hit by bullets on their thighs while Kabul Singh's shoulder-blade was fractured.

The ambush was obviously an act of desperation. The district police, under the no-nonsense SP Mohinderpal Singh Aulakh, has foiled all three major terrorist attacks in the last five months. What is more, after every attack it either killed or captured the terrorists. The sophistication of the weapons used in the latest attack—the terrorists had the most modern weapons including a 9 mm machine-gun—and the meticulous planning, with the escape route all worked out, shows that the terrorists realise they must wrest the initiative to continue their reign of terror.

The same terrorists struck the next day also, burning down the house of police inspector Jaskirit Singh in Kassochal village. They left behind a handwritten note vowing to get Brar and Singh, a relative of Punjab minister Sukhjinder Singh, the next time. Says Aulakh: "We thought we were doing a good job since we had succeeded in foiling earlier attempts. But we shall have to be more vigilant and devise a different strategy."

—GOBIND THUKRAL in Kapurthala

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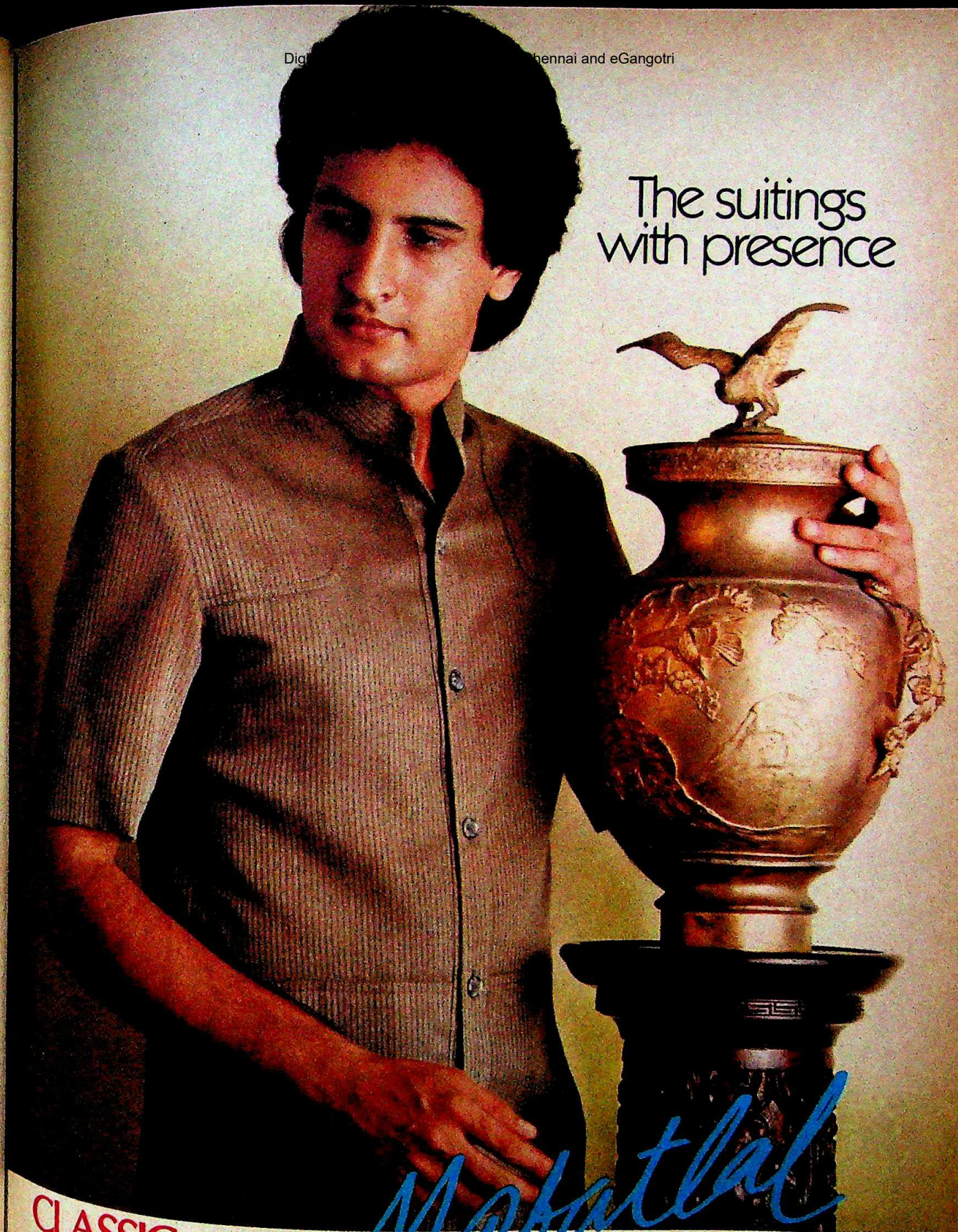

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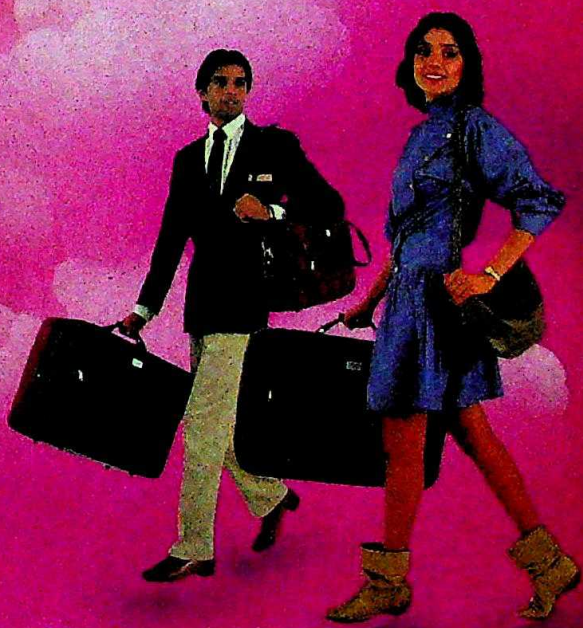

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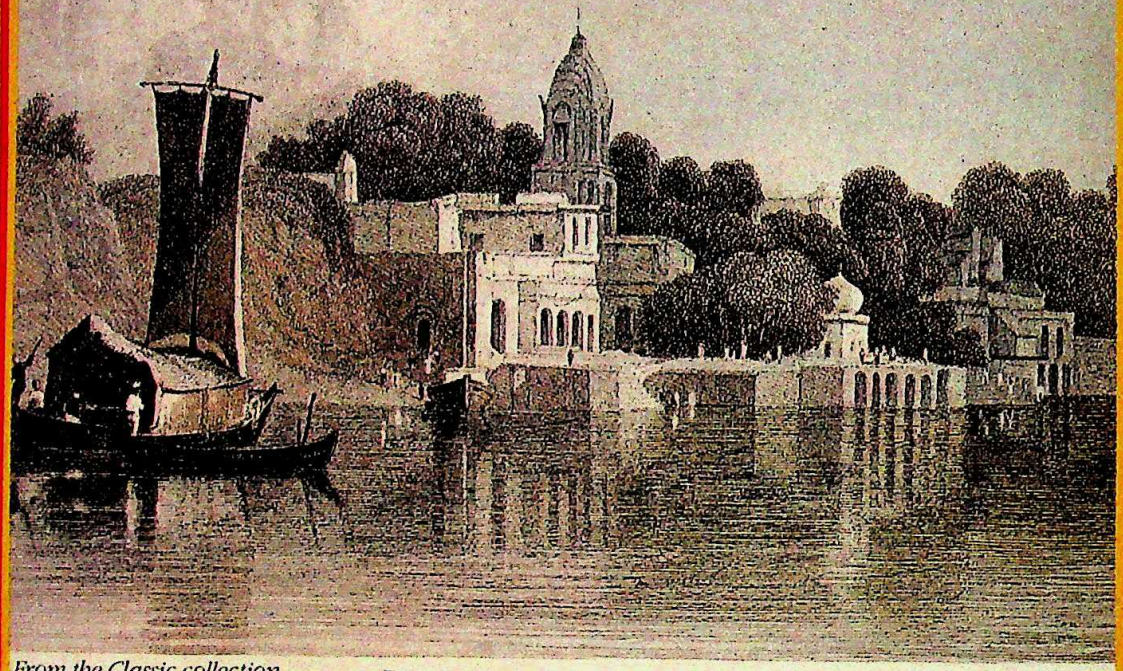

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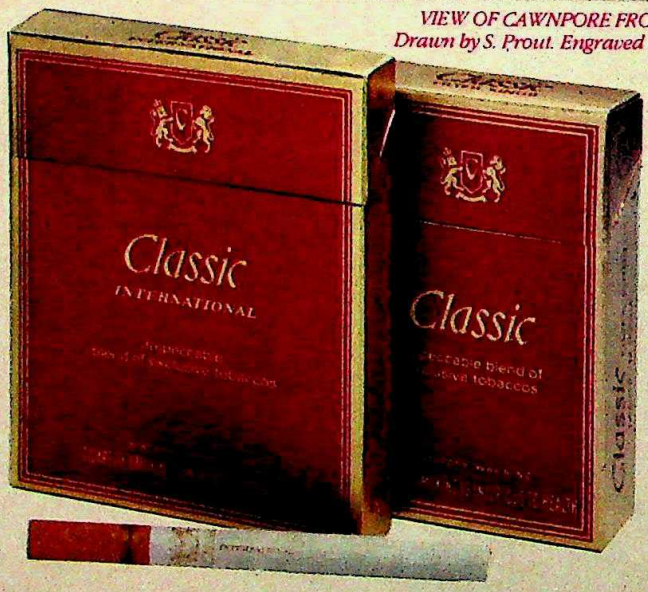

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GUJARAT

The Solanki Strategy

IN A POLITICAL culture where most Congressmen live in awe of the leadership, a blatantly obvious move to put the party leader on the hook is bound to create ripples. And so it was when former Gujarat chief minister Madhavsinh Solanki handed over a long note to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, chiding him for government policies which are rapidly eroding the party's image. No former chief minister has been so daring and it is obvious that Solanki had decided to stand up and be heard. Ostensibly private, the letter was leaked to the press for obvious reasons.

The tremors were felt immediately. Said Gujarat party chief Ahmed Patel: "If the letter has been deliberately leaked to the press by Solanki then it is a very serious matter. It is a direct attack at the party and the Congress president." Two dozen Congress(I) MLA's marshalled by Narsi Makwana, MP, who has a love-hate relationship with Solanki, including party whip Manohar Singh Parmar, launched a signature campaign to ask the central leadership to take disciplinary action against Solanki.

But Solanki brushed aside charges of violating party discipline, arguing that there was nothing wrong in writing the letter as he was just voicing the feelings of partymen. Nor, he maintained, is he thinking of forming a regional party for: "The idea will not succeed here."

The fact is Solanki cannot be ignored in Gujarat. Even critics like Jinabhai Darji agree on that. He was the architect of the stupendous Congress(I) victory in the last assembly poll and most of the 148 Congress MLA's (in a house of 182) were handpicked by him. If there was a democratic election to choose the legislature party leader today, Solanki would win hands down. Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary has not been able to inspire confidence in his eight months tenure.

Solanki has been following a strategy calculated to bolster his grassroot support. Gujarat is reeling under an unprecedented drought and he has been touring affected areas for the last two months. By April-end he intends to tour 16 out of the 19 drought-affected districts. Says Darji: "Solanki has been using these trips to assess his strength and it is quite obvious that he continues to have tremendous clout. Every trip makes him feel more confident."

Solanki's note to Rajiv Gandhi chided him for government policies which are rapidly eroding the party's image. No former chief minister has been so daring.

"If the letter has been deliberately leaked to the press by Solanki then it is a very serious matter. It is a direct attack at the party and the Congress president."
AHMED PATEL
AICC general secretary

His other sources of strength are the backward classes and tribals who feel Chaudhary has sold out to the higher castes. Last fortnight, staunch Solanki supporter Jashwant Chauhan rallied around 22 MLA's from the backward castes and put forward the demand for re-imposition of the 18 per cent reservation which the Chaudhary Government had dropped. Congress(I) sources say Chauhan has Solanki's blessings.

It was with this backdrop that Solanki gave in his four and a half-page note to Rajiv. Among the more important points it made were:

- Frequent reshuffle of Union ministers, chief ministers, party executives and bureaucrats has generated a feeling of instability and an impression that decision-making at the highest level is very ad hoc. Worse, replacements have not proved better than the "oustees".
- The communication gap between old and new Congressmen is increasing alarmingly. The safari-clad elite leadership is creating vibrations which may one day rock the party.
- Measures giving direct and immediate benefits to the poor must be taken up immediately. Subsidised rations, medicare and mid-day meals to children could be some of them.
- Cheap production of mass consumption goods, curbs on vulgar display of wealth and a frontal attack on tax evasion, smuggling and foreign exchange violations are musts.
- The party leadership should grow up from the grassroot level. Party offices should be run by full-timers. Members must interact with professionals like economists, social scientists and political analysts. And the party should have its own newspapers.

For the time being, Solanki's limited purpose is to make it clear that the party can ignore him in Gujarat only at its peril. Political observers feel the ultimate aim of his tours is to "capture" the PCC(I) when party elections are held. But he will obviously not be satisfied with sops. When party Vice-President Arjun Singh asked Solanki last month if he wanted a party post, he reportedly asked Singh if he was happy being pushed around every few months from one post to another. The outlines of Solanki's ambitions are clear. The future promises to be exciting—and tumultuous.

—RAMESH MENON

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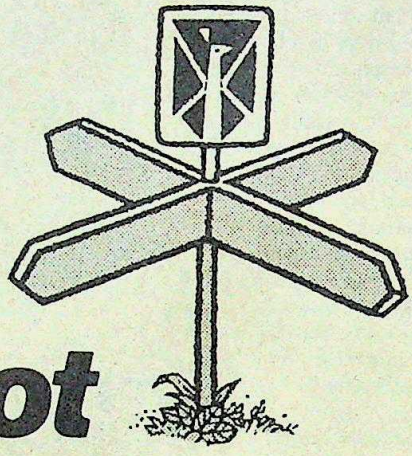

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GUJARAT

Pension Peril

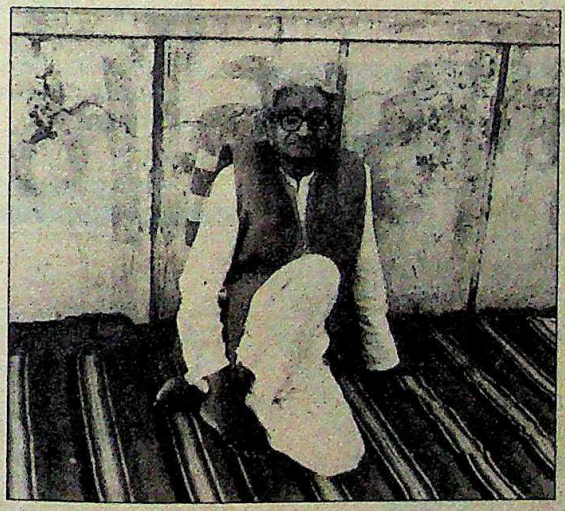
THE DEBATE over the question of parliamentary privileges is as old as the institutions themselves and of late, has been largely dormant with MP's and MLA's increasingly wary of the strong negative reaction from the people on any attempt to increase their perks. Gujarat is one such prime example where attempts by MLA's to get the Government to give them pensions have been repeatedly torpedoed by the people.

Way back in April 1984, a bill to give MLA's a pension of Rs 500 a month with Rs 60 for every additional term was introduced in the state Assembly. But former Janata chief minister Babubhai Patel, backed by the Gujarat Lok Samiti, formed by Jayaprakash Narayan, and some opposition leaders opposed it. Calling on citizens to agitate against this "immoral act", they took their protest to the streets and organised bandhs, paralysing life throughout the state. The Government beat a hasty retreat and the then governor K.M. Chandy, did not sign the bill.

But his successor, B.K. Nehru, put the cat among the pigeons when he signed the controversial bill into an Act on the eve of laying down his office. The reaction was expectedly strong. Last fortnight, former MLA and Sarvodaya worker Mahendra Desai, 72, protest-fasted in Ahmedabad demanding that the act be scrapped. Significantly enough, Desai had undertaken a 21-day fast two years ago over the same issue. The Lok Samiti also threw its weight behind him and called for a people's movement against the bill. Opposition stalwarts like former MP Purshottam Mavlankar and BJP member Ashok Bhatt, also rallied to Desai's side.

Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary was embarrassed. But he could hardly disavow it when his own party MLA's were threatening to go on a counter-fast against Desai. Three Congress (I) legislators—Ramlal Ruplal, Vajubhai Jani and Khodidas Thakkar—charged Desai with "character assassination" of the people's representatives and maintained that since the bill was passed before the assembly elections and the people had voted solidly in favour of the Congress, the bill in fact, had popular assent. The argument was hardly calculated to impress and Chaudhary feebly sought to save face by claiming that he had not even seen the file on the subject and therefore, could not say if the governor had assented to it. The cat was out of the bag, however, when he buckled under to opposition questioning and admitted that the bill had been signed. But he flatly refuted opposition charges that the Government had pressurised Nehru into signing the bill a few hours before his retirement.

Governor B.K. Nehru put the cat among the pigeons when he signed the MLA's pension bill into an act on the eve of laying down office



Desai's protest fast in Ahmedabad

Seeking a way out of the situation, the chief minister tried to persuade Desai to give up his fast arguing that the bill was meant to help those MLA's who usually had to fend for themselves after the end of their terms. But with opposition from every quarter, barring Congressmen, and the Lok Samiti's call for a state-wide agitation hotting up, Chaudhary announced that the bill would not be implemented "till a practical solution was found in consultation with the concerned parties".

Having won the first round, Desai called off his fast but the Lok Samiti president and noted Gandhian, Chinubhai Vaidya, challenged the Government to hold a referendum on the issue. He pointed out that the "concerned party" were the people and nothing should be done without their consent.

That the entire move to grant pensions is ridiculous was amply brought out by the agitation. Babubhai Patel, who stands to gain at least Rs 1.75 lakh in arrears if the bill gets through, has given in writing that he would never accept a pension. He also reminded MLA's that they got over Rs 16,000 a year as allowance even though most of them rarely attended the proceedings of the Assembly. A government employee, on the other hand, had to slog for close on 30 years to get a pension, he said and added: "The Government should not give effect to the act keeping in view the strong sentiments of the people. The argument that some states give pensions is no argument. Gujarat has to show the way by taking a moral stand." Echoed Independent MLA Jaspal Singh: "If these MLA's were hankering after pensions, they should have joined government service rather than politics. It is also unfortunate that ruling party MLA's are demanding an extra pound of flesh when the country is passing through a severe economic crisis."

The fate of the bill is thus a matter of speculation. For those who have been legislators since 1962, the arrears would work out to over Rs 1.75 lakh—and the state will have to cough up a few crores of rupees keeping in view the number of MLA's in the state. A decidedly tall order when the financial dislocation caused by the prolonged reservation agitation has yet to be sorted out. But the fact that 78 MLA's have announced that they would not accept any pension is a creditable move. The distasteful part is that of the MLA's who have refused what amounts to a small fortune, only one—Madhavlal Shah—is a Congress(I) member.

—RAMESH MENON

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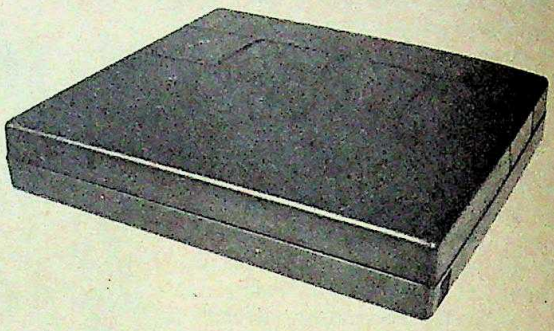

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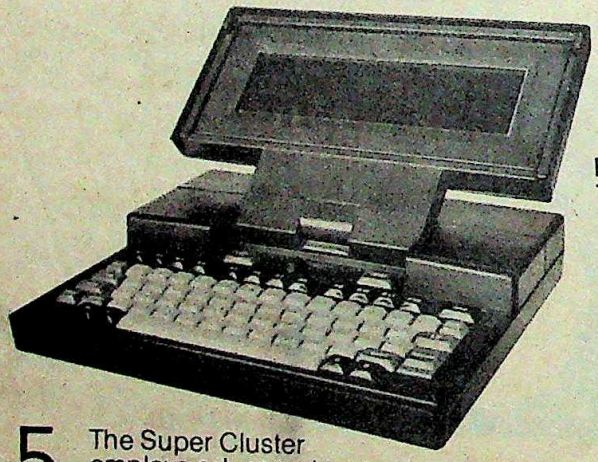

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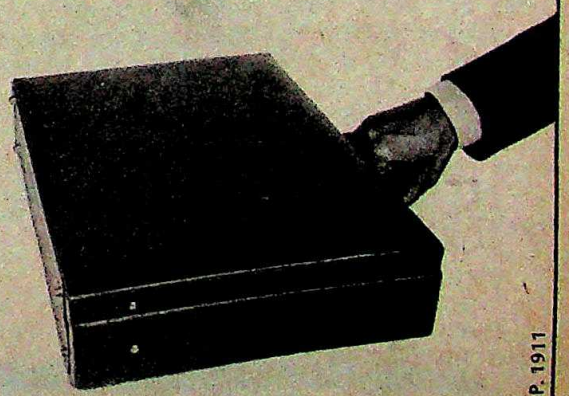

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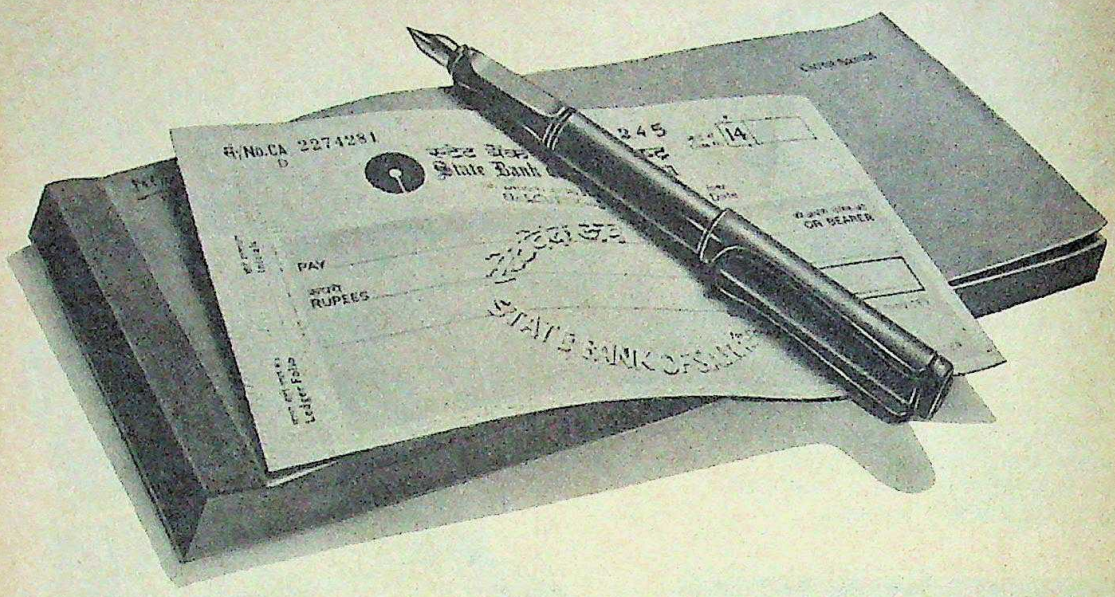

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NTR launching the Grameen Kranti Patham: abandoning his electorate

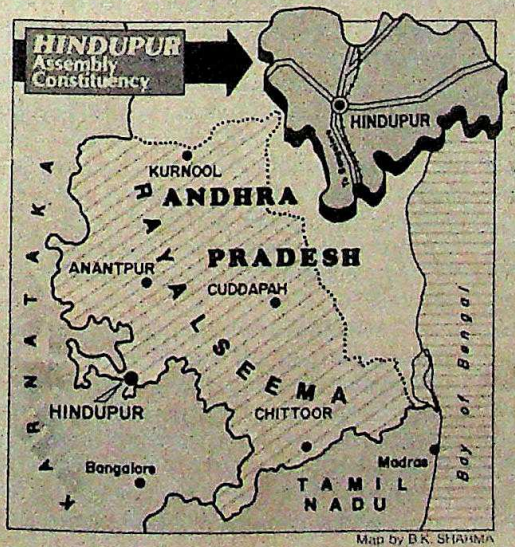
ANDHRA PRADESH

Backyard Neglect

"PRIOR to Vikari year (1779), there was only a petty fort and no town here, but the Sultan (Haider Ali) induced people to settle there by giving concessions and remissions of taxation. Thereafter, the traders came and established shops and markets."

So reads a manuscript from the Mackenzie collections about Hindupur in the old Madras Presidency. But for the present-day inhabitants of Hindupur—who voted in N.T.Rama Rao as chief minister of Andhra Pradesh a year ago—the fond hope that their latter day "sultan" would continue the 18th century tradition of patronage and concessions has crumbled rapidly. Contrary to his election promise of transforming Rayalaseema (land of stones)—comprising Hindupur and four other parched southern districts of the state—into a "*Ratnalaseema* (land of diamonds)", the electorate are discovering that belonging to the chief minister's constituency might not have been such a good idea after all.

Rama Rao, in fact, was elected from three different constituencies in the March 1985 elections—Gudivada on the coast, Nalgonda in Telengana and Hindupur—but he chose to retain the Hindupur seat where he had won by the largest margin. Within six weeks of his election, a micro-plan for the development of Hindupur block 1985-90 (area 1643.60 sq km, population 2.62 lakh) was drafted on the lines of the late prime minister Indira Gandhi's plans for Medak. But by the end of the first year, the micro-plan remained just what, ironically, its drafters had claimed it to be: "a modest plan dreamt of within a short time".



Map by B.K. SHARMA

Over the last year, the chief minister has condescended to visit his constituency only thrice and that too for largely ceremonial reasons—to cut ribbons, open a blood bank, inaugurate a bus station and unveil foundation plaques for the labour room of a maternity ward or a state-run residential school. The only time he stayed overnight was in January this year, when he started off contributory road-laying and repair work and construction of bus shelters at 10 places. Such activity, while having its own uses, has not touched the core of Hindupur's problem—chronic drought.

Hindupur is a part of the larger Anantpur district, and all 63 revenue mandals in Anantpur are facing drought for the third successive year. Drought-relief and provision of irrigation facilities has remained restricted to short-term sops ladled out to make the burden of living

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momentarily easier. Rationalised District Collector Asoke Kumar Tigidi: "Our task is to manage with scarcity and not plenty. Rainfall is scanty, sporadic and scattered and only 9 per cent of the cultivated area is irrigated. The rest of the area depends on the vagaries of nature."

It isn't as if Rama Rao has done nothing. Less than a fortnight after his second visit to Hindupur on October 16 last year, the Government put off collection of arrears on land revenue, loans, cesses and special land tax. Commercial and cooperative banks and other financial institutions were asked to liberalise credit rules and give fresh loans and reschedule the dues on existing ones. Bankers admit that the chances of banks getting back even a fraction of the 7,868 loans amounting to Rs 3.07 crore, given to Hindupur block residents in 1985, appear pretty bleak.

But the tragedy is that most of these loans were given for welfare schemes, not for development projects. Said a senior official in the biggest bank in the area: "There is no doubt we have increased the amount under the loaning programme by a crore as it covers the chief minister's constituency, but it is a futile exercise in sinking money. Water is the most needed resource for any development programme to click and only desultory attempts have been made to tackle this problem. Engineers of the Andhra Pradesh Irrigation Development Corporation tried half-heartedly to dig some 35 tube-wells but gave up after digging around 100 feet." Consequently, the banks are going slow in advancing 9,096 loans totalling Rs 4.13 crore under various development schemes planned for this year.

The easiest and perhaps the most practical solution to the problem would have been a request to Karnataka to supply a few million cubic feet of water to irrigate parts of Rayalaseema. But the ongoing dispute with that state over the sharing of the Krishna Waters has precluded the chief minister from making any such request. Even more, his seeming indifference has irritated local leaders. Said Redappa Reddy, Anantpur Zilla Parishad chairman and Congress(I) activist: "The chief minister is a distinguished member of the parishad by virtue of being an MLA. But he has not found time to come to even one meeting of the parishad." The Hindupur Panchayat Samithi President and Congressman B. Narayana Reddy, sarcastically commented: "It is easier to have *darshan* of Venkatswaraswami at Tirumala than Rama Rao in Hindupur or Hyderabad. People here do not have enough money to buy food and he wants them to contribute for road laying and repair works!"

Even some Telugu Desam activists are getting increasingly disillusioned by the chief minister's lack of initiative in pushing through more concrete programmes. Said Venkata Rama Reddy, president of the Hindupur Taluk Ryot Seva Sangham: "The only important change after Rama Rao was elected from here is that officials no longer say: let us see. They now say: we will get it done. But it does not always happen. Loans under various welfare programmes and housing schemes are sanctioned to create an overall impression that things are being done, but the real problems are still ignored."

Cattle-runners at work: cashing in

G. SAMPATH KUMAR

About the only 'dynamism' shown in the area is by cattle-runners who are cashing in on the distress sale of cattle by drought-hit farmers.

The chief minister's attitude has percolated down to the lowest levels of government. No official has bothered to visit villages like Obulapuram near Lepakshi (famous for its Nandi bull) and the menfolk of the Boyas, a backward community, are forced to trek across the state's borders to work in the silk units in and around Doddalballapur in Karnataka as casual labour for a pittance of Rs 13 a day. "We go to work there for 25 days a month to earn enough to buy rice. This village is ignored," lamented Venkatappa, an aged Boya.

Compounding matters is Rama Rao's attempt to put the cart before the horse. He recently launched with great publicity the Telugu Grameen Kranti Patham—a programme involving voluntary contribution by villagers to meet half the cost of laying new village roads and repairing existing ones. But as even Telugu Desam activists point out—when the poor have been forced to pawn off their household belongings for cash and still do not have enough money to eat, how can they possibly be expected to contribute to this fancy rural development programme?

Development strategists and former collectors of this district have called for large-scale cultivation of mulberry and industrialisation as a way out of this mess. In fact, the sericulture development programme has been a signal success in Cholasamundaram where some 20 Harijan families are assured of at least Rs 1,750 a month. A similar project, named after the chief minister himself, has been taken up in Malgur but the programme cannot escalate unless water is available.

Similarly, plans for industrialisation have also not made any headway since the unveiling of a foundation plaque on October 16 last for a 300-acre industrial estate at Thoomakunt near the Karnataka border. About the only 'dynamism' shown in the area is by cattle-runners who are cashing in on the distress sale of cattle by drought-hit farmers. Admitted Mohammed Ismail, a cattle runner: "Sales have increased but prices have crashed and this is why we herd 30 and more animals in a lorry."

Yet, hope still exists in Hindupur that Rama Rao will, like he has done in countless of his films, come to their rescue. But with Hindupur's basic problem of water still not been given a serious thought, and the seeming satisfaction of Rama Rao's constituentswith getting a kilo of rice for two rupees, it does seem that even having a chief minister as an MLA is unlikely to make much difference to Hindupur's pace of progress.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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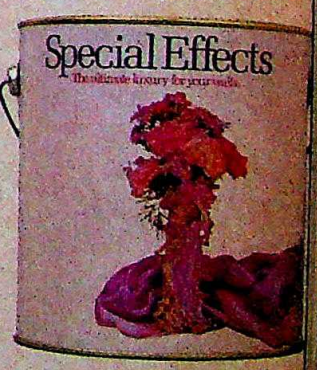

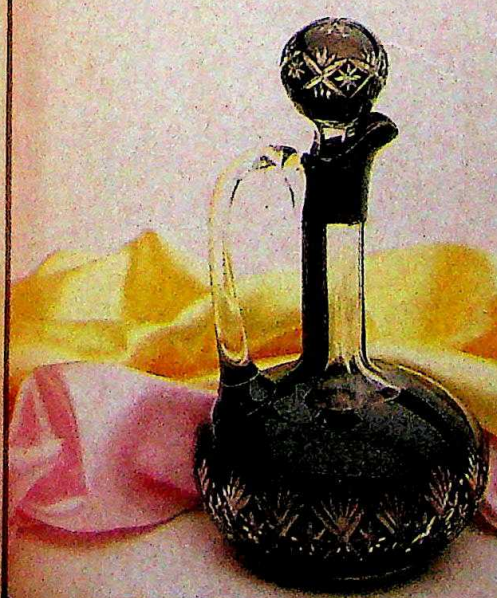

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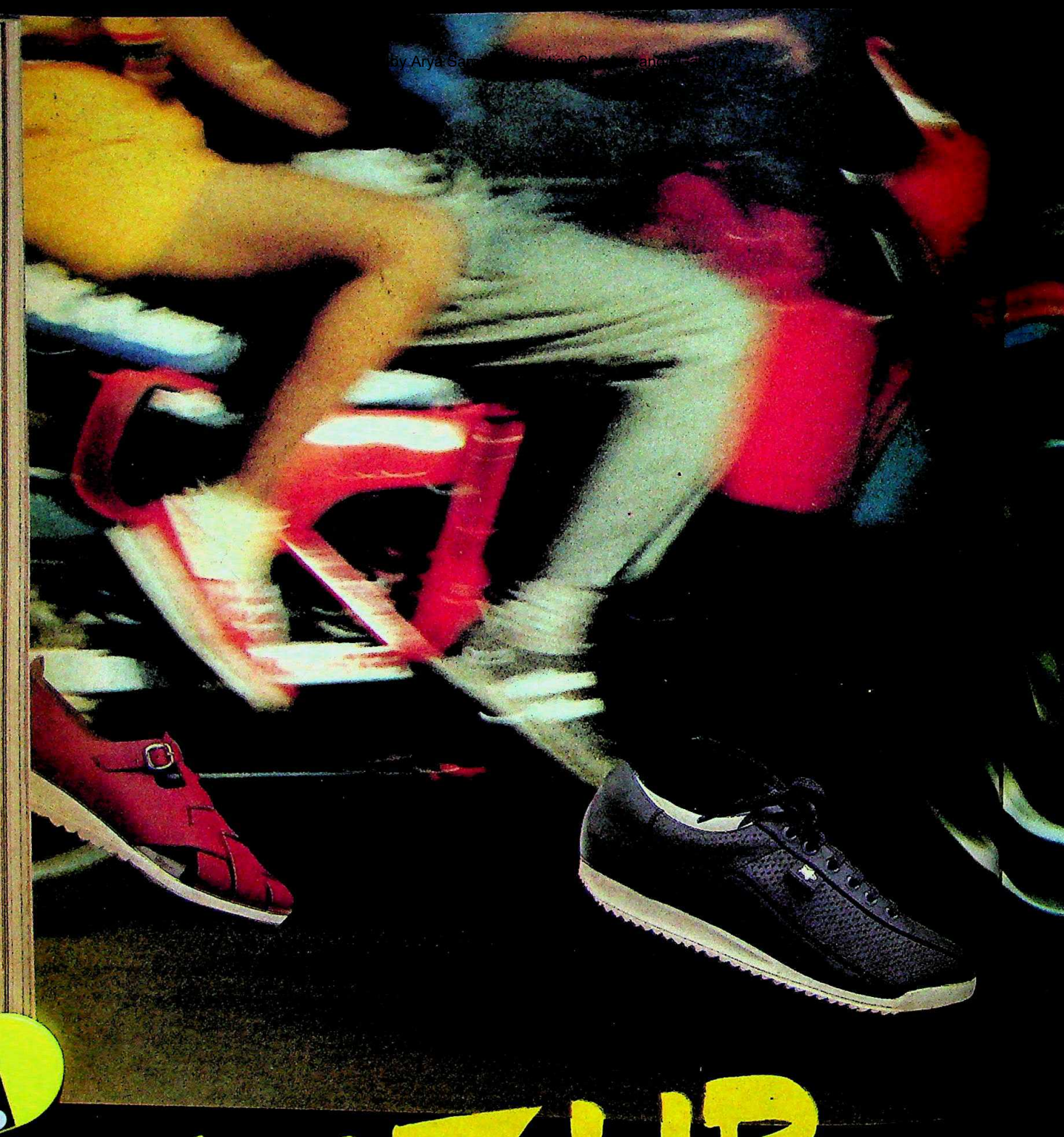

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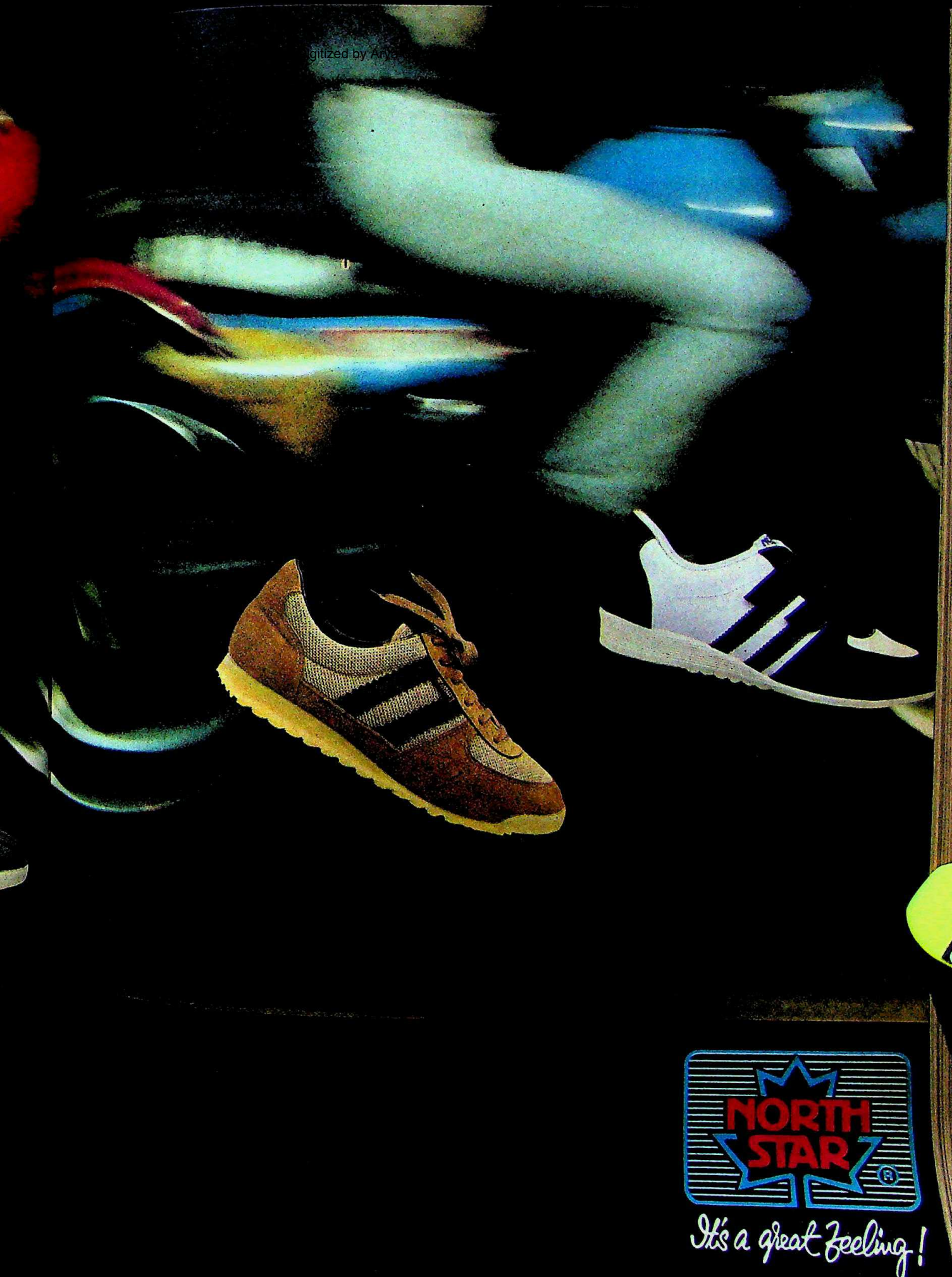

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Vajpayee (left) and Advani: new look

BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY

Veering Right

DROWNED in the din of the more tumultuous developments on the national political scene, a subtle yet significant change in the BJP got only passing notice last fortnight. In a matter of fact fashion, the presidentship of the party passed from the hands of the charismatic, crowd-pulling personage of Atal Behari Vajpayee to his long-time alter ego, Lal Krishan Advani, who has a relatively low-profile image but is a high-tensile organisation man.

For the capital's large corps of political observers, however, there was more to the change than merely the contrast in the personalities of the two men who have more or less controlled the erratic destiny of the party over the past decade and who have, since the BJP lost the Delhi municipal election in 1983, seen its political fortunes dip quite dramatically.

In a disciplined, cadre-based party like the BJP, which over the years has more or less steered clear of the personality cult, it is hard to expect a new president to bring about a sea change in its policy, approach or electoral fortunes. Nevertheless, the change has serious political implications. For one, Advani is considered closer to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), in other words the strong, original core of the BJP which has been rueing the loss of the party's Hindu vote bank in the northern and central parts of the country. Secondly, Vajpayee is the biggest crowd-catcher, after Rajiv Gandhi, at least in the Hindi-speaking areas, and as Advani acknowledges, the BJP has been realising in the recent past that it needs him in the field rather than have him wasting his time solving the day-to-day hassles of the party in its small office Ashok Road in downtown New Delhi. More significantly, party spokesmen point out that in today's political ethos any suggestion of change is only going to do good to the image of the party. "Someone has been ruling this country with a mere illusion of change. The party had to do something like this to counter that deception more effectively, credibly and convincingly," said Jaswant Singh, Rajya Sabha member and one of the secretaries of the party.

Vajpayee had for long been insisting on handing over the baton, particularly after discordant voices began to rise in the party in the wake of the December 1984 general election debacle. "There were not too many of them, but some people had begun to complain. Moreover, there was no way I could persuade people lower down to make way for youngsters unless I set an example myself," said Vajpayee, in a qualified admission of the fact that a vocal section of the party had begun to blame him for its continuing woes. What is significant, however, is that these were predominantly the elements who are known to be closer to the pro-RSS lobby in the party.

Among the party's cadres it is being openly said that the change in the leadership firmly establishes the trend towards a slow shift back to the party's Hindu moorings that was first endorsed at the national council meeting of the party at Bhopal last July, where Deen Dayal Upadhyaya's doctrine of "integral humanism" was taken out of the party's cupboard and restored to its place as the party's guiding philosophy like in the Jan Sangh days.

Advani is considered closer to the RSS than Vajpayee, though both have been members of the organisation. He is also less unabashed than Vajpayee in talking of the party's relationship with the controversial organisation and is thus more acceptable to the RSS hardliners who believe that the BJP cannot afford to distance itself from the RSS. "Remember what happened to the party when we parted ways briefly in the 1984 elections," remarked a senior leader of the party. They believe that the installation of Advani, who is less of a "hypocrite" about his RSS loyalties, will rectify that anomaly.

Advani himself maintains that the RSS issue is a bit of a non-debate but Vajpayee, the most candid of all the BJP leaders, admitted: "The RSS and the party are coming closer again." Arguing that the distance between the party and its sword-arm had come about as a consequence of the "unusual happenings" of 1984, he added: "They (the RSS) were also affected by what happened and then our relationship was overtaken by events. There was a communication gap. But now we are all realising that the distance was unnecessary."

On a purely political plane, that goes well with the current thinking in the party, a result of the soul-searching over the past year, that the decline in the party's fortune began with this "confusion and loss of perspective which has made us lose even our Hindu vote banks." As a result, the changes that are taking place today are mainly geared to regain this lost territory.

In the months to come, and particularly at the forthcoming plenary session of the party in New Delhi next May, the BJP under Advani is expected to move even more decisively towards regaining its moorings. This will amount to reversing the shift towards a more liberal outlook, which Vajpayee stood for personally; but the party has no alternative. There is no other way to get back its Hindu vote.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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THAKKAR COMMISSION

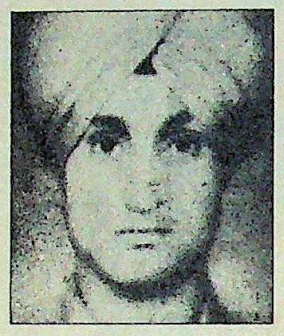
Passing the Buck

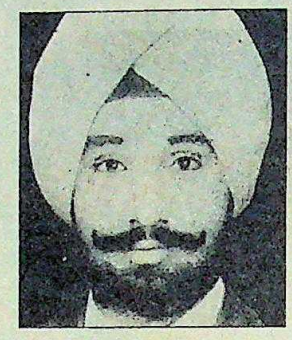
THIS IS the off-season at Vigyan Bhavan and the capital's massive convention centre generally wears a deserted look. Except for the adjoining office complex, the Vigyan Bhavan Annexe, where there is unusual activity. On the two top floors, sentries, clutching bayoneted rifles, tensely confront visitors. Access is through a metal detector arch.

The security, officials say, has to be extremely tight here, for the two floors house the headquarters of the two most sensitive commissions of inquiry in the country's recent history: the Justice M.P. Thakkar Commission and the Anand Ram Commission inquiring into the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi, to fix responsibility for the security lapses that led to it and to determine whether the murder was the result of the vengefulness of a few Sikhs in Mrs Gandhi's security set-up or had its genesis in a conspiracy.

Some answers to these questions were expected to surface last fortnight as Justice Thakkar submitted his final report to the Government within a few days of the extension of the term of his commission by a year. But as senior officials scrutinised the report, it became clear that the commission had refused to answer most of the key questions. Said a Home Ministry official: "The report is full of references to security failure, carelessness and even suggestion as to who could have been responsible for all this. Beyond that, there is nothing substantial. It does not fix responsibility and does not deal with the issue of conspiracy."

But even while hedging his bets on this, the most crucial question of all, Thakkar has made some remarkably candid observations on the issue of security lapses that led to the assassination. Thakkar, who examined over 200 witnesses besides studying hundreds of pages of official records and analysing the VVIP security manuals and instructions issued by the security officials from time to time, traces in detail the sequence of events on the morning of October 31, 1984. The commission has established that:





Satwant Singh (left) and Beant Singh: part of a deep-rooted conspiracy

► In violation of all security norms, personnel in the prime minister's security staff were frequently able to make mutual exchange of duty shifts.

► The whole security system round the prime minister was structured in such an amorphous manner that it was impossible to hold any one person accountable for her protection. This particularly applied to Ram Nath Kao, virtually her most influential security advisor, who had a lot of power with "no accountability at all".

► There were frequent and serious differences of opinion between the Intelligence Bureau and the Delhi police, the two agencies mainly looking after the prime minister's security, leading to lack of coordination.

In the reconstructions of the hazy sequence of events on the morning of October 31, the commission has unearthed a startling find. It seems that on that fateful morning, Mrs Gandhi's proposed interview with Peter Ustinov was delayed by half-an-hour for apparently inexplicable reasons. This crucial 30-minute period coincided with a hurried visit to the toilet by both Beant Singh and Satwant Singh. "That could have been out of a bout of nerves or to sort out some last-minute detail of coordination," said a commission official. But from this the judge has inferred that, but for the last-minute change in the prime minister's schedule, she could have safely walked past the gate for her interview with Ustinov, with her would-be assassins locked up in the toilet.

It is apparent that the commission is not prepared to blame this entirely on providence and it is this factor which compelled the commission to search hard for likely accomplices of the assassins within the inner sanctum of 1, Safdarjang Road with the burden of suspicion inevitably falling on R.K. Dhawan, the powerful personal aide who had accompanied Mrs Gandhi through a decade of fluctuating fortunes. Besides, the commission suspected him of being careless in not getting the right import of Mrs Gandhi's insistence on retaining the Sikh guards in her security staff. According to the commission's view, Dhawan failed to ensure that while these guards were posted to maintain the Government's secular image, they should not be allowed to get close to the prime minister "particularly when it was being openly said at two gurudwaras in Delhi that Mrs Gandhi will be killed by her own security guards". While the judge

HARI OM GULATI

The Thakkar Commission has raised more questions than it has answered. It has added a whole new dimension by suggesting that the assassins could have had backers within the prime minister's inner circle.

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squarely blames the Delhi police for not sensing this mood at the gurudwaras correctly, the main suspicion falls on Dhawan, now living in virtual retirement. This led to the lengthy exchange of notes and letters dutifully leaked out to reporters.

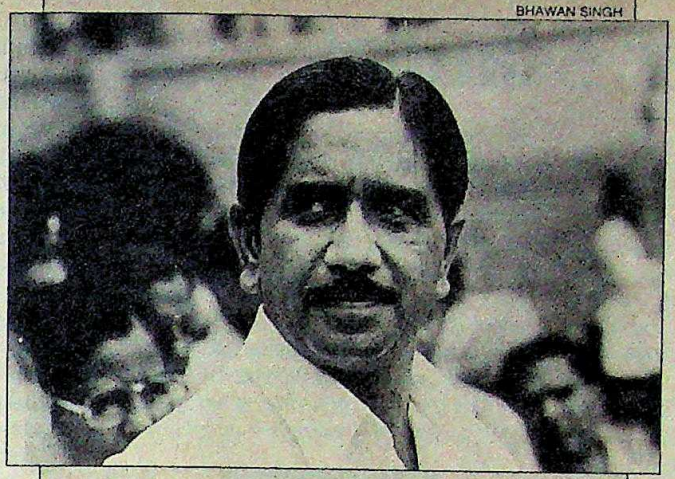
The commission's concentration on Dhawan was largely the result of rumours that he had been feeling insecure for a few months because of reports that Mrs Gandhi was planning to sack him. In fact in one of the notes the commission pointedly asked Dhawan if, at any time in the 1983-84 period, Mrs Gandhi had shown any lack of confidence or displeasure with him. Dhawan denied all this and then firmly refused to accept the commission's suggestion for taking the polygraph (lie-detector) test. To begin with, he raised technical questions about the nature of the test and later conveyed to the commission that it could result in his coming out with secrets he had become privy to during his days close to Mrs Gandhi and that "many of these may not be fitting to the memory of the late prime minister."

The commission, however, spent much time in examining Dhawan's conduct and closely questioned a number of officials, including Mrs Gandhi's then personal security officer D.K. Bhat, who had been sent on a punishment posting to the Andamans. And even though nothing substantial has been discovered to fault Dhawan, the commission has suggested that the Anand Ram Commission, which is still investigating the conspiracy charge, keep Dhawan's role in mind.

From one point of view, that is by far the biggest letdown. The report has not revealed any conspiracy though it has obliquely suggested that there was one. In fact the judge has recommended that the conspiracy issue be examined separately now by the Anand Ram Commission.

But that is a tricky proposition. Sources in the Union Home Ministry explain the reasons behind the commission's unseemly hurry in rushing through its report and shying away from the issue of the conspiracy in the perspective of the recent conviction of Satwant Singh, Balbir Singh and Kehar Singh for Mrs Gandhi's assassination. This is not the best situation for the prosecution to be in. Any suggestion of a further inquiry into the conspiracy theory will only weaken the prosecution's case when the appeal of the three convicts comes up for hearing before the Delhi High Court. Senior officials connected with the Thakkar Commission say that the defence in the case was likely to seek postponement of the trial till the completion of the commission's inquiry.

BHAWAN SINGH



Dhawan refused the lie-detector test by conveying to the commission that it could result in his coming out with secrets and that many of these may not be fitting to the memory of the late prime minister.

YET THE Anand Ram Commission, which is officially incharge of the prosecution case in the assassination trial continues to work on hundreds of other leads brought in by its investigators spread all over the region now. Among the officials there is still a strong feeling—some of it resulting from the evidence collected over the months—that there is a deep-rooted conspiracy waiting to be unearthed. But the Government cannot even talk about it because it will destroy the prosecution case.

To begin with, the commission officials have the initial statement of Bimal Khalsa, Beant Singh's widow, who had clearly mentioned that a number of people (Sikhs) used to frequently hold quiet confabulations with her husband. The commission has only been able to collect vague descriptions of these people, and has also interrogated Sikhs detained on charges of sedition or extremist activity. These include Simranjeet Singh Mann, the dismissed IPS officer now in the Hazaribagh jail. But no evidence has been found. Some of the descriptions, according to sources close to the inquiry, matched Attinder Pal Singh, a student from Bhopal who is now widely believed to be in Pakistan, and Gurinder Pal Singh, an extremist believed to have been killed in a recent encounter with the Punjab police.

Besides, the investigators are still looking for answers to some of the inconsistencies in the evidence brought up before the Thakkar Commission. For example, it is widely believed and has been stated before the commission that Beant Singh had refused to accept the 100-rupee gift Mrs Gandhi made to each of her security men, thereby expressing his resentment. But his widow's first statement says clearly that he had brought the money home though he kept cursing himself for having done so.

That the Government still firmly believes in the existence of a deeper conspiracy is obvious from the fact that even while the Thakkar Commission is more or less in the process of winding up, the Anand Ram team was, till January, seeking more investigating personnel from the state police forces all over the country. Said a Home Ministry official: "Initially they had the dual role of building the prosecution case in the trial and assisting the Thakkar Commission. But now while the inquiry into the conspiracy theory continues, the commission may also become a kind of permanent agency to keep a watch over the Sikh extremists."

As things stand thus, the Thakkar Commission has raised more questions than it has answered. Besides casting serious doubts on the basic system of VVIP security it has added a whole new dimension to the story by making the veiled suggestion that the assassins could have had backers within the prime minister's inner circle. The indications last week were that the Government was planning to hand the report over to the Anand Ram Commission whose turn it will now be to delve into the hazy and complex dimensions of the second most significant political murder in the history of the country.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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HARYANA

School for Scandal

AS SCANDALS go it did not set the Ghaggar on fire. Haryana has seen bigger scandals which came to naught. But the nasty can of worms opened up by the Vice-Chancellor of the Maharishi Dayanand University (MDU), Professor Ram Gopal, who accused his predecessor, Hardwari Lal, of tampering with the answer sheets of the medical entrance examination, was showing signs of having serious political consequences.

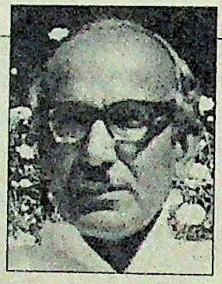
The charges and countercharges have exposed to public view the way universities in Haryana function and how senior appointments to academic positions are made. Hardwari Lal, 75, the main accused, is the Congress(I) MP from Rohtak and educational adviser to the Haryana Government.

On February 24, *The Times of India* carried a front page story saying that Hardwari Lal had been "implicated" in the falsification of examination results by an inquiry panel set up by the MDU vice-chancellor to look into charges of malpractice in the 1984 medical entrance tests. Events moved fast after that. Ram Gopal says he was summoned by the Governor S.M.H. Burney who is the chancellor. He alleges that Burney told him: "You have done a very wrong thing by damaging the image of a Congress(I) MP. Hush up this inquiry or I will suspend you." Ram Gopal immediately issued a statement saying he had been threatened with suspension. A few days later, he was asked to meet Chief Minister Bhajan Lal in Delhi, who told him : "The governor is very angry with you. He wants you to resign or accept a transfer to Kurukshetra otherwise he will suspend you."

Ram Gopal says he was given 24 hours to decide and when he refused the offer, Bhajan Lal said the governor had ordered him to transfer Ram Gopal's son—who is superintendent of police in Ambala—and daughter—who is the city magistrate of Rohtak. On March 6 he received his own suspension orders from Burney.

Said Ram Gopal: "I am challenging my suspension before the high court. It does not mention any charge nor has any charge-sheet followed. I was the only non-IAS vice-chancellor in Haryana universities. Now they have removed me. I have been getting threatening phone calls." In a letter to Burney on March 3, he had written that "the irregularities committed by Hardwari Lal in the conduct of the medical entrance examination held in July 1984 find no parallel in the academic history of the world".

Hardwari Lal had appointed himself paper setter, and then altered the marks given by the examiner, raising the marks of roll number 318's English paper from 10.5 to 28. The answer book carried Hardwari Lal's initials. (INDIA TODAY found that the same candidate's chemistry marks had also been increased and those of other candidates reduced, some drastically.) Further, he wrote that Hardwari Lal had "kept with him unused answer books collected from the examination centre... and attendance charts of the candidates who appeared in this examination...As a result of this, he manipulated the replacement of original answer books of some candidates by fake answer books attempted outside the examination centres."



"The irregularities committed by Hardwari Lal in the conduct of the medical entrance examination find no parallel in the academic history of the world."

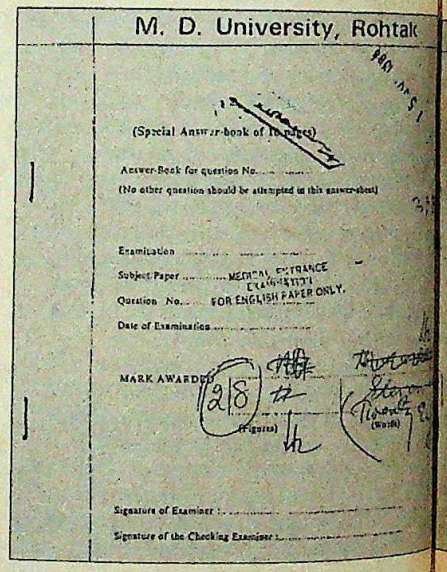
RAM GOPAL
vice-chancellor
MD University, Rohtak

The five-man inquiry committee which had examined the evidence went even further. In its interim report, the committee said that the answer books used by at least four candidates were not the original ones issued to them at the centre where they took the examination. "It indicates that (these) candidates did not write their answers in these answer books at their respective examination centres but at some other time and place outside the examination hall." Many answer books and the final "award list" did not carry the signature of any examiner, yet they had been accepted by the Controller of Examinations, R.C. Bhardwaj, who was suspended. These irregularities, the committee said were "only the tip of the iceberg". Ram Gopal informed the governor that Bhardwaj, who started out as a stenographer, rose to become controller of examinations in just six years.

These are extremely grave charges which Hardwari Lal emphatically denies. He had set the 1984 English paper "for the sole purpose of preserving the secrecy and integrity of the test". The medical entrance exam had to be cancelled in 1983 after the papers leaked out. New papers had to be set overnight. "After that I did not want to give the English paper to anyone else to set." Hardwari Lal asserted he was never concerned with the tabulation of the results. "If Dr Ram Gopal's panel saw any snags in the tabulation, they should have confronted the controller of examinations...the inferences drawn are a total distortion...." In any case, he alleged that the teachers on the inquiry committee were not free from animus and as vice-chancellor he had sought explanations from them.

All answer books, he argued, had to be

Telltale MDU answer book with Hardwari Lal's initials and altered marks


M. D. University, Rohtak

(Special Answer-book of Teacher)

Answer-Book for question No. .....

(No other question should be attempted in this answer-sheet)

Examination .....

Subject-Paper ..... MEDICAL ENTRANCE EXAMINATION

Question No. ..... FOR ENGLISH PAPER ONLY.

Date of Examination .....

MARK AWARDED (28) (Twenty-eight)

Signature of Examiner : .....

Signature of the Checking Examiner : .....

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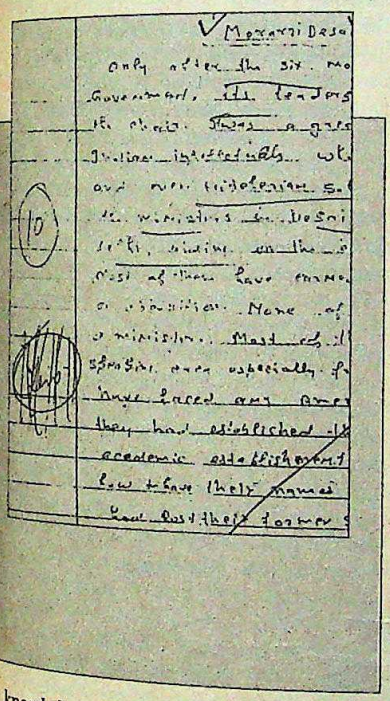
destroyed after nine months unless otherwise decided by the academic council. In this case, the council had not cleared retention of the answer books. "I treated destruction of the answer books as a routine matter. If I had done anything improper I would have got them destroyed myself."

About the changes in marks on some of the answer sheets, he replied: "I distributed the answer books. I may have gone through them again and my judgement may have been different." To the best of his recollection, he "got a number of examiners to set papers in other subjects and he selected one paper for each subject at random out of the lot". He denied



knowledge of the unused answer sheets which Ram Gopal says were found in the cupboard at the vice-chancellor's residence. "I dont know at all. It should have been the responsibility of the examination branch. This is not my job."

Last fortnight, Hardwari Lal filed a defamation suit against his accuser and tabled copies of his correspondence with Burney in which he says that Ram Gopal was appointed vice-chancellor simply because he belonged to Bhajan Lal's Bishnoi caste. "Ram Gopal (was) appointed to my sure knowledge, at the instance of Mani Ram Godara Bishnoi, earlier an enemy and now a friend of the chief minister." To ingratiate himself with the-then Haryana PCC(I) chief Sultan Singh, Ram Gopal had appointed Sultan Singh's daughter-in-law—a 2nd class M.A.—as a lecturer in the Hindi Department without advertising the post. Better qualified teachers, some holding doctoral degrees, were available if the job had been advertised, Hardwari Lal claims.

Ram Gopal on his part responded with equally serious charges. After he was suspended, he issued a press statement saying that the governor was "hand in glove with Hardwari Lal and has gone out of his way to shield him in every possible manner". He said Burney had earlier shown "special undue favour to Hardwari Lal" and ordered him to be paid gratuity though his terms of service did not entitle him to gratuity.

Apart from drawing Burney, Bhajan

"If Dr Ram Gopal's panel saw any snags in the tabulation, they should have confronted the controller...the inferences drawn are a total distortion."

HARDWARI LAL
former vice-chancellor, now educational adviser to Haryana

Lal and party functionaries into the vortex of the controversy, the MDU squabble has split the university faculty down the middle into pro-Ram Gopal and pro-Hardwari Lal camps. "We see the hand of Hardwari Lal in these developments. There was a general feeling that the 1984 exam was unfair but everyone was afraid to talk," said MDU's Professor of Chemistry O.P. Agarwal. "The way the 1984 exam was conducted has brought a bad name to the university," confided the former registrar, B.K.Raizada , a member of the inquiry committee.

But another senior faculty member criticised Ram Gopal's actions saying he "had no business conducting an inquisition against his predecessor. Whatever shape the university has today is due to Hardwari Lal," he said. Dr Sarup Singh, former vice-chancellor of Delhi University, described what had happened as "shameful. It has devalued the institution of vice-chancellorship."

Hardwari Lal's dislike for Ram Gopal is pathological and vice versa. The history of their ill feeling is fairly old. Hardwari Lal said that as vice-chancellor, he had undone the seniority unfairly given to Ram Gopal's daughter, a history lecturer in the university. "Ram Gopal came to me a number of times abjectly begging for the position to be continued. I practically rebuked him. That started the trouble." Hardwari Lal said he had stoutly opposed Ram Gopal's appointment and written dozens of letters to the governor, copies of which he proudly reads. Here is a sample of one such letter: "Here is a man (Ram Gopal) who cannot be described in one word. I would not be satisfied if I called him stupid. I would not be satisfied if I called him stupid and mean. I would not be satisfied if I called him stupid, mean and stubborn. He defies description."

Hardwari Lal revealed that he along with the HPCC(I) chief, Virendra Singh, had met the governor on February 1 to plead that the university should be rid of Ram Gopal. He says the governor promised to send Ram Gopal a charge-sheet. It is quite possible that Ram Gopal got wind of this move and the inquiry into the examination, the breaking open of the cupboard and institution of the inquiry commitee could have been only to preempt action by the governor. In any case, the speed with which the inquiry committee completed its report in two days and it was published in a Delhi newspaper, even *before* the report was sent to the governor raised many eyebrows. What is more intriguing is that an official known to be close to Bhajan Lal went around offices in Delhi trying to hawk the story along with photostats of the tampered documents.

There is obviously more to this story than meets the eye, and the sordid tale of academic corruption and brazen malpractice is rooted deep in the kind of political intrigue that today atrophies academic institutions. In case of Haryana, in particular, the syndrome is compounded by the existence of age-old caste rivalries. But coming as it did close on the heels of the shockingly similar scandal in Maharashtra, the Haryana affair underlines the fact which, in any case, should constantly nag the minds of those drafting the new educational policy for the country—that a large number of universities across the length and breadth of India have become schools for scandal.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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KARNATAKA

Record of Assault

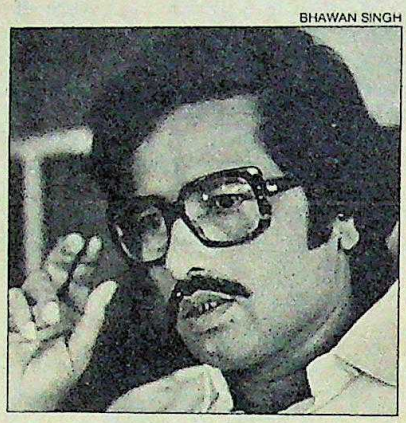
POLITICS in Karnataka has a way of getting entangled in tape, not the familiar red bureaucratic variety but of the recording kind. The latest to discover this was leader of the Congress(I) in the Assembly, S. Bangarappa. Even as another Congress(I) leader M. Veerappa Moily was preparing his affidavit for the judicial inquiry into the infamous "Moily tapes", Bangarappa was confronted with another tape allegedly proving his involvement in an assault on former PCC(I) chief, K.H. Ranganath, in November last year.

Predictably, Bangarappa protested vehemently, maintaining that the tape was concocted and his voice could have been mimicked. But his heated denial could not even silence his own party colleagues. Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde took an ambivalent attitude. While he gave the impression that the disclosure was made entirely at the initiative of the Janata MLA Ramesh Kumar, who produced the tape, he seized the opportunity to hit out at Bangarappa, accusing him of taking money from two excise contractors who failed to get contracts for arrack bottling.

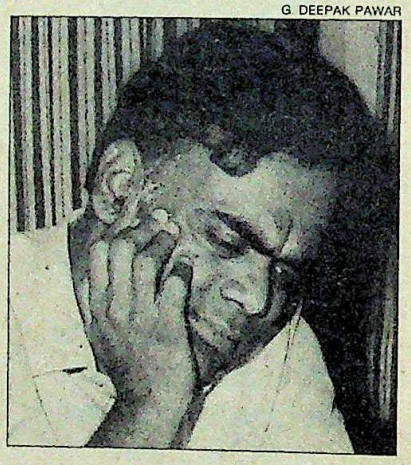
"I have sufficient proof," taunted Hegde. Bangarappa in turn accused Hegde of having taken Rs 12 crore from excise contractors for giving them the bottling contracts. Hegde, somewhat predictably, promptly declared that both the allegations would be referred to the Lok Ayukta and announced a judicial inquiry into the assault on Ranganath and the murder of V.G. Nanda Kumar.

Bangarappa was away in Delhi in connection with the council elections when Home Minister B. Rachaiah read out in the Assembly what he claimed was the taped "confessional statement" of Nanda Kumar, who had attacked Ranganath with two other rowdies. Shortly before he was killed by some gangsters, Nanda Kumar had told the police that it was Bangarappa who had instigated him to attack the then PCC(I) chief.

BHAWAN SINGH



G. DEEPAK PAWAR



MUSHTAQ AHMED

(Clockwise from top left) Bangarappa, Ramesh, Nanda and Ranganath: tape ties

The voice in the tape sounds very much like Bangarappa's with all his accent and intonations. In the tape the voice tells Shiva Murthy, a follower of Bangarappa and a former MLA, that Ranganath "should not be allowed to grow because he is a Harijan". Those who know Shiva Murthy have no doubt that the other voice on the tape is his. The telephonic conversation apparently took place soon after Ranganath was appointed president of the PCC(I).

In the course of the nine-minute conversation in Kannada, the voice makes many derogatory remarks and abuses Ranganath, calling him a "*holeya*(a derogatory reference to Scheduled Castes), a rascal and someone not born to human beings". It asks Shiva Murthy to mobilise people to disturb Ranganath's meetings. It also advises him: "You be in the background. Let the disturbances of his meetings come out in newspapers and he will be later replaced. He is a Harijan he should not be allowed to grow. Tomorrow it will be a question of leadership."

Nanda Kumar, against whom 26 petty criminal cases were pending, told the police in his confessional statement that Bangarappa often used him for disrupting meetings and creating trouble. He told the police that 15 days before the incident, he met Bangarappa at the party office and asked him to secure two seats in the S.J. Polytechnique for two friends of his. Nanda Kumar says it was explained to him that he would get the seats if he threatened the life of Ranganath and put the blame on Gundu Rao. "I do not know politics and I did what I was told to do," he told the police. Since Nanda Kumar was known to be a close associate of B.K. Hari Prasad, former slum board chairman and a close follower of Gundu Rao, the idea apparently was to create the impression that it was Gundu Rao who had organised the assault.

Nanda Kumar had gone to the Congress(I) office with two associates, drunk and armed with a sickle, and threatened to kill Ranganath who happened to be talking to some party men. When the partymen overpowered him and his accomplices, they ran outside and managed to escape in a waiting autorickshaw. Two days later, the three were caught by the police but not before Nanda Kumar had swallowed two bottles of an insecticide and plenty of sleeping pills. The police, however, managed to take him to the

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hospital in time and after pumping out the contents of his stomach, extracted a confession.

The disclosure of the tape and the confession has split the already-fractured state Congress(I) unit. A meeting of the legislature party called by Bangarappa to garner support degenerated into a slanging match between Bangarappa-baiters like B. Basavalingappa and K.H. Patil and supporters. The former wanted the party to be kept out of it since this was a "personal allegation of (a) very serious criminal nature." Patil told Bangarappa: "You make a statement in the house and try to extricate yourself from all this but we will all be silent." As a sideshow, Moily and T.N. Narsimha Murthy, long time political foes, almost came to blows in the meeting. Said a senior party leader: "I do not remember a more stormy meeting in recent years."

LATER, Bangarappa's critics sent off a memoranda to the high command backing the Janata's charge. Said one Congressman gleefully: "Bangarappa is finished now." Although Bangarappa denied reports about the infighting, he confessed to his confidants that he was peeved at the "betrayal" by his partymen.

Ramesh Kumar added to the mystery by refusing to disclose how he had got possession of the tape but insisted that Hegde had nothing to do with it though he had got the chief minister's "reluctant acceptance" before making the disclosure. Said Ramesh Kumar, who had defected from the Congress(I) to the Janata before the 1985 elections: "I got the tape some eight months ago from some people but decided to come out with it now because I wanted to disprove Bangarappa's claim that he had no association with any criminals." Yet, the timing of the disclosures—months after Nanda's confessional statement—did raise certain doubts. The disclosures, observers feel, may be part of a Janata strategy to outmanoeuvre Bangarappa, who had succeeded in somewhat denting Hegde's Mr Clean image with the bottling scandal.

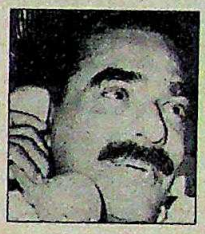
Wallowing in the publicity, Ramesh Kumar said ecstatically: "Bangarappa will now lose whatever credibility he has." However, a more impartial verdict will have to wait till the promised judicial inquiry into the affair comes out with its findings. Till then, Kannadigas cannot help but marvel at how political scandals in the state always seem to have some tapes attached to them.

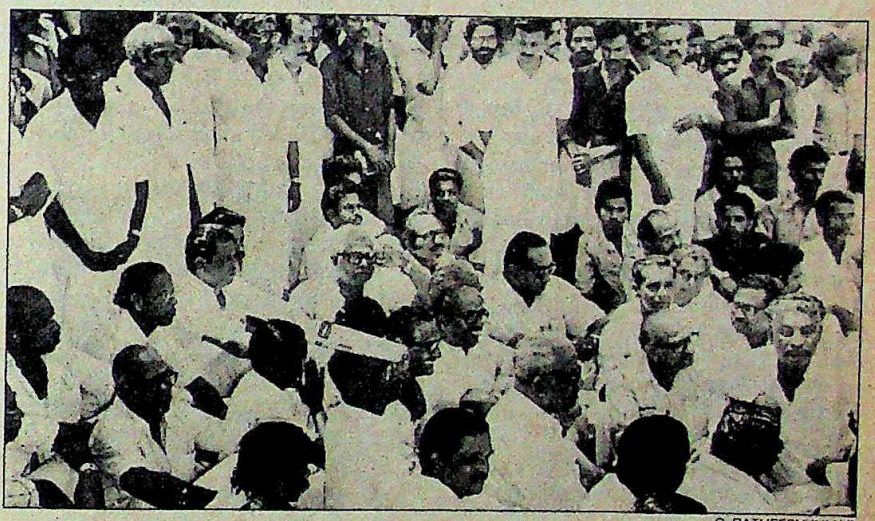
—SRINIVASA PRASAD

KERALA

Stalemate

KERALA'S canny Chief Minister, K. Karunakaran, has weathered many a political storm. But his five-month-old attempts to persuade the Centre to permit a cabinet reshuffle, which would strengthen his hands vis-a-vis his coalition partners, finally bit the dust. Faced with an unyielding high command intent on preserving the coalition, Karunakaran surrendered to the demands of the Kerala Congress (KC) and the Muslim League and summoned the budget session of the Assembly.





C. RATHEESHKUMAR

(Above) Mani and Karunakaran, and opposition leaders: political force

The surrender was humiliating—it was a widely-known fact that Karunakaran did not want his (KC) rival, Finance Minister K.M.Mani to present his record ninth budget and also wanted to drop Home Minister Vayalar Ravi from the Cabinet. He drafted his resignation but was dissuaded from pressing it by Congress(I) Vice-President Arjun Singh. The result was a continuing political stalemate which Ravi, his bitter critic, ascribed solely to Karunakaran's stubborness.

Said Palode Ravi, a trade union leader close to the home minister: "Karunakaran wanted to browbeat the Kerala Congress and his detractors with the threat of dissolution of the Assembly and the much tom-tommed mid-term poll. But it backfired on him. Ravi was able to persuade Arjun Singh to come to Kerala and make an on-the-spot study of the political situation." Added Mani: "We were able to convince the high command about the futility of a mid-term poll and the urgency of remaining together."

That argument, perhaps, clinched the issue for a high command faced with trouble in Maharashtra and Kashmir and wary of losing its only foothold in the south. With defeat writ large on his features, the chief minister, reading from a prepared text, said at a hurriedly-convened press conference: "Today's meeting entrusted the chief minister to fix a suitable date for the budget session. Immediately after the session, necessary steps would be taken for bettering the performance of the UDF."

Congress(I) sources claimed that Mani had agreed to give up his portfolio after presenting the ninth budget, as the first step towards bettering the UDF's performance. But the KC promptly denied it.

Later the CPI(M) led a massive rally to the state secretariat demanding dismissal of the ministry "which is practically dead and the corpse stinks". Argued former chief minister and opposition leader E.K.Nayanar: "This farce cannot continue. It is high time the people came out strongly against this rudderless and paralysed government which clings on for the sake of power." With the budget session due, there is little doubt that the last word on the current crisis is yet to be heard.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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BIHAR

On the Boil

EVEN as Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey completed a year in office on March 12, growing dissidence within the Congress(I) and the political dust kicked up by Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar's "*kranti* march" gave him little cause for celebration. Though Dubey himself claimed to be fully in command, his detractors, notably Jagannath Mishra, left no opportunity to embarrass him while the disquiet in the party mounted to panic proportions.

It was this panic that drove over a 100 Congress(I) legislators to the house of Kumbh Narain Sardar, MLA, to voice concern over the "inaction" of both the chief minister and PCC(I) chief Dumar Lal Baitha in the face of the "resounding success" of the Opposition-sponsored February 26 Bharat Bandh in Bihar and the growing enthusiasm for Chandra Shekhar's *padyatra*. Said a rebel: "If we depend on this leadership the party will be wiped out."

A delegation of the dissidents led by Jaikumar Palit rushed to Delhi to submit a memorandum to T.Anjaiah, AICC(I) general secretary in charge of Bihar. They claimed that Anjaiah told them he had informed the high command that if Dubey was to continue as chief minister, Mishra should either be removed from the party or given his due place. Encouraged, the three groups of dissidents decided to join hands against Dubey.

K.M. KISHAN

Chandra Shekhar on *padyatra*

In a fierce attack in the Assembly soon after this, Mishra criticised the state's "surplus budget". Said Mishra: "By showing a surplus, the state Government has forfeited its right for special Central assistance." The budget, showing a surplus of Rs 22.53 crore, only confirmed Mishra's allegation that funds had not been utilised.

But Dubey argued that the surplus was only an affirmation of the Government's success in mobilising additional resources, not of its inability to spend them. "A state which can mobilise additional resources should not necessarily go for a deficit budget," he argued.

Though Dubey's aides said the chief minister was unruffled by all the political buffeting, the chief minister decided it was time he shored up his flanks. Said Dubey at a CLP meeting: "You elected me the leader with the consent of the high command and if you have any grievance, you should tell the high command instead of rushing to the press. We are all party colleagues and I have to be with you whether I remain chief minister or not." The meeting had its desired effect as a majority of the legislators present expressed confidence in his leadership. Dubey called another CLP meeting on March 10 to chalk out the party's strategy to counter the march. It was here that the rebels asked him to step down, saying he no longer enjoyed their confidence, and walked out chanting anti-Dubey slogans. They later held a meeting at the house of MLA S.P. Roy, where it was decided to request party Vice-President Arjun Singh to send an observer.

There is little doubt that a major political confrontation is building up. The Save Democracy Front led by leader of the Opposition Karpoori Thakur and comprising all the major opposition parties save the BJP, has already called for dissolution of the Assembly on the grounds that last March's poll had been rigged. They also announced launching of an agitation to press their nine-point charter of demands from March 19.

Chandra Shekhar's *kranti* march, slated to climax with a huge meeting in Patna on March 18 to coincide with the day 11 years ago when JP gave his call for a "total revolution", has added to the state's political tempo. The paradox is that many of JP's associates who were in the forefront of his movement—including Narendra Kumar Singh, Dr Ramjatan Singh and Dr Jagdish Sharma—are now Congress(I) MLA's while those who had vehemently criticised the movement—like Shankar Dayal Singh and Raghunath Jha—are now in the forefront of the *kranti* march. Quipped Saru Roy, head of the JP Vichar Manch: "The padyatra is in fact a *pad-yatra* (walk for post)." Bihar's confusion is only getting more confounded.

—FARZAND AHMED

Dissidents' meet in Patna: open revolt

RAJEEV

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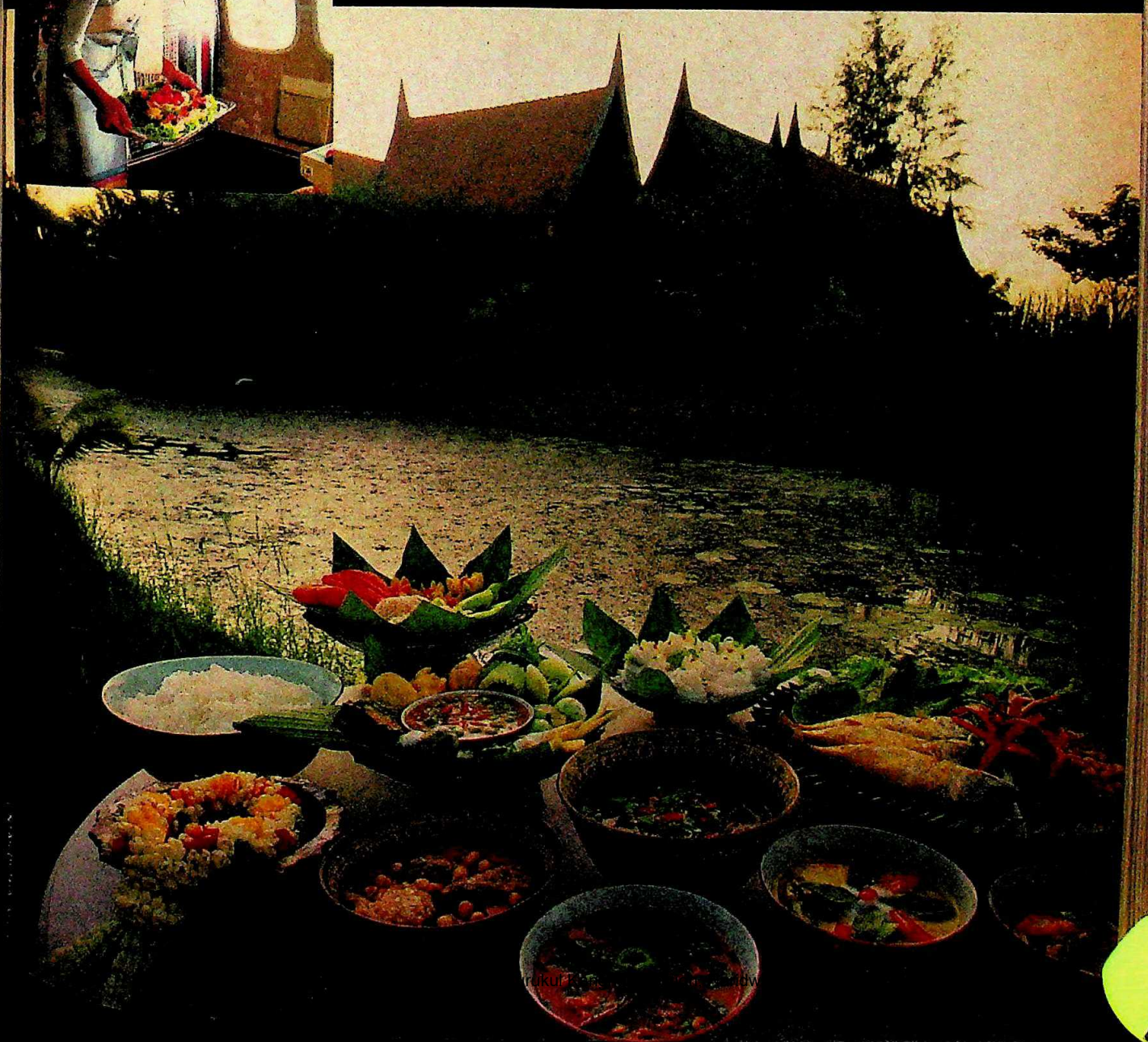

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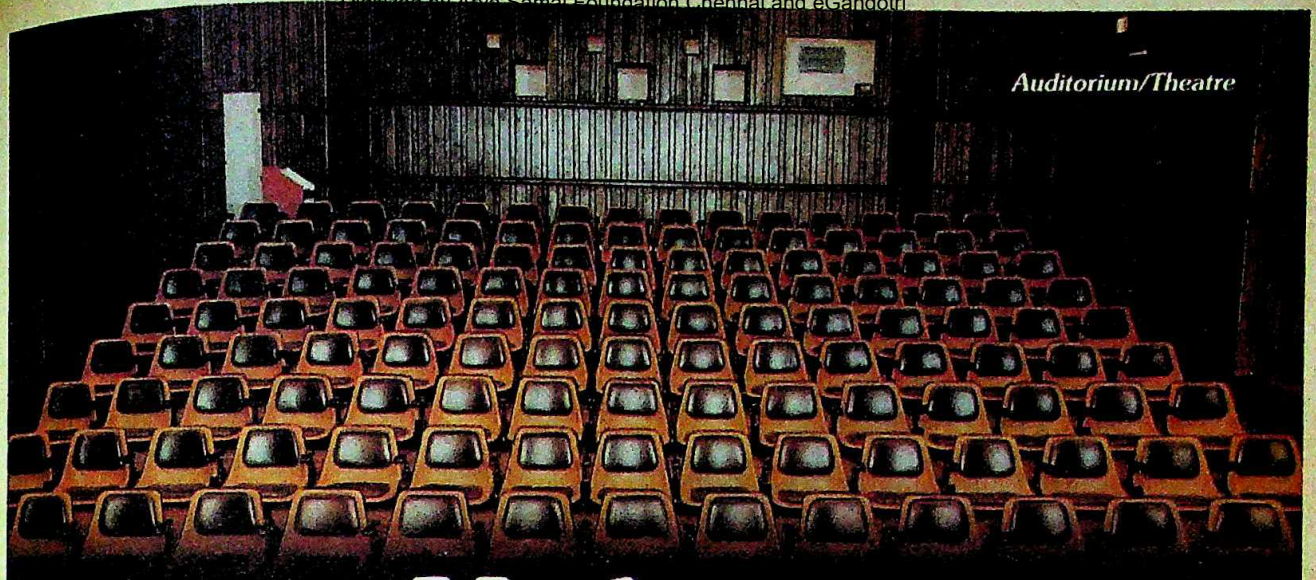

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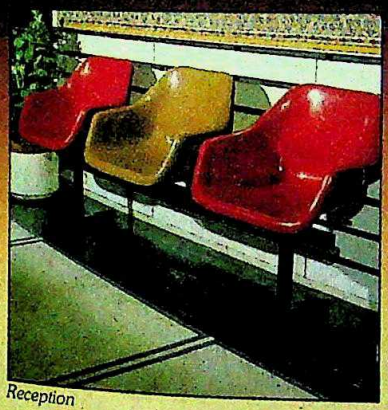
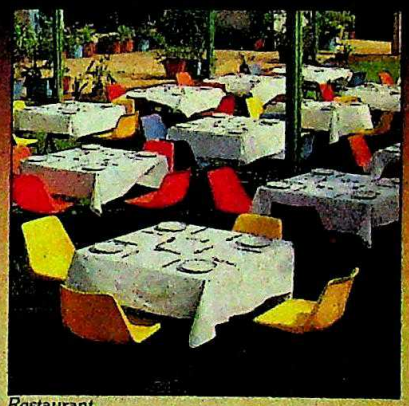

Reception

Training Centre / School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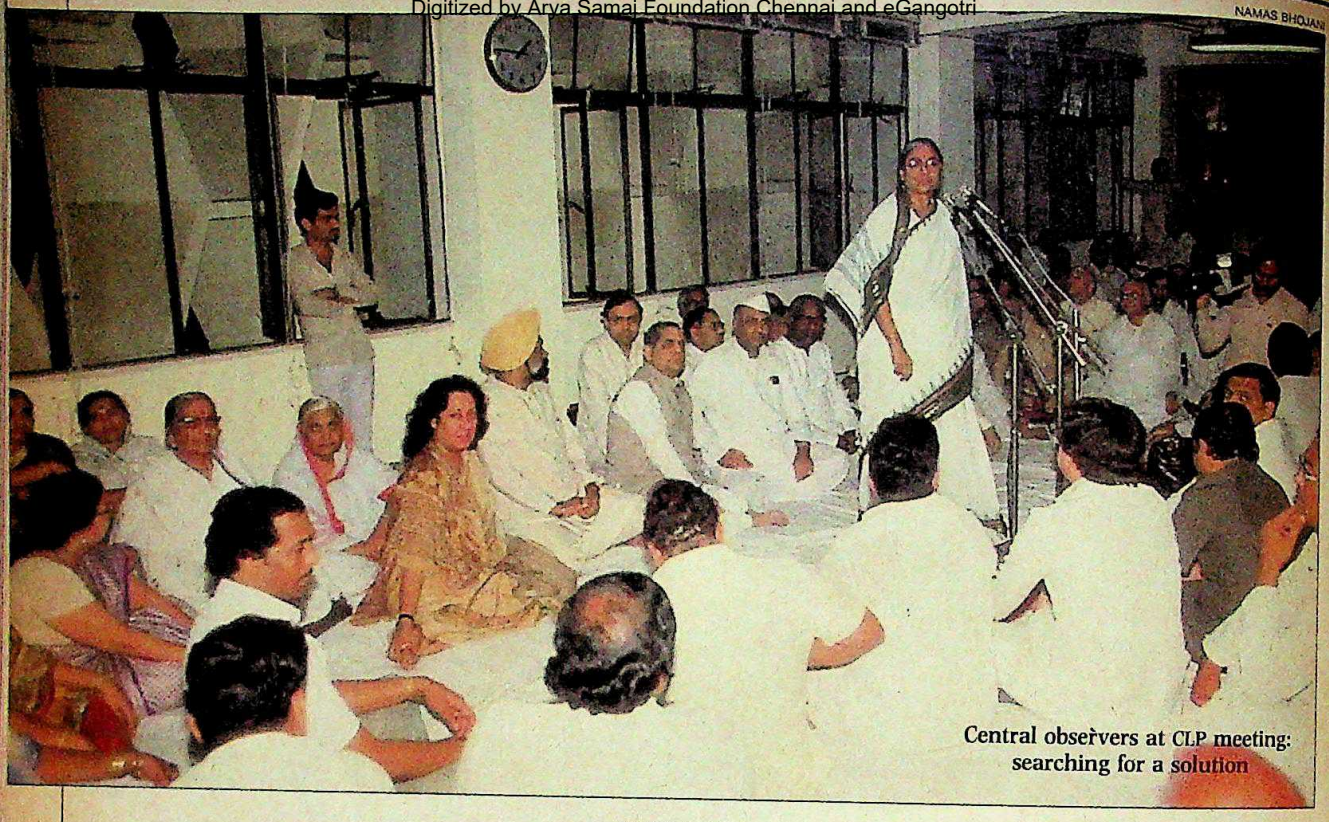

Central observers at CLP meeting: searching for a solution

MAHARASHTRA

The Crisis State

IT WAS a pleasant enough formal assignment to have, representing India at the swearing-in of Portugal's new President Mario Soares. And the portly Home Minister, Shankarrao Bhaorao Chavan, must have welcomed his brief respite from such problems as Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir, which had dogged his heels in the last few weeks. But Chavan's fleeting visit to Lisbon turned out to be even less of an interlude than he had planned. The Maharashtra marks scandal had undoubtedly stirred things up in Bombay before he left, but Chavan had no inkling that it would alter the course of his political career in a matter of days.

The first hint of impending change was a message from the prime minister's office to return home early. The second was the summons to the heavily guarded Race Course Road residence in the dead of the night, the moment Chavan's plane touched down. And then, as Chavan himself puts it, the unexpected offer—would he take over the chief ministership of Maharashtra if asked to do so?

BHAWAN SINGH

Chavan: challenges ahead

Chavan felt he had no choice in the matter: "As Congressmen and disciplined workers we have to abide by the high command's directive even if we don't like it personally," he told INDIA TODAY *(see interview)*. But the odd thing was that even the Congress(I)'s Maharashtra MLA's who had gathered in Bombay's Vidhan Sabha building to elect a new leader had no real choice in the matter. For the vast majority of them preferred the continuance of outgoing chief minister Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar, with industries minister Sudhakarrao Naik as the second choice and legislative affairs minister N.M. Tidke the third favourite.

But the party high command had its own mind on the issue; and in the ultimate analysis the choice fell on a man who was not the MLA's favourite and who himself was not keen on moving from Delhi. Indeed, the high command was clearly in a tight spot looking for a man to fill a post

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that has turned out to be jinxed. An Antulay had to go, committed to trial for financial irregularities. A Bhosale found the job beyond his abilities. Even a Vasantrao Patil, well bronzed in the heat of political battle, decided to call it a day rather than be humbled by the high command. And just as Nilangekar seemed to be settling in, he too fell victim to what has quickly been dubbed the Maharashtra marks scandal (*see page 77*).

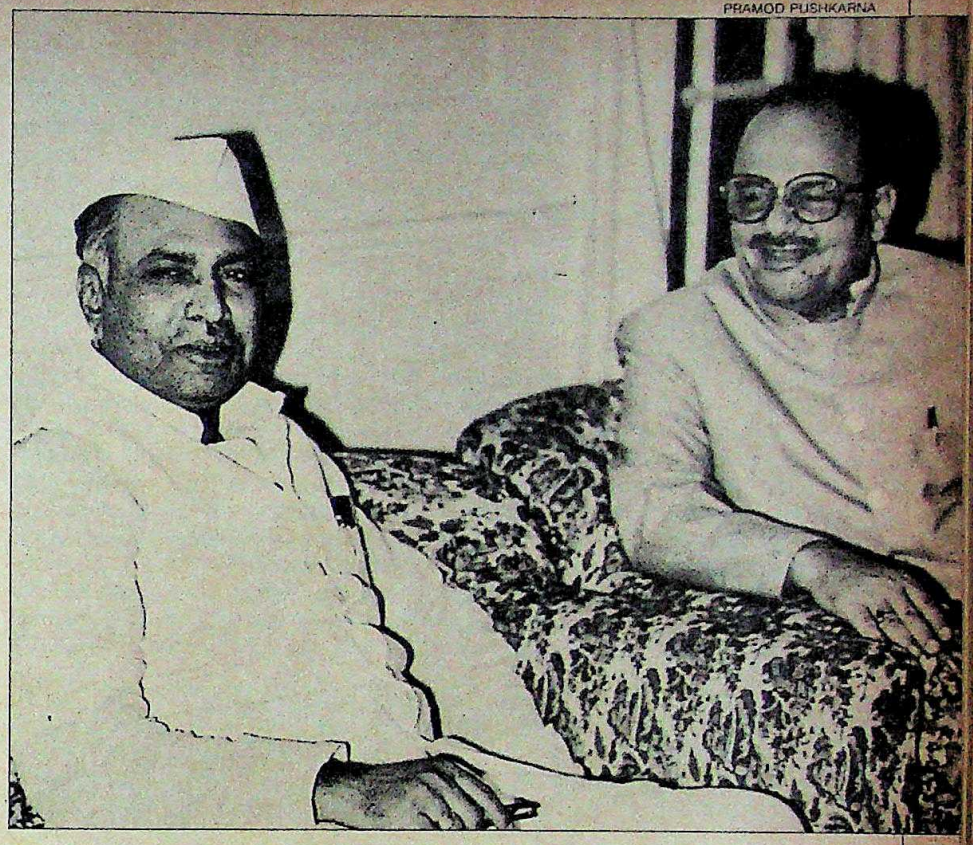
The crucial question at the end of last fortnight, therefore, was whether Chavan would fit the bill: control the faction-ridden party in the state, get the administration moving, keep the image of the Government clean, and above all, last it out till the term of the Assembly ends four years from now. There were no easy answers to these questions. Rajasthan Governor Vasantrao Patil, after all, had openly come out against Chavan and might well choose to create trouble for the new incumbent by using the large complement of MLA's who owe him allegiance. But Chavan indicated quickly that he was not going to give in to groups, or indeed to pander to the MLA's demands.

THE SHIFTING of the country's home minister came at the end of 10 days of political drama and academic scandal that had clearly caught the Centre off-guard. As early as mid-January, Rajiv received a memorandum detailing various charges against the Maharashtra chief minister. Among them was a reference to the admission of his daughter and son-in-law in medical courses. But the memorandum was dealt with in the normal manner—it was docketed for eventual action.

Even when the chief minister came to Delhi a day after M.S. Gore, the then vice-chancellor of Bombay University, resigned, he was not asked for any explanation. The chief minister along with the party's Bombay unit president Murli Deora, discussed the accounts of the centenary session and, later, development projects in the state. It was business as usual later on as well when Rajiv and Nilangekar thrashed out the possibility of a cabinet expansion and the chief minister's desire to contest the by-election from the seat vacated by his son earlier. Admitted Sitaram Kesri, AICC(I) treasurer: "We were all under the impression that this case had no political implications."

But when the high court judgement finally came, it plunged Maharashtra into yet another bout of political uncertainty. Admitted Congress(I) Vice-President Arjun Singh: "We had a very stable chief minister who was appointed only few months ago. He was not facing any major dissidence and was running the state reasonably well but he decided to resign on moral grounds."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Nilangekar meeting Arjun Singh in Delhi

New Delhi was plainly worried that if Congress(I) chief ministers continued to fall like ninepins, it might lose the state altogether, as happened earlier in Andhra Pradesh. Maharashtra, after all, has seen eight chief ministers in little more than a decade. Worse, Nilangekar seemed to be following in Antulay's footsteps with a signature campaign to get himself re-elected—and seemed to be carrying the party's legislators with him. There wasn't much time to be lost, especially when Maharashtra veterans Shivraj Patil and V.N.Gadgil warned the prime minister and his advisers that the party would suffer if Nilangekar was able to foist his own man on the Assembly—just as Antulay had nominated Bhosale and Vasantdada had brought in Nilangekar. At the same time, the party couldn't be seen to be going against the will of the legislature party, and Shiv Shankar, one of the three observers sent to Bombay to oversee the election of a new leader, opined: "Our brief is to ensure that the legislature party elects its own leader. Rajivji wants that the people who have to work locally should elect their own leader." But that brief changed as the events unfolded.

Initially, Rajiv had taken one decision: that whoever replaced Nilangekar should be able to carry on till the next assembly elections due in four years. He instructed his observers to let the MLA's know that the high command would not hesitate to order a mid-term poll if they failed to throw up a consensus candidate for the chief ministership.

But the search for a new man was suddenly complicated when Vasantrao Patil, setting aside all gubernatorial norms, walked into the AICC(I) office and met Arjun Singh to canvass support for his candidate. Talking to various other leaders as well, Patil argued that the party was making a big mistake in imposing "leaders without mass support" and also stressed the point that Maharashtra needed a chief minister with a free hand to run the state. Patil finally told the high command that he would not like his arch enemy Chavan to replace his protege, the outgoing chief minister.

With the loyalty of some 60 of the party's 159 MLA's in his pocket, Patil couldn't be ignored, and his unilateral entry into the decision-making process

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suddenly changed the rules of the game, but in a manner quite contrary to what Patil had in mind. When Rajiv received a detailed report about Patil's activities in Delhi, he summoned Arjun Singh and senior cabinet colleagues for consultations and to take a final decision about the new chief minister. Rajiv was well briefed about the rebellious, pro-Patil mood building up in Bombay, and after an hour or so he seemed to have decided to deal firmly with Patil's challenge lest it be mistaken for a sign of weakness.

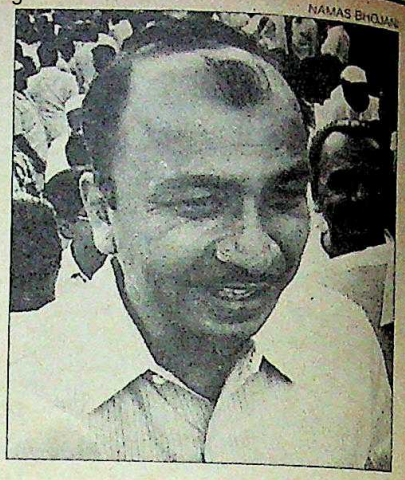
So it came about that Chavan emerged as the high command's candidate for the job. Arjun Singh justified the choice saying: "Chavanji was the only leader who had a clean image, varied experience of running the Government and qualities of leadership. At this stage, Maharashtra needs them all".

The party's vice-president was not off the mark. But what finally tilted the scales in Chavan's favour was Rajiv's firm resolve to once and for all put an end to group rivalries in the state's politics by finding a leader who was being opposed, not on merit, but on personal animosities. After being assured of the party's support, Rajiv kept the decision to himself. Later, Shiv Shankar was contacted by the prime minister's office and informed about the decision to get Chavan's nomination formally approved.

CHAVAN'S imposition is also a clear message to politicians like Jagannath Mishra, Madhavsinh Solanki, Gundu Rao, Pranab Mukherjee and their ilk, that Rajiv Gandhi is in a mood to assert himself. Said G.K. Moopanar, AICC(I) general secretary: "All of us must learn to express our opinions in party forums and accept the decision taken finally by the high command."

None of this tortuous decision-making process was, of course, known in Bombay where high drama was unfolding quite independently. Rajiv had telephoned Nilangekar late at night on March 6, asking him to resign. The prime minister also asked the chief minister to come to Delhi on Sunday evening, March 9, to meet him. On March 7, sitting in front of a

NAMAS BHOJAK



S.B. CHAVAN

"Frankly, I was not very keen"

SHANKARRAO Bhaorao Chavan, 66, gives the impression of being a stolid, dependable man who can be counted upon to keep his head in a crisis. These were all qualities that he needed to draw upon in full measure last week. Chavan arrived from Lisbon after midnight on March 11-12, and drove straight to the prime minister's residence where he spent an hour discussing the Maharashtra situation after being informed about his new assignment.

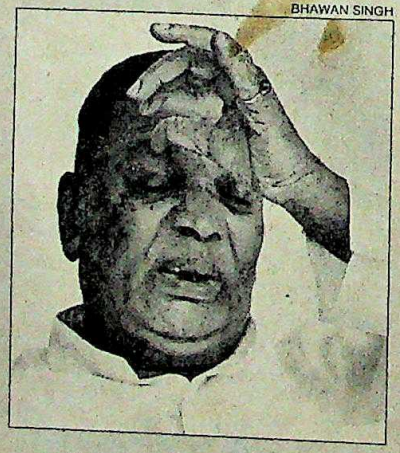
The next morning, he unhurriedly went about his daily household chores as if nothing had really happened to once again re-direct his personal political compass. He milked his cow in the morning, spent an hour playing with his granddaughter and finally called up his personal staff and told them to start packing for his next job as the 10th chief minister of Maharashtra. Before leaving New Delhi, he gave an exclusive interview to Assistant Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *at his residence. Excerpts:*

Q. *Did you know that you were being shifted to Maharashtra?*

A. It came as a total surprise to me. I returned to India at 12.45 a.m. and was asked to see the prime minister immediately. When I met him at his residence he asked me whether I would be willing to go to Maharashtra as chief minister. He also told me that it is linked with the final choice of the legislature party. But I was not very keen myself frankly. If they felt that I had to go then I have to go.

Q. *So you readily gave your consent?*

BHAWAN SINGH



A. There was no question of consent. As Congressmen and disciplined workers we have to abide by the high command directive even if we don't like it personally.

Q: *What difference do you notice in Maharashtra politics now, compared to 1976 when you were chief minister?*

A. I have to go there and assess the situation. People talk about the emergence of various groups in Maharashtra politics but I don't believe in group politics. I would like to take the best talent from within the party and encourage young people who have not been given a chance to perform, irrespective of group affiliations.

Q. *But successive chief ministers have had to quit due to group politics.*

A. I would not like to comment.

Q. *How did the party allow people without any mass base to take over the state's leadership?*

A. I don't agree entirely with your question. But something strange happened in 1980 when some people who could have provided leadership in the state chose to come to Parliament. I could not understand this tendency at that time. In the 1984 parliamentary elections a similar trend was repeated. That is why we find that those who could do something for the state have come to Parliament.

Q. *Was this by design or accident? Can't they go back now?*

A. It happened just like that. But the trend cannot be reversed now because we don't want to get people elected through by-elections.

Q. *Won't you face problems because most* MLA*'s are loyal to a former chief minister who is hostile to you?*

A. I don't think that is correct. For securing the ticket to the Assembly,

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Shinde (left) and Naik: a scramble for succession

frieze of Shivaji's durbar in the conference room at Varsha, his official residence on Malabar Hills. Nilangekar announced his resignation. But he first read out a long list of his achievements as chief minister and alleged that attempts were being made to bring instability to the state "by whatever means". He then opened a pink file of newspaper clippings on his family members' scandals, read out the headlines and recited a litany of complaints against the press.

That signalled to those present that Nilangekar wasn't going to give up easily. Even as the countdown began in Delhi, he began to shore up his own case with a signature campaign asking for re-election, besides spreading the word that strongman Vasantdada was backing him solidly. Not knowing Delhi's views, most MLA's were in a quandary and found themselves signing the memorandum addressed to Rajiv Gandhi and asking for Nilangekar's re-election almost as if it was a visitor's book at Varsha. By the time Nilangekar left for Delhi on the evening of March 9, signatures of 128 of the party's 159 MLA's had been collected: but oddly enough, he failed to take them with him.

The climax came on Tuesday, March 11. That morning, Nilangekar's lieutenants went around to the three MLA's hostels in the city with the message that Rajiv Gandhi had agreed to his re-election. Some ministers were told to come for a cabinet meeting at Varsha. About 60 MLA's and all the ministers gathered at noon in the formal reception hall on the ground floor of the chief minister's bungalow and were told that the decision had been taken to re-elect Nilangekar.

From Varsha, Nilangekar, his ministers and the legislators set off for the plush Sahyadri state guest-house where first Nawal Kishore Sharma and then Buta Singh had arrived on the morning flight from Delhi. Nilangekar, exuding confidence, met Buta Singh in his suite along with a few ministers. Education Minister Ram Meghe was overheard saying that the party MLA's had unanimously decided

people approach certain individuals. But that doesn't mean that they owe allegiance to that particular person. I don't think any Congressmen should claim the personal loyalty of MLA's.

Q. *So you expect full cooperation from all the factions?*

A. I don't see any difficulty on that front. I know the background of each one of them and it will be unfair to allege that they would create hurdles for me.

Q. *What are the immediate problems that you face as chief minister?*

A. I consider drought the number one administrative problem. A large number of villages are suffering from unemployment, shortage of drinking water and other infrastructure facilities.

Q. *Don't you think that corruption and misuse of power for personal gains is also a major problem?*

A. I need not comment on this issue because the people of Maharashtra know my nature. My going there will solve half the problems of corruption and the remaining half I will solve by my actions. Some people will have to be dealt with rather severely. I want to make it clear so that everybody understands that on the question of corruption I will not compromise with anybody.

Q. *The state has faced political instability because of intra-party squabbles. Don't you agree that a chief minister should be allowed a full term?*

A. Normally, that should be the position. But in the cases of Nilangekar and Antulay, court judgements caused their exits. Of the remaining two, one resigned on his own.

Q. *But the high command, by appointing a hostile PCC(I) chief, created a situation in which Vasantdada had no alternative but to quit?*

A. I don't subscribe to the theory that the PCC(I) chief should be merely a rubber stamp for the chief minister. The organisational chief should have his or her own independent existence also. So long as the PCC(I) chief doesn't create any problem for the chief minister, the confrontation will never arise.

Q. *How do you assess your performance as home minister at the Centre?*

A. It is for you people to judge. But I am satisfied that the Home Ministry was instrumental in solving two of the most important problems of the country. We were able to sign accords with Punjab and Assam leaders which led to the establishment of democratically-elected governments in these states.

Q. *But aren't you sad that the accords are not working properly?*

A. I appreciate the problems which the Akali Dal is facing in implementing the accord. The Central Government, instead of maintaining neutrality, should help the state Government in coming to grips with the situation. The people the Akalis are trying to win over are hard-core terrorists. The Akali Government has realised now that these people have to be treated as a different class altogether. In Assam, we do not forsee any major problem.

Q. *What difference did you notice between running a state as chief minister and the country as its home minister?*

A. At the national level, we take decisions keeping in view their implications for the entire country. But as chief minister one can't possibly do this. In the state if a chief minister takes any wrong decisions, he gets a reaction immediately. As home minister, the reaction comes quite late.

Q. *Do you believe that a chief minister has to yield to local pressures which are not there at the Centre?*

A. Local pressures are bound to exert themselves on a chief minister because they are directly affected. But one should not succumb to wrong pressures.

Q. *But a chief minister can't survive if he doesn't concede MLA's demands.*

A. Fortunately for me, all the MLA's know my mind. I will not go out of my way to oblige anyone for wrong work even at the risk of losing my job.

Q. *But you are at the mercy of these MLA's who can throw you out.*

A. If support of the MLA's means doing wrong things then I certainly don't need it. But it is not correct that MLA's always ask for wrong things to be done. Once they realise that they can't pressurise a chief minister they will be afraid of approaching him for illegal work.

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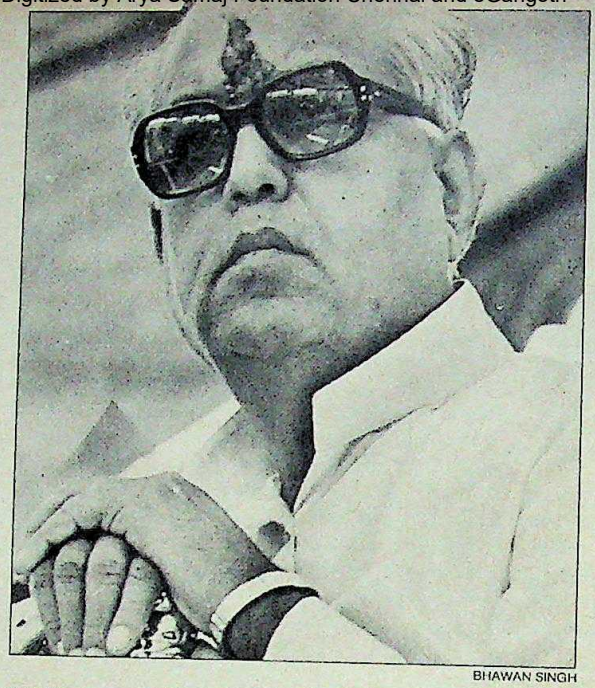
that Nilangekar should be re-elected. They were directed to the suite occupied by Nawal Kishore Sharma, who told them that nothing could be decided until the observers spoke to the party's MLA's.

But the way the MLA's were spoken to was instructive. Said one MLA from western Maharashtra: "They asked me who is my first choice and I told them it is Shivajirao. They said 'no, we are not talking of re-election, think of a new candidate'. So I said Sudhakarrao Naik and then Tidke. They asked me if I had anyone else in mind and I said that if the high command would like to make someone the chief minister then you can tell us and we will support him."

These individual meetings dragged on till 8 p.m. Shiv Shankar then flew in from Delhi on an evening flight, and the formal meeting of the legislature party was postponed from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m. and still later. Legislators sat around the massive oval but water-less fountain in front of the main entrance, or wandered about the Nariman Point business district—all without the remotest indication of who was going to be the next chief minister.

Reprieve came at around 1.30 a.m. when Buta Singh and Shiv Shankar arrived in a cream-coloured Ambassador with Nilangekar, followed by Nawal Kishore with Sushilkumar Shinde and Najma Heptullah. The meeting began, but till 2.25 a.m. there was no indication of what was in store. And then the call from the prime minister—who had been consulting Chavan—clinched it. A bare five minutes later, Shiv Shankar, accompanied by Murli Deora, returned to the hall to confirm what a group of MLA's were rushing out to declare: "It's SB, it's Shankarrao". Shiv Shankar had only a little while earlier told Nilangekar of the high command's choice, giving rise to a tricky situation: Nilangekar was obliged to propose the name of a person he couldn't abide by, while the runners-up in the local popularity stakes (Naik and Tidke) had to second Chavan's candidature.

With that assertive fiat from the party chief, a bizarre poltical drama ended, cutting short the poltical career of a chief minister who had yet to be elected to the Assembly, and foisting another whom precious few in the Assembly seemed to want. With his ignominious exit,



BHAWAN SINGH

Vasantrao Patil: violating gubernatorial norms

Nilangekar established yet another record of sorts, spending fewer days in office (278) than any chief minister since 1960. And with his unsung ouster began Chavan's second term in office—he'd been chief minister during the Emergency—after a gap of almost 9 years.

BUT CHAVAN'S re-election failed to receive the kind of applause usually associated with stage-managed legislature meetings which are called to elect a new leader. Said a party worker waiting outside: "Normally when the leader is elected we can immediately make out by the sound of the applause. But this is a strange election where there seems hardly any enthusiasm."

Later, Nawal Kishore explained that the CLP meeting was delayed because they were waiting for Chavan's return to Delhi from Lisbon. He also said that if Nilangekar wanted to contest the by-election from Nilanga he would get permission from the high command. When asked about the possibility of a "big group" opposed to Chavan splitting the party, Nawal Kishore replied with characteristic self-assurance: "That's your information, not mine. Forget about a big group, there's not even a small group within the party."

Nevertheless, political speculation late last fortnight centred on the possibility of an unhappy Patil teaming up with the only leader left in Maharashtra with a mass political base, Sharad Pawar of the Congress(S). Pawar's much talked of return to the Congress(I) is now out of the question since Chavan is an old political rival. And observers wondered whether Patil's 60-strong following in the Assembly and Pawar's group of 54 would come together to unseat the Chavan Ministry.

Amidst such political kite-flying, few gave a thought last fortnight to the record in office of Nilangekar. For Nilangekar was an inconsequential, nondescript politician who did not command a following outside his home district of Latur. He had boasted last year that "I will rule for the full term" and declared soon after his elevation that no member of his family would be involved in any scandals. But both forecasts proved wrong.

Mantralaya officials confirmed that Nilangekar's was a totally lacklustre administration, with files piling up in the chief minister's secretariat for long periods. An official said: "His whole approach to administration was petty minded also. One got the distinct feeling that he had a small-town concept of exercising power and authority." However, officials also maintained that during his reign the phenomenal corruption of earlier chief ministers was not there.

At no time after the MD examination scandal broke out did Nilangekar seem to give it the significance it deserved. Perhaps he imagined that political manipulation would get him out of trouble. Even when he spoke to INDIA TODAY around midnight on the day of his resignation, he blamed the press for all his problems.

Chavan's return to Maharashtra politics is likely to be welcomed most in Mantralaya. He has the reputation of being an excellent administrator. Even his political opponent Sharad Pawar acknowledged before the election: "If Chavan becomes chief minister it will be good for the administration but bad for the party." Chavan had proved himself earlier as a chief minister during the Emergency and later on during his long innings of five years as Union minister. Even earlier, as a minister for more than a decade in Maharashtra, he was rated as one of the most successful in the state; and he has a clean image: even in a department like irrigation, no major scandal took place. Says Murli Deora: "SB is

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known for his frankness and straightforwardness. He would not allow his government to be misused for promoting personal interest even if it harms him personally."

Even at the Centre, Chavan was firm in his dealings with people. For instance, during his stint as education minister, he gave directions to the various grant-disbursing agencies like the University Grants Commission to combat lawlessness on the campuses with a heavy hand and, in the matter of releasing funds, dealt firmly with universities which were closed because of politicisation. When he took over as planning minister in 1981, he ruled that states would not be allowed to ask for Plan funds for any scheme that they started without Planning Commission approval. His close monitoring led to the detection of over 100 unauthorised projects which various state goverments were trying to push in.

It was perhaps his disciplinarian attitude that brought him to North Block as Union home minister after Rajiv's election in December 1984. And during his 14 months in office he was a party to historic decisions like the accords on Punjab and Assam. It was during this period that most of the assemblies went to the polls, and a breakthrough was made in the troubled Union territory of Mizoram. But he was later eclipsed somewhat ignominiously by the appointment of the powerful Arun Nehru as his minister of state, his nominal deputy.

Chavan tends to be impatient with politicians, and was clearly not keen to move to Bombay. But since he has been chosen, he is likely to bend his efforts to taming the mercurial politics of the state, which has seen political instability ever since Antulay's slide began in 1981. Indeed, so devastating has been the effect of political uncertainty that the state is on the verge of losing its supremacy as one of the most affluent in the country with both capital and manpower looking for greener pastures elsewhere. But above all, his primary task is to refurbish the tarred image of the party in the state where the Congress's popularity is at its lowest ebb in recent years. With a hostile political environment at home but solid backing from the Centre, it remains to be seen whether this Maratha from Marathwada can turn the tables on his adversaries. On his success also depends the authority of Rajiv Gandhi, who has gambled in imposing a leader on a state.

—PRABHU CHAWLA and M. RAHMAN

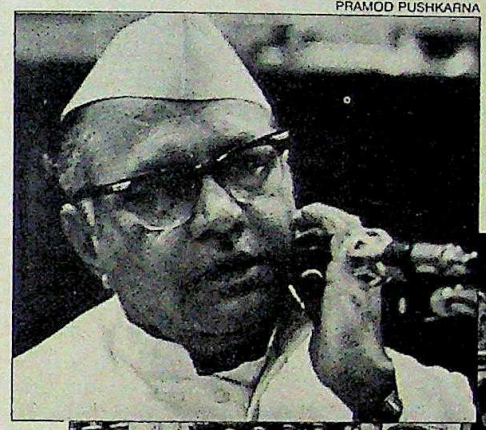
SHIVAJIRAO PATIL-NILANGEKAR

Shame and Scandal

IT WAS, ironically enough, in the same courtroom—number six on the ground floor of the Bombay High Court building—that an earlier judgement four years ago had led to the resignation of A.R.Antulay from the chief ministership of Maharashtra. On March 6, another chief minister followed in Antulay's footsteps when Justice M.L. Pendse, after inaudibly dictating his verdict for a record two hours and fifty minutes on a writ petition challenging the MD (obstetrics and gynaecology) results of the Bombay University, told a packed courtroom that a "reasonable inference" could be drawn that the fraud in the exam results was committed "at the behest" of Chief Minister Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar and his daughter Chandrakala, one of the candidates for the MD degree.

The hearing reached its climax after two days of intense drama: the gradual unravelling of the fraud as sealed examination records were opened and examined, an astute judge trenchantly ques-

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



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Nilangekar (inset); and crowds at the high court: reasonable inference

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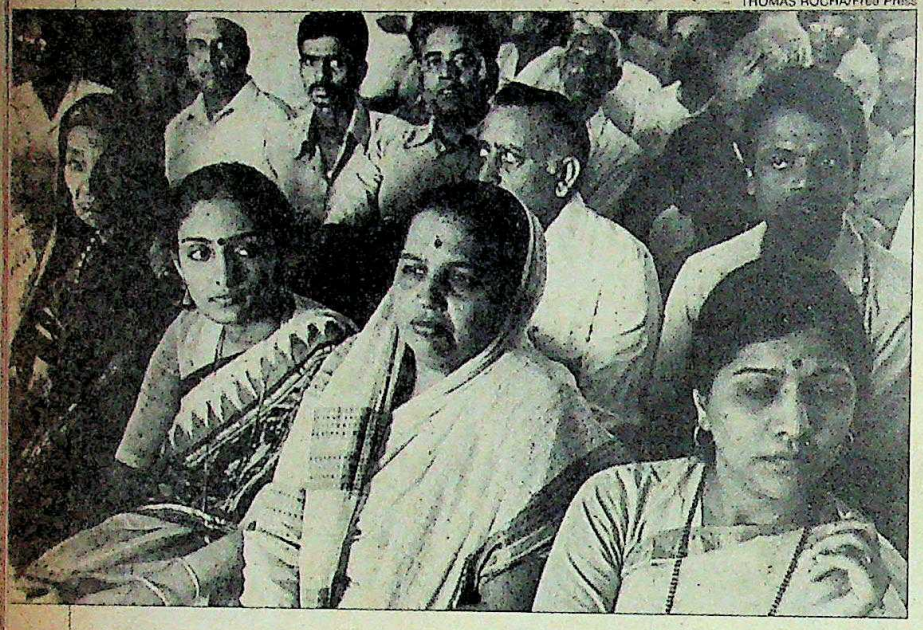


Nilangekar's family with Chandrakala (extreme right)

tioning the accused examiner's advocate, the panic after a bomb hoax on the second day of the hearing emptied the courtroom within minutes, and finally the excitement and jubilation as the verdict was announced. The hero of the legal battle, of course, was the young, intense-looking petitioner, Dr Mahesh Madhav Gosavi, whose stubborn pursuit of the scandal after the MD results were announced last November led to the fall of a chief minister. The high points as the scandal unfolded:

November 30, 1985: The University of Bombay declared the results of MD (obstetrics and gynaecology) examinations held in October and November. An amazing 72 per cent of the candidates—34 out of 47 who sat for the tough post-graduate medical exam—were declared passed. Rumours began circulating in medical colleges that the extraordinary results were linked with irregularities committed to pass Nilangekar's daughter Chandrakala, who had already failed thrice to secure an MD degree.

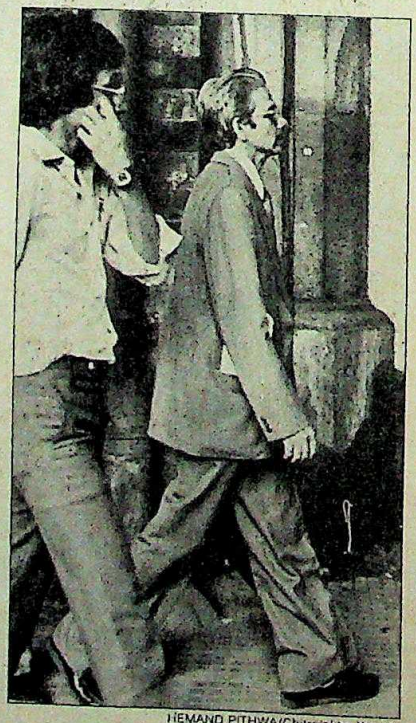
December 3: Dr Mahesh Gosavi, an assistant medical officer at the King Edward Memorial (KEM) Hospital, who had failed in the MD examination, met professor Balasubramaniam Arunachalam, the university's officer on special duty (examinations) to demand a revaluation of the results. Gosavi's subsequent meetings with Arunachalam confirmed the rumour that the convenor of the MD exams, Dr Mahesh V. Raval, had tampered with the grades to pass Nilangekar's daughter and another candidate, Smita Gnanesh Thacker, said to be a favourite of Raval's at the KEM Hospital. In the process, Raval had to bend the rules for passing another 10 candidates.

January 16, 1986: Even as Arunachalam prepared a report on the exam fraud for the university's executive council, Gosavi approached the Bombay High Court. Justice S.P. Bharucha ordered that all documents relating to the exams be sealed and handed over to the court.

January 24: Arunachalam filed the university's detailed affidavit in response to the petition in which he stated that

- investigations had showed that the grades of two candidates had been tampered with;
- Raval had told him that he had been authorised by the other examiners to alter the grades;
- he (Arunachalam) had pointed out to Raval that the passing of candidates with six P minuses was "too much of a deviation" from the accepted practice (grades are given for each of the 16 questions in the MD theory and practical exams. These grades are: G for good, P plus for above average pass, P for pass, P minus for borderline failure and F for fail). At most, candidates are passed if they have two P minuses out of 16 grades, and only if they have simultaneously scored a few above average pass grades. Chandrakala had originally scored 12 P minuses and four P's—a resounding failure.
- the university had discovered that one of the two candidates was the daughter of the chief minister.

Raval: bending the rules



HEMAND PITHWA/Chitrakatha Weekly

January 24: Vice-Chancellor M.S. Gore, who was in hospital with a heart ailment, was informed by the university's lawyer, S. Radhakrishnan, of a message conveyed through a senior member of the Bar to "pass the petitioner and settle the case". Gore told the lawyer that the university should proceed with the case.

January 30: Justice S.P. Barucha admitted Gosavi's 20-page writ petition and observed: "The affidavit made on behalf of the university discloses a horrifying picture. There is no doubt in my mind that the petition must be investigated...this matter will be investigated by the court, it cannot be left to the university."

The same day, a meeting of the university's executive council resolved that the court should be asked to let the university investigate the scandal.

February 21: Registrar G.M. Rajashri was called to Raj Bhavan by the university chancellor, Governor Kona Prabhakar Rao, and in the presence of Advocate General Arvind Savant, who was representing the chief minister in the case, instructed that the university lawyer should be changed in consultation with Savant (a clear conflict of interest for the advocate general, whose role in the entire affair has left the legal community aghast). Rajashri informed the vice-chancellor of Kona Prabhakar Rao's orders. The governor later denied it.

February 22: Gore sent in his resigna-

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M.S. GORE

A Question of Principles

AFTER a distinguished academic career as director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Bombay, Dr Madhav Sadashiv Gore, 64, retired in 1982 to take up a Homi Bhabha Fellowship on the leadership of the backward class movement in Maharashtra. After completing 10 months of the two-year fellowship, he was appointed vice-chancellor of Bombay University in 1983. Even at that time some of his close associates felt that Dr Gore was too upright a person to survive in the politics-ridden atmosphere of the university. Near the end of his term, shortly after he returned to work after being hospitalised for a heart ailment, Bombay's 129-year-old university was rocked by its most sensational examination scandal involving the then chief minister Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar's daughter. Dr Gore chose to resign rather than be a party to hushing up the case. Typically, the day after he left the university, he was trying to arrange for a car to visit his private residence in new Bombay as "it would not be right to use the official car". Dr Gore now plans to resume the Bhabha Fellowship work. He spoke to Chief Correspondent M. RAHMAN *about the background to his sensational resignation. Excerpts:*

Q. *Dr Gore, first the question everyone has been asking: Why did you resign?*

A. On the evening of February 21, I received a message through the registrar that the chancellor felt another, more senior counsel should be engaged for the case filed against Bombay University in the high court. I did not agree, because I thought that our case had been properly presented in court. Normally I would not have reacted the way I did, but in the light of earlier events and since in any case I was not in good health I sent in my resignation the next day.

Q. *Was there any pressure on the university earlier to settle the case out of court?*

A. When I was in hospital the university lawyer came and informed me on January 24 that he had been approached by a senior counsel of the bar saying that "they" would like to "explore the possibility of settling the case". I told him that my instructions were very clear, our affidavit stands and he should proceed with the case.

Q. *What happened when you met the chancellor after resigning?*

A. The chancellor tried to persuade me not to resign. I told him that since I did not agree that we should change our lawyer, I would like to move out and let the chancellor and the executive council decide. He said there was a misunderstanding, he felt the university case had not been properly represented, and that we had probably furnished facts in the affidavit which we were not required to, and that we should have given a paragraph by paragraph reply to the petition. I told him that to the best of my knowledge that is what we had done. The chancellor replied it does not matter then, and that I should not let it stand in my way (in changing the decision to resign).

Q. *What made you change your mind subsequently?*

A. At the executive council meeting on February 27 three or four persons said that the council's decision that the university enquire into the case had not been represented to the court and so we should engage a senior counsel. I could have said I did not agree and recorded my dissent. But partly because of what had happened earlier, and partly you might say that I was cowed down by the situation and the atmosphere that had been created, I did not say anything and the resolution was passed.

But I was not happy with what had happened. The next day I had a discussion with the pro-vice chancellor and told him that by keeping quiet I had let down the officer on special duty (examinations) and the lawyer who was doing an honest job for us. The same day I wrote out a letter to the chancellor saying I would like to press my resignation. I received a reply saying that the chancellor would like to see me again since nothing had transpired since our last meeting to change the situation. I immediately sent a reply in which I said to the contrary a number of things had happened.

The executive council had passed this resolution and I had failed to record my dissent. I wrote that since I had failed in my duty to advise the council and compromised the position of my colleagues, I would like to step down.

Q. *Was the university threatened with the withdrawal of government grants?*

A. No, not that I am aware of.

Q. *How do you look back on your term as vice-chancellor?*

A. When I became vice-chancellor in June 1983 I had said I don't expect miracles to happen. To my mind it has largely been a "holding operation". We are going to continue to be in very difficult circumstances, financially as well as with state patronage of the higher education system in India. The credibility of the whole system is in doubt, and not only in Bombay. We have to try and hold it together and make it function with some credibility, and that's what we tried to do in Bombay University.

Q. *Finally, do you think the consequences of this latest scandal could be positive for Bombay University?*

A. It's very difficult to say. But I hope it will help make people aware that there are certain things that should not be done.

Q. *And that even very powerful people cannot hope to get away with it?*

A. That, of course.

Former vice-chancellor Gore: restoring credibility to Bombay University

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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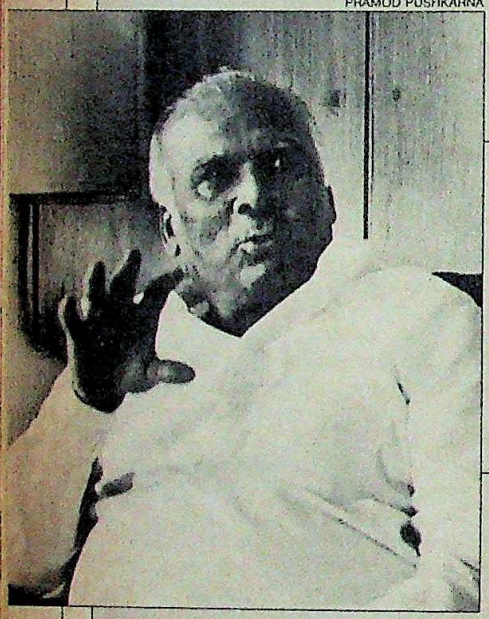
K. PRABHAKAR RAO

Suspect Role

MAHARASHTRA may go down in history as the only state where both the governor and the chief minister have been accused of exploiting their positions to get relatives admitted into medical courses. Former chief minister Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar's son and son-in-law were admitted to post-graduate medical courses in two Bombay colleges after admission rules were flouted. And Governor Kona Prabhakar Rao's granddaughter, Kona Padmaja, allegedly secured a seat in the MBBS course at the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Post-Graduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER) in Pondicherry last year under the quota allotted to Sikkim.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Fifteen seats in the JIPMER MBBS course are reserved annually for students nominated by the Union Government. In July last year, press reports charged that Rao, who was governor of Sikkim before he moved to Bombay's Raj Bhavan in May, had got the Sikkim Government to recommend his granddaughter's name to the Union Government for admission to JIPMER after she was certified as a Scheduled Caste girl.

Padmaja had just then passed the inter-science examination with 53.8 per cent marks, which hardly qualified her for admission to any medical college in the country. She was a student of St Theresa's College in Eluru in Godavari district, in Andhra Pradesh, where her grandfather had once been a Congress(I) minister before taking up his first assignment outside the state as lieutenant-governor of Pondicherry.

Sitting at his desk in the Raj Bhavan, Rao said that there was no truth whatever in the allegations against him. "Firstly, I wasn't the governor of Sikkim when my granddaughter applied, and secondly I didn't certify that she is a Scheduled Caste candidate. Even the Government of Sikkim has denied that she got admission as a Scheduled Caste candidate. How could she when her school certificate shows her as a Brahmin?"

Rao's granddaughter allegedly secured a seat in the MBBS course at the prestigious JIPMER in Pondicherry under the quota allotted to Sikkim.

However, the governor added: "Sikkim is a small state without any professional colleges so it is allotted a certain number of seats in different colleges in the country. When I was coming away from Sikkim because the altitude and climate did not suit me, the chief minister approached me and said you have done so much for the state but I haven't done anything in return for you. My granddaughter applied some time in June or July after I had left the state and got the seat. In any case, nobody in Sikkim was denied a seat because of her."

But the story had a sad ending for Kona Padmaja. The governor revealed that his granddaughter had dropped out of the MBBS course at JIPMER recently and returned to Nellore in Andhra Pradesh, where her father is a police sub-inspector. Will she seek admission in another medical college now? "No, she found the pressure too much," the governor said.

tion to the chancellor, but agreed not to press it after a meeting at Raj Bhavan.

February 27: At a stormy meeting of the executive council, it was resolved to change the university lawyer in consultation with Savant, and to once again try and take back the case from the court for investigation by the university.

February 28: Gore again wrote to the chancellor pressing for the acceptance of his resignation as he felt he had failed in his duty to oppose the executive council's resolution.

March 3: An appeal filed by Nilangekar to delete his name from the list of respondents was rejected by a division bench of the high court.

March 4-6: After a two-day hearing of the sensational case, Justice Pendse announced the gist of his judgement. His verdict: Though there was no concrete evidence, the reasonable inference could be drawn that the MD results had been manipulated by Raval at the behest of the chief minister and his daughter. Pendse instructed the university to debar Raval from any kind of examination work in future, and to review the results of the 12 candidates.

March 7: The chancellor accepted Gore's resignation. Nilangekar handed in his resignation.

THERE was, in the end, an almost weary inevitability about the Nilangekar affair. If A.R. Antulay displayed an irresistible weakness for collecting money for trusts, Vasantrao Patil for political patronage and land deals, Nilangekar showed yet another distinctive trait: collecting degrees for himself and his family members. Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar, BA, MA, LLB, found time even as chief minister to submit a PHD thesis to Nagpur University on 'political awareness, mobilisation and change in Marathwada'.

It is, by any reckoning, an extraordinary inventory of professional degrees that the Nilengekar clan accumulated, even as the head of the family exercised his clout as a minister in various cabinets since the early '70s. But it was only after Nilangekar unexpectedly became chief minister last June and came into the limelight that the scandals involving the family's pursuit of degrees started becoming public.

Sharad Patil, Nilengekar's second son, was admitted to the MS course at the Lokmanya Tilak Memorial Medical College (LTMMC) in Bombay last December even though he plainly lacked the necessary qualifications. According to the

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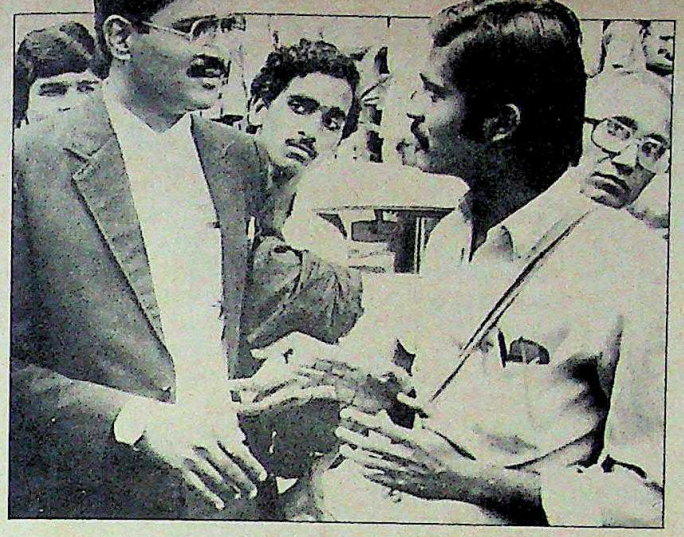
rules, a medical graduate is eligible for the post-graduate course only if he has passed the subject he wants to specialise in (Sharad's case, general surgery) less than three attempts, and the whole MBBS examination in less than four attempts. Sharad had cleared the surgery paper as well as the MBBS examination on his third attempt from the Government Medical College in Nagpur, but the first part of the admission rule clearly denied him eligibility for the two MS seats at the LTMMC.

But Sharad was admitted to the post-graduate course after the college authorities were prevailed upon to consider only the second half of the admission rule. That still left the problem of a candidate who was denied a seat even though he was ranked higher than Sharad on the merit list. The deprived candidate slapped a writ petition in the high court which he withdrew after the college hastily created another seat to accommodate him.

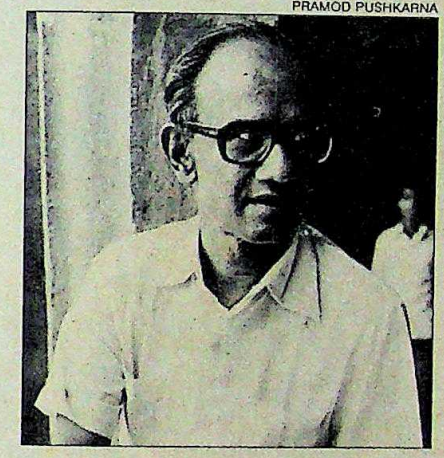
Chandrakala's husband, Arun Dawle's quest for specialisation in cardio-thoracic surgery has an even more scandalous history. He held a non-transferable post as lecturer in surgery at the Swami Ramanand Teerth Rural Medical College at Ambejogai in Beed district of Maharashtra when, in 1982, he married Chandrakala Patil-Nilangekar.

Dawle's fortunes changed shortly after. On April 15, 1982, the state director of medical education and research ordered Dawle's transfer from Ambejogai to the Grant Medical College (GMC) in Bombay. His appointment as lecturer in surgery at the Bombay college was subject to two conditions: that his services would be terminated when the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) selected a candidate for the post, and that he would not be allowed to enroll himself for any post-graduate course.

Just three months later, Dawle applied for the MCH (cardio-thoracic surgery) course. Besides the fact that this was explicitly ruled out at the time of his transfer, he was ineligible since he had not held any hospital housepost in cardio-thoracic surgery. In his letter opposing Dawle's application, the head of the department of surgery at GMC, Dr Jejuriker also pointed out that it would not be possible for Dawle to be a lecturer and work in the cardio-thoracic ward at the same time. Jejuriker was soon faced with open defiance from Dawle. His insubordination and irregular absences from college were repeated, and no amount of pleading from a helpless Jejuriker to higher officials about Dawle's behaviour made any difference.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Gosavi and Thorat (above); and Arunchalam: legal drama

All that happened was that letters were exchanged between Mantralaya, the Directorate of Medical Education, the Pay and Accounts Office, the college and Dawle. Finally, hardly a month after Nilangekar became chief minister, Jejuriker was summarily transferred to Sholapur. The transfer orders, quite extraordinarily, were signed by the chief minister himself. Jejuriker, a respected senior professor, immediately took voluntary retirement.

But this was not all. Long before Jejuriker was transferred, in October 1983 the director of medical education and research ordered the appointment of Dawle to the more specialised post of lecturer in thoracic surgery, in place of Dr Y.C. Agnihotri who was transferred to Aurangabad. But when Agnihotri filed a writ petition his transfer order was withdrawn and he was promoted as a reader.

Dawle's appointment as lecturer in thoracic surgery clearly stated that it was "on purely temporary basis for a period of one year...or till the post is filled through the Maharashtra Public Service Commission". Last year Dr Krishnarao Narayan Bhosale was selected by the MPSC for the post of lecturer in thoracic surgery at the GMC. But before Director of Medical Education B.R. Kate could issue the appointment order, he was summoned by Nilangekar, now chief minister, on October 25 and instructed to withhold the order "till he (the chief minister) goes through the relevant file of Dr Bhosale's appointment.." That is where the matter of Dr Bhosale's appointment stood until the MD examination scandal involving Chandrakala surfaced and Dawle was quickly posted back as lecturer in surgery.

As if these scandals reverberating through several colleges in Bombay University were not enough, a newspaper report from Nagpur suggested there were problems with Nilangekar's PHD thesis as well. He submitted it last December, but the doctoral candidate's MA degree identifies him as S.B. Gaikwad. Questions were raised at a meeting of the Nagpur University's academic council, but Nilangekar's guide, an old college friend, gave the assurance that "the name would be corrected". A Congress(I) MLA from his district confirms that Shivajirao B. Gaikwad is in fact Nilangekar's real name—he changed it to the more high-sounding Maratha title Patil to help him along in politics. But there were also accusations that material for the thesis was actually collected by someone else, that the thesis could have been ghost-written and that PHD candidate "S.B. Gaikwad" never visited the university even though the rules require that he should conduct research work there for at least two years.

And, it is now clear, when the children lacked the calibre to acquire the degrees on their own, there was the doting father ever willing to use his political clout to help them along.

—M. RAHMAN

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

Suspended Animation

THE END, when it came was completely in character, not a swift, clean termination like the scything of a rice stalk but a reluctant, lingering demise more like that of an over-ripe Kashmiri plum finally falling, decaying and malodorous, to the ground.

Like most things political, there was more than an air of the theatre and a touch of the farce to the demise of the state Government in Jammu & Kashmir last fortnight. Here was chief minister Ghulam Mohammad Shah demurring on March 6 at urgent summons from Governor Jagmohan in Jammu, pleading on the long distance line from Delhi that he hadn't got a ticket on the morning flight. Two weeks after communal riots swept the Kashmir valley, the Congress(I) had withdrawn its support of the Shah Administration, and he knew what the summons were all about. When a special aircraft was laid on for him the next day, Shah decided he wanted first to go home to lunch before stopping by at Raj Bhawan.

Not unexpectedly, Shah wasn't alone at 'lunch', hosting 10 of his Cabinet colleagues. And suddenly his party—the National Conference(Khalida) (NC-K)—which had shouted from the roof-tops that Farooq Abdullah was corrupt and anti-national (a Cabinet subcommittee had even published a detailed report to prove this) announced its own dissolution and merger with the National Conference(Farooq) (NC-F)! But wait a minute, said some of Shah's colleagues, this isn't what we had bargained for. At least six of them immediately announced that they had no intention of rejoining Abdullah whom they had deserted in a dawn defection on July 2, 1984. Three days later, spurned by the NC(F), 14 of Shah's ministers announced that since the NC(K) had ceased to exist, they were forming a separate group of their own, leaving Shah and his wife Khalida to their own devices.

By then the curtain had long come down on one of the most blatantly contrived state governments in the country (INDIA TODAY, July 31, 1984). On the afternoon of March 7, unwilling to await Shah's pleasure any longer, Jagmohan had despatched a four-line dismissal even as Shah, armed with his letter and the NC(K) dissolution resolution, finally arrived at Jagmohan's doorstep. Thus the dismissal and resignation crossed each other on one of Jammu's overcrowded streets leaving a nice little conundrum for future historians—to decide whether Shah had resigned or been dismissed.

Governor Jagmohan listening to grievances in Srinagar: welcome move

But the reaction to Jagmohan's act of suspending the Assembly and declaring Governor's rule was no mystery. Like the almond blossoms that made a premature appearance in the Kashmir valley last week, it promised the start of a new season of hope, ending a 20-month regime in which, according to a calculation made by Panthers Party chief Bhim Singh, curfew was imposed in one location or other a full 157 days. "We will give our full cooperation and strengthen the hands of the governor," declared Begum Abdullah, Farooq's mother and NC(F) MP for Anantnag whose party had been agitating for precisely this all these 20 months. Abdullah's political partner, Mirwaiz Maulvi Farooq of the Awami Action Party (AAP) said: "We must restore health to Kashmiri politics, the state of affairs was such that Governor's rule was necessary for a while." People's Le[illegible]

MLA Abdul Ghani Lone said it was "a step in the right direction, we've been asking for it for a long time". Congress(I) leaders saw it as a vindication of their growing distrust and dislike of the Shah regime and Srinagar industrialist Ghulam Moiuddin Mattoo expressed a widely held view when at a meeting of leading citizens he told Jagmohan: "People are not normally happy at the imposition of Governor's rule, they want popular government, but it is a fact that today there isn't a child who

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hasn't welcomed it."

Jagmohan himself said that the widespread popular reaction was evidence that he had done the right thing. Hartals and agitations that had become daily occurrences in the wake of last month's communal disturbances abruptly ended. Meeting scores of political representatives, leading citizens and common people, Jagmohan moved quickly to phase out the curfew that had been in force in parts of the state since February 19. He said: "My first priority is to bring about communal harmony and confidence among the minorities. We have to reform and reorganise the administration, to give it a humane and enlightened face, to make it more progressive. We will concentrate on development and the environment."

With typical zeal, Jagmohan lost no time in getting to grips with the state's bewildering problems, and his early actions and words reflected much of what had gone wrong. Turning down demands for an inquiry into alleged corruption during Shah's rule—which would keep officials tied up investigating the past rather than focussing on the problems at hand—Jagmohan nevertheless began to undo several of the wrongs perpetrated by the Government. For instance, he reinstated Srinagar Divisional Commissioner Hamidullah Khan and Deputy Inspector General of Police A.M. Wattali, who in December 1984, had successfully prevented any rigging of the Lok Sabha election in which Abdullah's men trounced the candidates of both Shah's party and the Congress(I).

Shah's government had last year superseded the state's 3,000-odd panchayats, local bodies, elected municipalities and town area committees and appointed its own people to run them—and handle the vast sums of money they controlled—triggering off widespread charges of favouritism and corruption. Said Abdullah: "He got rid of all the democratically-elected institutions, be it the municipal committee, or the panchayats which are the basis of our democracy. He disbanded them and put his own people there." Jagmohan quickly undid this decision, handing over responsibility for these bodies to the concerned deputy commissioners.

SUMAN DUBEY

RAJU KERNI

Shah with newsmen after his resignation

MUCH of the criticism of the Shah government had to do with alleged nepotism and corruption in appointing people to government jobs. Recruitment boards were abolished a year ago, and appointments were effectively being made by ministers. A pamphlet put out by the state Government in December said the jobs of 5,000 teachers had been regularised and another 10,000 people had been appointed to government jobs cutting through red tape. In fact, these appointments are widely alleged to have been made out of political considerations.

"This is the only state in which MA's and BA's were ignored and matriculates appointed schoolteachers because they happened to be related to ministers," said one highly placed individual. Last month the *Kashmir Times* published a still-undenied verbatim transcript of a quarrel between Shah and his agriculture minister Dilawar Mir at a cabinet meeting, which suggests that only 70 per cent of police recruits were taken on merit—the remaining being made at the instance of ministers. According to instructions issued recently, ministers had to clear all appointments, even those of casual labour and Class IV employees. Bhim Singh, who has filed over 100 writ petitions in the Jammu & Kashmir High Court and the Supreme Court challenging the decisions of the Shah government, alleges that the jobs carried hefty price tags.

Jagmohan intends to set up a statutory services selection board along the lines of a Public Services Commission to appoint people to government jobs. He intends to put eminent people on a guaranteed three-year tenure in charge so that they are insulated from political pressures. The board will make senior appointments and lay down guidelines and policies for all others, whetting them before they are finally made.

Among other things on the cards are a flying audit squad to look into alleged fiscal malpractice at short notice and an institute that will prepare people of the state for competitive jobs, such as elsewhere in the country. "The UGC awards 1,000 merit scholarships each year; there hasn't been one from Jammu & Kashmir," says Jagmohan.

But it wasn't these alleged malpractices or even the allegations of cor-

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ANANTNAG

A Tragic Tale

ON THE afternoon of March 3, a venerable *kazi*, or priest, at the Anantnag mosque tells a well-attended prayer meeting that a Muslim deputy superintendent of the armed police (DSP) in Jammu has died, slain by marauding mobs, defending the honour of his wife. The next day, the state administration fetches the DSP and his family to Anantnag and presents him to a public gathering of 2,000 people to prove that the *kazi* is wrong. Rumour.

In Qaimoh village in Anantnag district, Mohammad Amin shouts angrily as he talks of a Muslim *gujjar* girl stripped naked in Jammu by Hindu mobs, an event the local administration in the city avers has never taken place. Rumour.

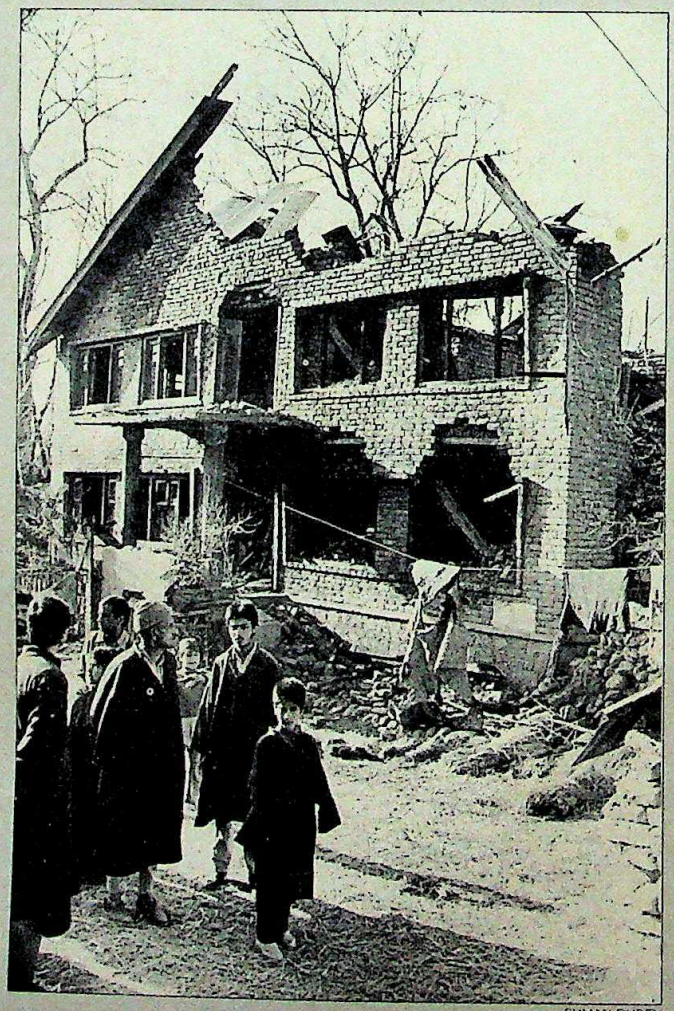
In Anantnag, a police officer says that bus-loads of migrant workers arriving in the valley alight at the first villages along the main road and speak of the massacre of Muslims across the Banihal and the imminent arrival of "truck-loads of dead bodies". More rumour.

In Delhi, the local Kashmiri Samaj puts out a "fact sheet" using highly charged words and phrases like 'genocide', 'mass-scale rape and molestation of women' and 'people beaten or stabbed' to describe what has been happening in the valley. Still more rumour.

Any one of these bits of fiction which swept Jammu & Kashmir last month would have sufficed as a spark in a dry tinder-box. In the face of the barrage of misinformation, the wonder is not that there was communal violence in the emotionally surcharged atmosphere that came to prevail in the state, but that it did not take a still greater toll. Violence there was in plenty: scores of homes burnt and looted, temples destroyed and damaged, shops raided, moveable property ruined, people threatened. But in a manner that could only be peculiar to Kashmir, not one person was killed, not one person deliberately injured, not one woman molested in a bout of violence that eventually undid a government.

Sadly, for a region that has prided itself on communal harmony, it was the first eruption of communal violence in living memory. "In all of Jammu & Kashmir, we have never fought on communal lines as in other parts of India. We have always participated in each other's festivals and processions," said former Janata Party member Jagat Mohini. "We are ashamed of these things, and we will make sure they never happen again," said Awami Action Party leader Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq.

House destroyed on February 20



SUMAN DUBEY

In the heat of the moment, the miniscule Kashmiri Pandit community, which numbers a mere 60,000 to 70,000 in a population of nearly 6 million in the state and was the target of the violence, spoke agitatedly of abandoning their villages and homes and resettling elsewhere in the country. Political delegations that toured the affected areas reported a break down of administration.

There were scores of scattered incidents of stone-throwing, looting and arson in places as far apart as Baramulla, Sopore, and Srinagar. But it was in Anantnag district, the region that straddles the Jammu-Srinagar national highway as it cuts out of the Banihal range and enters the valley of Kashmir, that the worst events took place.

Dhanau is a small village of some 110 homes, 60-km south of Srinagar. Retired sub-inspector of police Janaki Nath Butt belongs to one of some 30 Kashmiri pandit families in the village, many of whom live in well-built new homes decorated on the outside with colourful floral patterns that make them easy to identify. Last fortnight the three-storeyed home he shares with two brothers was a blackened shell, surrounded by the charred relics of arson: burnt books, furniture, clothes and paraphernalia.

"It was around 2 p.m. on February 20 when my neighbour Mohammad Maqbool came to me and warned that there was a *juloos* (procession) heading towards our village," he recalls. Butt had someone carry his 90-year-old mother into a neighbour's home and had her dressed in Muslim clothes. He hid his scooter and fled to another neighbour with his brothers and their family members. Then the mob struck. "There were about 300 or 400 and they robbed us of everything gold and cash, and they burnt my scooter." As the residents tell it, the mob came from the nearby vil-

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lages of Khadwani, Redwani and Qaimoh. They burnt seven homes and damaged and looted another seven. Among the other casualties were two temples and a dharamshala.

Another village that bore the brunt of the violence was Wanpoh, on the main highway 52 km from Srinagar and within a stone's throw of Anantnag. H.N. Razdan was celebrating his birthday on February 20 with a *puja* when the mobs—again from the same villages centered on Qaimoh—struck. Swami Damakakji's *samadhi* built in 1982 by Hindus and Muslims was damaged, as were two temples, several shops and homes. Tej Nath Kaul lost an oil expeller for which he had taken a Rs-50,000 bank loan. Avtar Krishan Raina's radio shop was burnt and he managed to save the situation by halting a military convoy that happened to be passing.

TIME and again, it was elderly Muslim neighbours that came to the help of the besieged Pandits. Shyamlal Butt of Wanpoh was at work in Anantnag but his wife was taken into Abdul Khaliq's home. Bhushan Lal Bal was saved by Dilshada Akhtar, an elderly neighbour, who held up the Quran and had the courage to tell the scores of young marauders that they were acting against its teachings.

"I know who they were but I'll never reveal their names," said schoolteacher Shyamlal with unexpected fervour. "After all, I have to live among them. They were small children when I taught them, today they have moustaches." Not everyone regards the future with such stoicism. Most of the victims have refused anything more than immediate relief. They've spurned the Rs 5,000 per destroyed house and Rs 3,000 per plundered shop and home that the administration sanctioned immediately.

Like many others of Qaimoh, from where some of the mobs allegedly came, Abdur Rahman was worked up over what he believed was injustice against the Muslims and violence against them in Jammu. In an impassioned diatribe, he spoke of convoys that came from the southern, Hindu dominated part of the state bearing families of Muslim government employees fleeing for their lives, of the Babari mosque in Ayodhya being converted into a temple.

Unlike so many other rumours, there was unfortunately an air of plausibility about some of this which seems to have triggered off last month's violence. Earlier in the year, in a bid to facilitate Friday prayers and prevent Muslim employees of the Secretariat from absconding every Friday afternoon, chief minister G.M. Shah ordered a disused store be converted into a prayer room. Such a room had been prepared in the Srinagar Secretariat without fuss. D.D. Thakur, who was Shah's deputy, said that the decision "could have been avoided", and he would have advised against it had he been in Jammu at the time.

Unfortunately for Shah, the room chosen was allegedly part of a *samadhi* and the city's Shiv Sena, a rag tag organisation of a few hundred set up with the ostensible purpose of protecting Hindus, immediately protested. The authorities say that the Shiv Sena has more muscle than popular following, but Shah chose to bend to its demands—giving it a new found status. Worse, he decided to allow the construction of a temple for secretariat employees. Not only that, Shah, the assembly speaker, and several MLA's attended a feast, to mark the occasion which gave the Shiv Sena added respectability.

Events—and communal passions—snowballed after that. When the Ayodhya affair took place, the Shiv Sena took out a procession in which provocative slogans were mouthed and weapons allegedly carried and fired without police intervention. The city's Hindu Raksha Samiti, eyeing the growing stature of the Shiv Sena with alarm, organised its own campaign, opposing the temple and mosque close to the Secretariat.

The crunch came on February 19 when the Sena, the Samiti and the Muslim Action Committee, which includes functionaries from Shah's National Conference (Khalida) (NC-K), organised separate protests, the last named demanding that the Government provide protection to its Muslim employees in Jammu for the winter. At a meeting addressed by G.M. Bhadrawahi, a minister in Shah's cabinet, the committee demanded the dismissal of the Chief Secretary R.K. Takkar and Director General of Police M.M. Khajuria for allegedly allowing the Shiv Sena to run riot. Shortly after that, a number of Muslim families were reportedly loaded into trucks and sent off to Srinagar. With this backdrop, the violence could have been anticipated.

—SUMAN DUBEY in Anantnag

ruption (INDIA TODAY May 31, 1985) that proved to be the undoing of the Shah government. The immediate provocation for Shah's departure was, of course, the communal violence aimed at the Kashmiri Pandits *(see box)* and the sharpening of communal tensions in a state known hitherto for its communal harmony. Trouble in the state in 1983, in Punjab in 1983 and 1984 and continuing uncertainty these past weeks played havoc with the state's tourism earnings, and the economy suffered. But the deeper reason was that the illegitimacy of the Government finally caught up with it. Shah came to power in July 1984 on the shoulders of defectors from Abdullah's National Conference. The defections reduced Abdullah to a minority and the Congress(I), plunged in to support the defectors—and get a slice of power without actually participating in the Government.

NOT THAT Shah was an unmitigated disaster. He did begin to undo the eclipse of the IAS and Indian Police Service, a direction which had been set by Sheikh Abdullah's government. During his time, the state Government had asked the Centre to reduce the cadre strength of the IAS from 107 to 78 and proposed to elevate the status of the Kashmir Administrative Service. Four months ago that request was withdrawn.

But the arrangement was doomed from the start, and survived only because it was being propped up by New Delhi, anxious to have a regime in Srinagar which it could control by proxy. Unfortunately, that isn't the way the electorate saw it. In the public mind, Shah was a usurper, he lacked legitimacy. Not surprisingly, Shah and his ministers remained confined, unable to address public meetings or move about freely. The longer it went on, the worse it became. Dependent on each of his ministers for his political survival, Shah couldn't control them even if he had wanted to. Lacking cadres and public support, the Government sought help no matter from where it came, even if it meant patronising such dubious bodies as the Shiv Sena in Jammu *(see box)* and turning a blind eye to the rapid growth of influence of the Jamaat-e-Islami in the Kashmir valley. "He was a captive chief minister, captive to a set of circumstances he himself created in July 1984," says one official. "It was history taking revenge."

It was, in fact, a farcical situation. Shah ruled not knowing what the next day would bring. His partner in power, the Congress(I), began to criticise him openly.

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and raised a clamour for his removal. His ministers, knowing that they were in it for a brief while, focussed less on governance than on their own interests. The Congress(I) didn't know whether to function as a coalition partner or an opposition, and finally the governor made little attempt to conceal his distaste for the kind of politics that the state had fallen to. Some people called it a political vacuum, others total chaos, a state without leadership, without administration and with growing anarchy.

It couldn't last, and challenged by an increasingly more popular Farooq Abdullah, the cracks in the Shah regime widened. Shah's enigmatic and abrasive personality had more than a little to do with it. He seems to have had few friends even within the circle of his own party, and one of his colleagues admitted that there were temperamental problems in the Cabinet. Ministers fell out and it was no secret—as subsequent events have proved—that many of them quarrelled openly. Deputy chief minister D.D. Thakur resigned last December but was persuaded to take back his resignation. The state unit of the Congress(I), recognising that it was losing public credibility, began to press the Centre to terminate the arrangement. Said Congress(I) MP from Jammu, Janak Raj Gupta: "We were feeling suffocated, but for the sake of party discipline we remained silent witnesses to all that happened." For the last few months, there were no meetings of the coordination committee of the NC(K) and the Congress (I).

It wasn't only the politicians that were protesting. Jagmohan's gubernatorial reports emphasised the alarming breakdown of the administration, widespread corruption and the growing alienation of the Government from the people, a particularly dangerous occurrence in a sensitive state subject to interference and extremist instigation from across the border. But the Centre appeared to be reluctant to take the plunge fearing that Governor's rule might be seen as external interference and could be grist to the mill of anti-national elements as happened in Punjab after the dismissal of the Darbara Singh ministry in 1983.

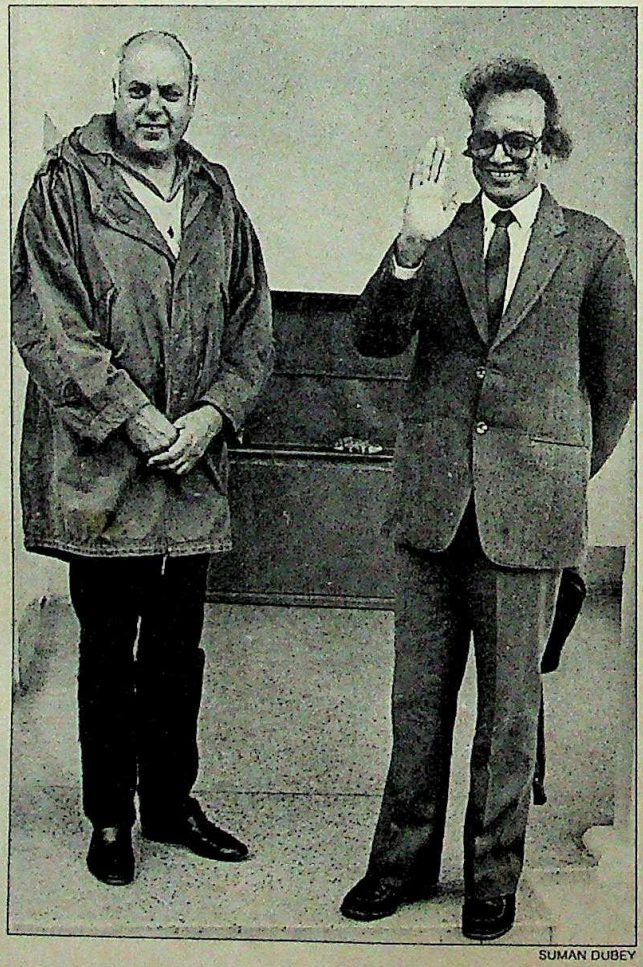
MORE important, of course, was the realisation that with Shah and, in tandem, the Congress(I) losing ground, the main beneficiary of Governor's rule would be their common political foe, the NC(F). Abdullah's standing in the Kashmir valley has risen dramatically since his dismissal as chief minister in 1984. The imposition of Governor's rule would naturally be seen as a victory for Abdullah who has been agitating for it ever since then.

These considerations weighed heavily when Congress(I) Vice-President Arjun Singh visited the state for an on-the-spot study in early February amidst widespread expectations that a change was imminent. Singh seems to have encouraged the feeling when he told newsmen that the Government would "keep the national interest in mind" in whatever decision it took. Summoned to Delhi, Shah and Thakur talked with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi—and earned a reprieve which demoralised a highly expectant Congress(I) in the state.

The communal riots that erupted on February 20 were the last straw—yet the Centre took its own time in pulling the rug from under Shah's feet. Mounting unpopularity prevented Shah and Thakur from visiting the affected areas, and it was left to Jagmohan to offer succour to the victims, to seek the active cooperation of Abdullah and the Mirwaiz—and bring back the story of administrative breakdown and police inaction on February 20 and the days immediately following. At least four Congress(I) MLA's from Jammu, fearful of a complete erosion of their credibility with their voters, let it be known that they intended to vote against Shah in a no-confidence motion scheduled for March 3 (the Assembly session was, in fact, postponed to March 8 and then March 18). But action didn't come till both former Union home minister S.B. Chavan and Minister of State for Internal Security Arun Nehru had visited the state. Jagmohan again appealed for action, and the aggrieved Kashmiri Pandits demonstrated in the capital.

Even so, Shah and Thakur made a strong bid to continue in office. As Thakur said: "It was wrong to terminate the arrangement at the time of communal riots when the atmosphere was surcharged. We argued if you want to, do it in a different context, but doing it now would indicate that the Government was being dismissed because it didn't act strongly enough against the majority community."

The argument didn't carry, though, and after prolonged consultations on March 6—aimed mainly at trying to see if any other arrangment could be worked out to salvage the Shah government—the high command gave Congress(I) state chief Mufti Mohammad Syed the signal to pull out. Later that night, Maulvi Iftikhar Hussain Ansari, leader of the party's legislature wing, sent a letter to Jagmohan withdrawing the party's support to the NC(K). Said Mufti: "Shah couldn't manage it."



Farooq with Jagmohan: promise of support

SUMAN DUBEY

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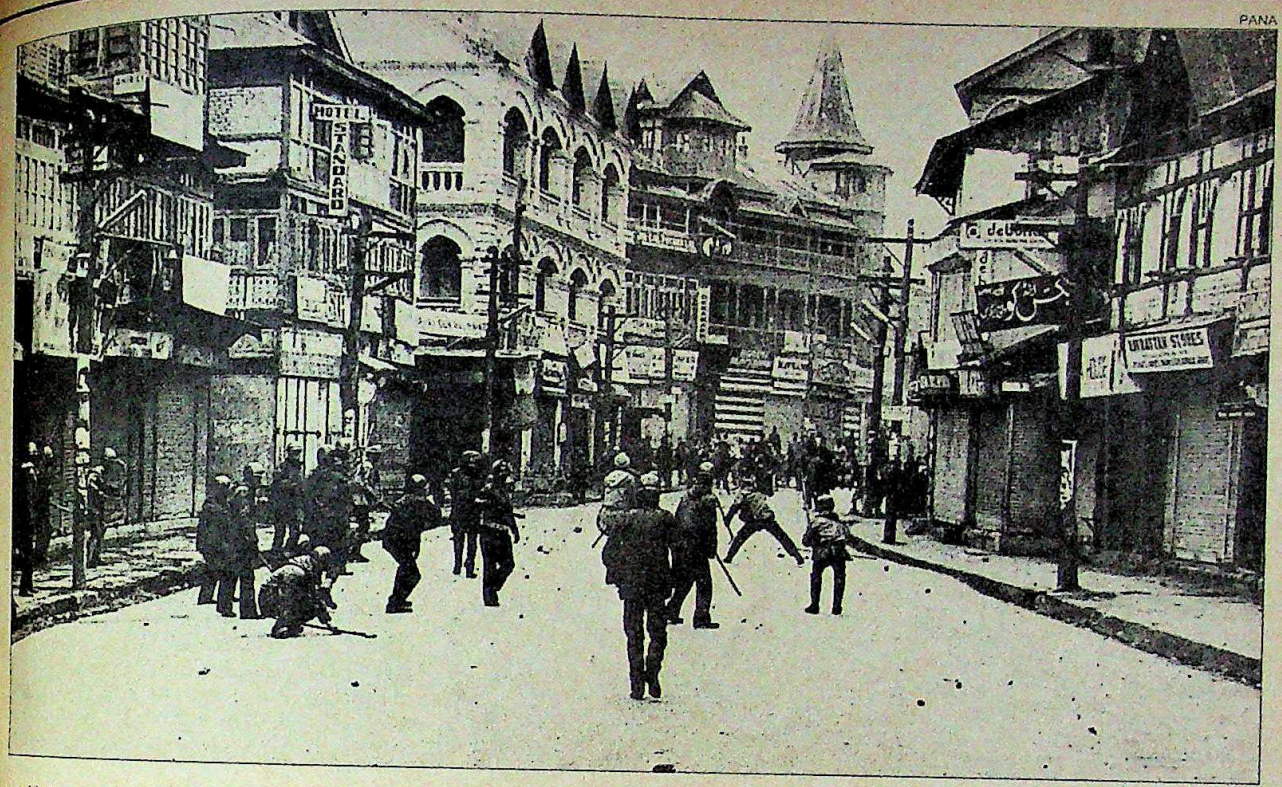

Police battling rioters in Srinagar

couldn't manage the party or the law and order situation."

For his part, Jagmohan doesn't have much time to manage things either. Six months is what the state's constitution permits, and though there are probably ways of extending Governor's rule if it is found necessary, the chances are that the state will begin to get restive if elections aren't called soon. NC(F) spokesmen are already asking why the governor did not dissolve the Assembly. Said former law minister P.L. Handoo: "If the Assembly is not dissolved, I fear that there will be horse-trading." Charges former education minister Mohammad Shafi: "It has already begun, the Congress(I) is chasing people with bags of money."

ABDULLAH has already made it clear that he intends to take no one from the Shah group, and that he is not interested in forming a government till after the elections. Earlier, he spurned overtures from the Congress(I) and has spoken harshly of the defectors who brought down his government in 1984. "I've learnt to differentiate between friends, opportunists and enemies," he says. Indeed, the state's administration is in such a mess that a popular government would find it virtually impossible to push through the kind of reforms necessary. And, it is just as well that the governor happened to be a man who has considerable hands-on experience at running administrations. Jagmohan's Emergency tenure in Delhi was controversial, but he has considerable experience of—and interest in—urban planning and renewal, and his spell in Goa, and in Delhi at the time of the Asian Games proved him to be a man of action.

Even so, Governor's rule will mean unpopular decisions, difficult decisions which may, for instance, affect those who have encroached on the Dal Lake, or undeservedly got themselves jobs they cannot handle. Says Abdullah: "Governor's rule is meant to be unpopular. He is sitting in a seat where he will have to take unpopular decisions to straighten up the state. I'm saying he should go ahead because I'm the man who will have to face the people tomorrow and tell them why this was done. You can't straighten up a state by putting sweets in everybody's mouths."

Nor is it a permanent solution, but if Jagmohan is able to bring the state's administration to good health and facilitate the installation of a popular government he will have played an invaluable role. As the Mirwaiz said: "The lesson to everyone is that a policy to disregard the established leadership will not serve any purpose. A kind of chaos, uncertainty, confusion will develop and the tendency of violence and communalism can grow. If the people feel their will has not been respected, this affects their thinking."

Shah and his fellow party men, in whatever manner they describe their political colours now, are the obvious losers. The irony is that the July 1984 toppling has probably undone much of the progress the Congress(I) recorded in the state, increasing its share of the vote in the valley almost three-fold to 28 per cent in the 1983 election over 1977, and it is doubtful if the party has emerged unscathed. With popular feeling on both sides of the Banihal running against those identified with Shah, Farooq Abdullah has emerged as the only winner out of the sordid events of the past two years. And if the next elections, whenever they are held, return him to office another state will have been thrust irrevocably, once again, into the grip of a regional party.

But this time, perhaps, there will be a difference. Abdullah believes that he was dismissed because the late prime minister Indira Gandhi was sent the wrong signals about him, because there was "an atmosphere of mistrust, basically a loss of communication. This time I'm going to make sure that the communication will remain with the Centre, and I will not wait but personally go there to explain, to clarify the situation rather than allow it to drift. One learns from experience."

—SUMAN DUBEY

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Burning Issue

A LEGISLATOR almost immolated himself last fortnight in Bihar. The drama began to unfold at the Assembly complex in Patna shortly before the budget session when Janata Party MLA Taslimuddin Ahmed sat on dharna and threatened to burn himself outside the Assembly on the opening day of the session if the Government did not punish the police and subdivisional magistrate of Araria in Purnea

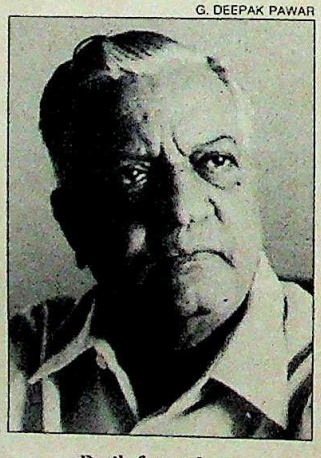
Ahmed on dharna: seeking justice

K.M. KISHAN

district. These authorities, the legislator alleged, had implicated him in a false criminal case to settle scores and destroyed his house worth lakhs of rupees on the pretext of attaching his property. The authorities and the legislator traded allegations but before things could get worse, the Government promised an inquiry and Ahmed withdrew his threat.

Hitching Hitch

G. DEEPAK PAWAR



Patil: few takers

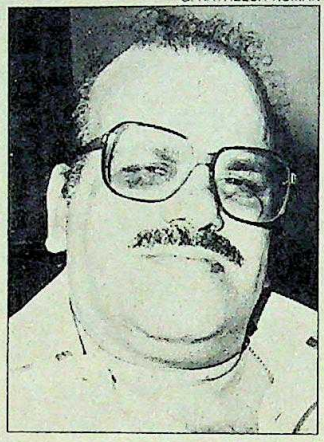
KARNATAKA Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde has devised a scheme to help poor couples get married without any expense. Under the scheme, every couple who ties the knot gets a pair of free *dhotis* for the groom and a pair of saris, blouses and a gold *mangalsutra* for the bride. To identify couples for the scheme, the Government has stipulated that either the bride or the groom should have the 'green card' that entitles poor families to subsidised rice and cloth. Another condition is that at a time, not less than ten couples should get married. Perhaps it is because of these conditions that the scheme, started early last year, has found few takers and only 398 marriages have been performed so far. But Social Welfare Minister V.L. Patil doesn't think that the scheme has failed. He says: "This is still something new and not known well enough to attract more couples."

Child Marriage

CLOSE on the heels of the Indra Vishnoi case has come the case of another minister involved in a child marriage. Kerala Irrigation Minister M.P. Gangadharan was accused in court by journalist T.A. Rajendran of marrying his daughter Bindu off before she could be 18. Rajendran alleged that the minister had the daughter's age changed in her school register after the complaint. The first class magistrate at Kunnakulam in Guruvayoor issued summons to Gangadharan, his son-in-law and son-in-law's father finding a prima facie case of violation of the Child Marriage Abolition Act. But the minister said that the complaint was not valid as it has been filed more than a year after the marriage. Saying that the issue was too "minor" to merit a resignation, he threatened to move the high court. But before the fortnight was through, Gangadharan had quietly resigned.

Gangadharan: defiant

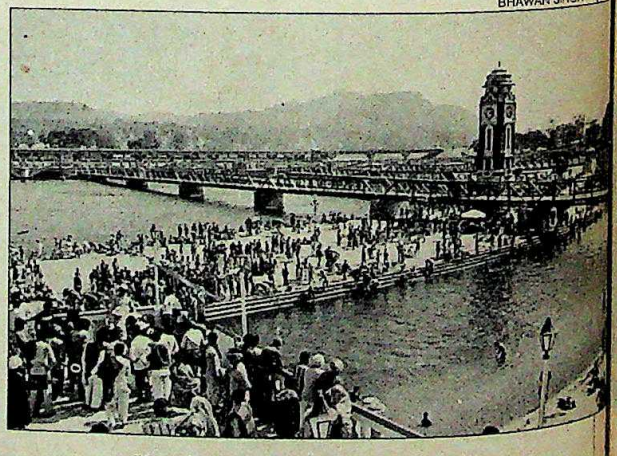
G. RATHEESH KUMAR



Mela Mess

ALL ROADS coming into the Doon Valley in Uttar Pradesh led to the Kumbh Mela last fortnight which went into high gear on March 14 with the first mass holy dip in the Ganga. The festivities, expected to attract an estimated 30 lakh pilgrims, were being held along a 68-square-mile area stretching along the Ganga river from Haridwar to Rishikesh.

BHAWAN SINGH



Har-Ki-Pauri: poor arrangements

But arrangements were poor. Congestion above Haridwar's famous Har-Ki-Pauri made movement almost impossible. And the stench from the open public latrine was odious and overpowering. The arrangements—or the lack of them—made the troubled pilgrims wonder what had happened to the estimated Rs 10 crore which had been allocated for drainage, sanitation and other facilities at the mela.

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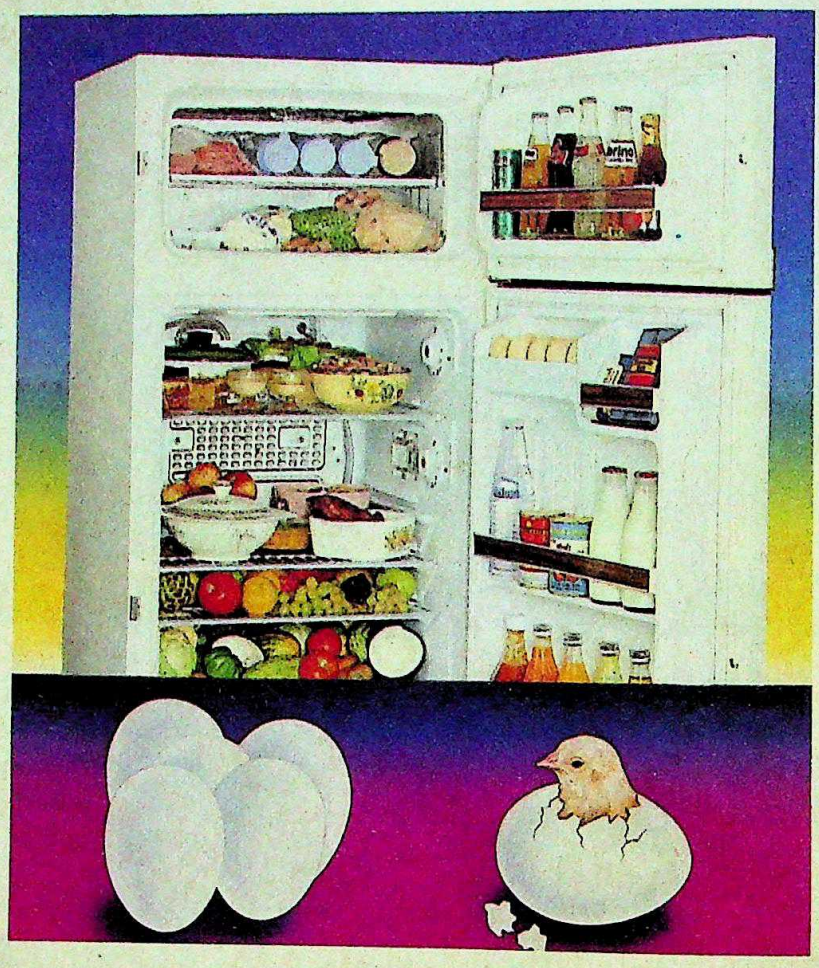

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UNITED KINGDOM

Breaking Barriers

JUST AS Britain's astringent film critics were singing a collective requiem for the country's cinema soon after celebrating British film year, they have suddenly sat up to take notice of a small-budget, unpretentious, made-for-television film, *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

Directed by Stephen Frears and written by Hanif Kureishi, *Laundrette* is an impressive commercial and critical success having won the highly-rated *London Standard*'s best film of the year (1985) award last month. *Laundrette* was originally made for channel four television—the country's innovative-minded network—but prudently released in the movie circuit and first attracted attention during the Edinburgh film festival.

The two principal protagonists of *Laundrette* are Omar, a sleek and supple Pakistani youngster (played with a whippy, feline deftness by Gordon Warnecke, a London-born actor who has worked in a variety of fringe and community art theatre) and Johnny (Daniel Lewis, seen recently in *Gandhi* and *The Bounty*), a strutting, punk-coiffed, unemployed white youth who has latterly become enticed by the execrable strong-arm politics of the National Front.

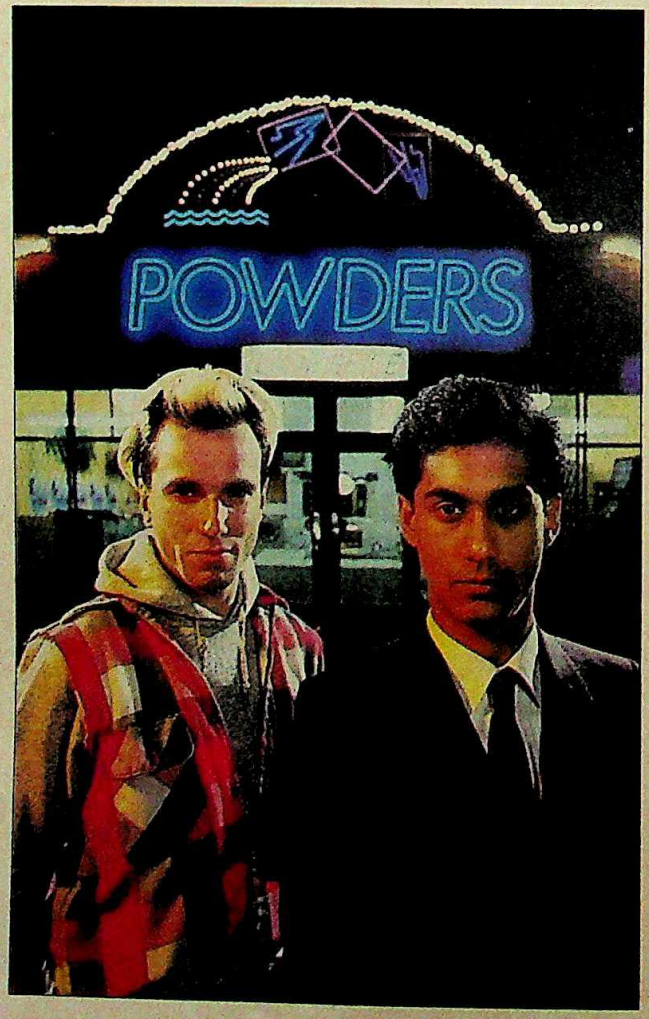
The setting is unspecifically in South London's skinhead-haunted Purlieu, placed against the dark smouldering background of friction between blacks and whites. However, the focal point of the film is pitched on the brittle relationships within a sprawling and securely settled Pakistani family.

The kingpin of the family is the resourceful plutocrat, the middle-aged Nasser (played with an artful, vulpine dexterity by Saeed Jaffrey), owner of several prosperous businesses. He is an energetic, self-confident entrepreneur who is able to take anything offered by "this country we so love and hate".

Confronted by his expatriate chums as to why he is so busy "trying to keep this damn country in the black", Nasser responds with one of the film's most telling indictments: "I am a professional businessman, not a professional Pakistani." Radically different from Nasser is his brother—a somewhat scholarly, left-wing journalist (another finely-judged, laconic performance by Roshan Seth)—Omar's papa—who lies in bed all day fuelled by his intellectual principles and his vodka bottle.

What else can Papa do but recommend his 18-year-old Omar to his well-heeled brother? 'Omo' is seduced by his uncle Nasser to look after a laundrette ("I'm not in the dole queue, Mrs Thatcher will be pleased with me"—says the wily Nasser). He is also seduced unsuccessfully by his lubricious female cousin Tania (Rita Wolfe), but with greater elan by Johnny, his former school buddy who is caught between a political passion for the coarse tenets of the National Front and an incisive raw sexual passion for "Omo".

Using money nicked from a slithery, drug-smuggling relative, Salim (Derrick Branche), Omar and Johnny revamp the run-down laundrette into an amazing palace with flashy, lurid neon-signs on the facade, *hokusai*-style wave murals, fruit machines and piped *puccini* for their bewildered clientele. The bizarre laundrette flourishes briefly, as the film—hitherto a spry and jaunty comedy—takes a dark turn when Omar and Johnny become lovers—unexpected passionate clinches in a darkened car, kisses in a love-nest in the back of the laundrette. Director Frears and writer Kureishi attempt to evolve a form of stylised racial integration thru *L'amour Fou* as taboos, both social and sexual, political and interpersonal begin to disintegrate, along with the main characters.



Lewis (left) and Warnecke in *Laundrette*

Nasser's bustling entrepreneurial zeal (he had only recently advised Omar; "You must know how to squeeze the tits of the system") flags as his problems escalate. His sexual life is in ruins when his dignified and untarty white mistress, the fur-dripping Rachel (Shirley Ann Field), leaves him when Nasser's cuckolded wife puts a spell on her. Omar's papa is anxious about his son's libido. His Smirnoff-ravaged brain cannot comprehend why on earth his Omo will not marry the luscious Tania. He demands of his son if his penis is in working order. The old radical has not discovered his Omo is in fact a homo. Vividly revolving around the story is a gang of zero-IQ skinheads who force a final showdown with their erstwhile mate Johnny.

Laundrette is a perilously poised parable. It has been condemned by the expatriate Pakistani community for "pandering to western tastes" and portraying immigrants as grotesque caricatures. The real objection however is to the stark homosexuality—a feeble argu-

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ment by any account. The flaws in the film appear to lie elsewhere. To begin with—its format—the flat and square television image—is a problem. Its slender story line notwithstanding, *Laundrette* has missed a fine opportunity to portray the cross currents and confusions of contemporary Britain's melting pot.

The excruciating dilemmas confronting Nasser's family—especially his hapless, conservative wife, his liberated daughter, hardly gets a look. In Britain, debates about its multiracial society abound. While in such centres of immigrant concentration like Southall and Wembley, Leicester and Bradford, many Asian families struggle to make adjustments—tradition-bound elders speaking chaste Urdu or Punjabi striving to come to terms with their cockney-speaking youngsters brought up on a diet of television sitcoms like *Eastenders* and rock music. Such issues and the problems of inter-racial manners are bypassed in *Laundrette*. There are fleeting references about home as one chic Karachi expatriate nostalgically speaks about "bridge, booze and VCR". Another hates the thought of going back to a country "sodomised by religion". Where this subversive comedy succeeds is that Kureishi has managed to prise the glutinous and mindless focus of Britain away from the Raj. One English critic described *Laundrette* as a gay "west side story" transposed to Thatcherite South London. It seems a pity that this whimsically crackpot tandem—the odious National Front teaming up with the seraphic Indian subcontinent—does not produce a fresh, revealing and spin-dried view of the anxieties and predicaments of immigrants in the United Kingdom.

(From left) Warnecke, Field and Jaffrey in a scene from the film

—RAMESH CHANDRAN
in London

HANIF KUREISHI

Cult Figure

FROM writing steamy porno stories to becoming one of Britain's most fashionable young playwrights, Hanif Kureishi, 32, has come a long way in a remarkably short time. Half-Pakistani, half-English, Kureishi has in a flash become the toast of the tottering British cinema having authored this season's voguish, popular hit, *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

He was born in South London of a Pakistani journalist father who works with the high commission and an English mother. He went to an "ordinary" English school and later read philosophy at King's College. He was, he says, raised to be a writer and had his first play *Soaking Up The Heat*, presented at the Royal Court when he was just 18, while his second play, *The King And Me*, was produced as a Soho play in January 1980. His first full-length stage play, *The Mother Country*, won him the Thames Television Playwrights award for 1980. His subsequent plays like *Borderline* and *Birds of Passage* received a fair measure of critical consecration.

As Kureishi told INDIA TODAY, the clamorous reception accorded to *Laundrette* by London's normally sulphurous critics and its commercial success has left him "pleasantly surprised". Currently, Kureishi is writing a book called *The Rainbow Sign* about the England of the '60s—the bilious years of Enoch Powell—and the Pakistan of the '80s where Islamic culture has consciously been made pre-eminent. His comments on contemporary Pakistani life-styles are now likely to create a fresh rumpus.

Kureishi: provocative

A preview of what is in store was revealed when an extract was published by the magazine *Time Out* in which he argues that Islamisation under the martial rule of General Zia hasn't bred a society of zealots but a generation bent on hooch, heroin, videos and yoga—a generation that longs to leave Pakistan.

He argues that the over-emphasis on dogma and punishment strengthened the repressive, militaristic and nationalistically aggressive state with the added bonus that in Pakistan, god was always on the side of the Government.

His provocative views have rankled the sensibilities of immigrant communities in the past. He once refused to be on the panel to judge the work of black writers because he thought they should not be considered a race apart. When he took *Borderline* to Southall—bastion of the Sikhs—some radical groups were furious. They tried to get it banned since it showed an Asian girl sleeping with her boy-friend. In his defence, Kureishi says: "All I can say to these people is, are there no homosexuals in the Pakistani community and do not Asian girls sleep with their boy-friends?" He feels Asians ought to be depicted like anyone else—neither as saints nor sinners.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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INDO-SRI LANKA RELATIONS

The Colombo Chill

IF YOU have to sup with the devil use a long spoon, is an adage that the Tamil militants battling for a separate Eelam state in Sri Lanka have long believed—and practised. It is, in hindsight, a tactic that the Indian Government is ruefully realising would have perhaps served them better in its dealings with the Jayewardene Government over the Tamil issue. The sudden and strident exchange of charges and countercharges telegraphed between the two countries last fortnight clearly marked an ignominious and abrupt end to the cosy honeymoon New Delhi had naively embarked upon with Colombo. It also signalled the Indian Government's belated determination to adopt a markedly tougher posture in its role as peace-broker between the two warring sides.

In what was easily the strongest statement to emanate from South Block since Rajiv Gandhi came to power, the Indian Government accused Sri Lanka of trying to "find an alibi for the failure to engage in constructive negotiations", and of "casting personal aspersions" on External Affairs Minister Bali Ram Bhagat, who in the midst of a stormy Lok Sabha debate over the Indian Government's handling of the Sri Lankan crisis, had issued the provocative remark that the action of Sri Lankan security forces had "the elements of genocide". Bhagat also suggested that it was time the Sri Lanka Government came up with a time frame in which to find a political solution to the problem. Bhagat's remarks predictably produced an equally provocative tirade from Colombo, which fell back on its time-worn tactic of once again accusing India of assisting and encouraging training camps for Tamil militant groups in Tamil Nadu. Colombo's statement also said that: "The value of the proferred good offices of the Indian Government stand impaired and its credibility diluted."

The Indian Government then put the seal on its abrupt about-turn by taking the rather extreme step of stopping the Indian cricket team's impending visit to Sri Lanka for the Asia Cup, scheduled for end-March. The sudden and mutual escalation in the verbal war has fragmented the fragile hopes for peace that the negotiation process initiated by the Indian Government in 1983 had tentatively raised. But in many ways, it was somewhat inevitable. "There was a growing chasm between the professions of the Jayewardene Government and their actions", says a Foreign Ministry source. "There were just too many contradictions in their approach to the issue."

Senior Indian diplomats involved backstage in the covert negotiations between the two governments produce a long drumroll of instances to prove the point, starting with Jayawardene's initial acceptance of the 'Annexure C' proposals stitched together by then chief Indian negotiator G.Parthasarathi, and his subsequent about-face. More recently, a prominent Indian columnist tape recorded an interview with Jayawardene in which he flatly stated that they were only interested in a military solution, a statement he has now denied.

The clincher came when Colombo sent signals that they were willing to consider the three crucial issues contained in the latest amended proposals worked out between Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari and the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)—the land settlement issue, the law and order proposal asking for a Tamil police force and the proposal to merge the northern and eastern province. Sri Lankan strongman Lalith Athulathmudali, indicated that they were willing to give in substantially to the first two and would even be willing to negotiate further on the third. The peripatetic Bhandari once again put a Colombo sticker on his bags and flew to Madras en route to Sri Lanka. The day he left, a special courier arrived from Colombo with a 58-page document containing the Sri Lankan reaction to the TULF proposals. "They bore no relation to the discussions we had been engaged in uptill that time," said a foreign ministry source. An embarrassed Bhandari had to fly back from Madras, sadder but wiser.

The bottomline, however, is that the Indian Government seems to be finally convinced that President Jayewardene and his advisers have decided that there is only one solution to the problem—the military option. Sri Lanka's indisciplined security forces, bolstered by the recent

The Indian Government is finally convinced that Jayewardene has decided that there is only one solution to the problem—the military option.

RAGHU RAI

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acquisition of a wide variety of weaponry from rather dubious sources, have escalated their brutal anti-Tamil offensive alarmingly in the past two months through their cordon-and-search operations (INDIA TODAY, March 15). The fact that the main victims of the crackdown—concentrated in the eastern province—have been innocent Tamil civilians put additional pressure on South Block to undertake a major review of their policy.

Finally, political realities, hitherto ignored, put the torch to the funeral pyre of India's peace initiative. Apart from the uproars in Parliament last fortnight, with members, not just from Tamil Nadu, baying for the Foreign Ministry's blood, the AIADMK Government in Tamil Nadu has made it clear to the Congress(I) that the sole reason for its shock defeat in last month's municipal elections was the electorate's disgust with its attitude towards the Sri Lankan situation. In the latest round of high-level meetings chaired by the prime minister to review the Sri Lankan policy, the participants included G. Parthasarathi, who had been sidelined on Sri Lankan affairs at the request of the Jayewardene Government, and Tamil Nadu's Electricity Minister, S. Ramachandran.

Neither could the Indian Government ignore the fact that the refugee population from Sri Lanka has started to reach alarming levels in terms of the financial burden involved in their upkeep. Since December 1983, a total of 1,24,828 Sri Lankan Tamils have fled across the Palk Straits in fear of death or destruction of their homes by the Sri Lankan security forces. In fact, the Indian Government has now asked Sri Lanka to share refugee expenses.

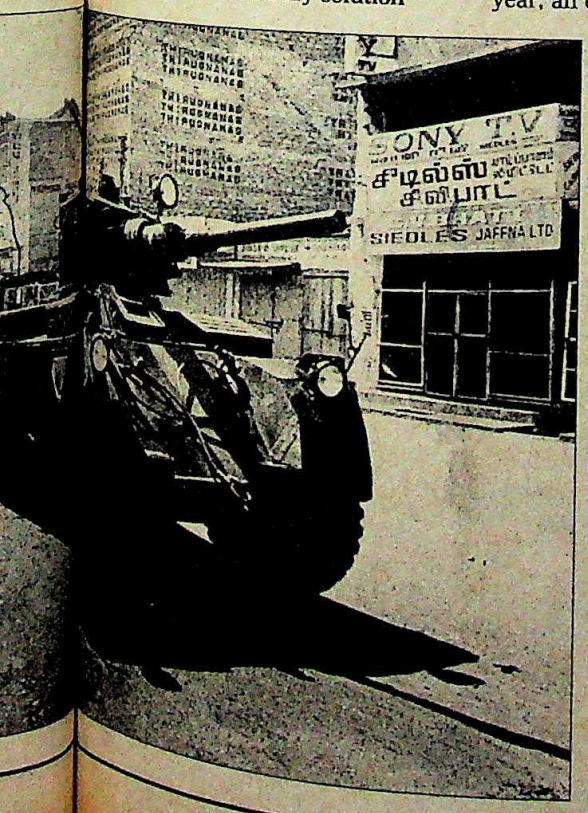
THAT Colombo had decided to concentrate on its desperate search for a military solution was patently obvious. But the increasing involvement of Pakistan in that hitherto futile search was added reason for India to harden its stand. According to defence and intelligence sources, the major source of Sri Lanka's arms acquisitions in recent months has been Pakistan, followed by South Africa, Israel, UK, China and Singapore. From Pakistan, the Sri Lankans have acquired a large amount of heavy and medium artillery in the form of 25-pounder field guns, 130 mm medium guns and rocket-propelled grenades, apart from an estimated 10,000 small arms in the form of rifles, light machine-guns and mortars. Latest reports say that the Pakistan Government has also promised Colombo six helicopter gunships.

Pakistan's involvement extends well beyond weapons supply. In the last one year, an estimated 8,000 officers, junior commissioned officers and other ranks have returned from Pakistan having completed courses in counter-insurgency, artillery, junior commanders training and basic training. Pakistan is also reportedly training Sri Lankan air force and naval pilots. In Sri Lanka itself, their security forces are being trained by the comically-named Keeny Meany Services, an outfit made up of former Special Air Services (SAS) veterans who have served earlier in Oman and usually do not operate in foreign countries without the tacit approval of the British Government.

In addition, Sri Lanka has acquired 150 armoured cars and personnel carriers from South Africa and Israel, 21 Bell helicopters from Singapore which are being converted into gunships, six SIA Marchetti aircraft from Italy for strafing and an equal number of Cessna 337's for surveillance. It has also bought 50 patrol boats and 40,000 land-mines in the past year. All these acquisitions have inflated the country's defence budget from Rs 17.71 million in 1982-83 to Rs 57.65 million in 1985-86, and encouraged further confirmation that the only course the Government is bent upon taking is a military one.

The Indian strategy, with its peace initiative having virtually collapsed, is to mount an international campaign to put external pressure on Sri Lanka. Much of its hopes rest with the US. During his recent visit to Washington, Bhagat raised the issue with the US Administration which has reportedly expressed support for the move to get the Jayewardene Government to exercise more restraint on its security forces and adopt a more reasonable attitude towards finding a peaceful and mutually acceptable solution to the ethnic crisis. At the same time, India strongly condemned Sri Lankan atrocities before the Human Rights Commission in Geneva last week, indicating that New Delhi is determined to pull out all the stops. But that could also mean that New Delhi might just be in the mood to allow the Tamil militants to resume their arms training on Tamil Nadu soil, which would put the clock back to a level where it would once again resemble the ticking of a time-bomb.

—DILIP BOBB



Sri Lankan armour prowls Jaffna streets; search for a military solution

External Affairs Minister Bali Ram Bhagat issued the provocative remark that the action of Sri Lankan security forces had the elements of genocide.

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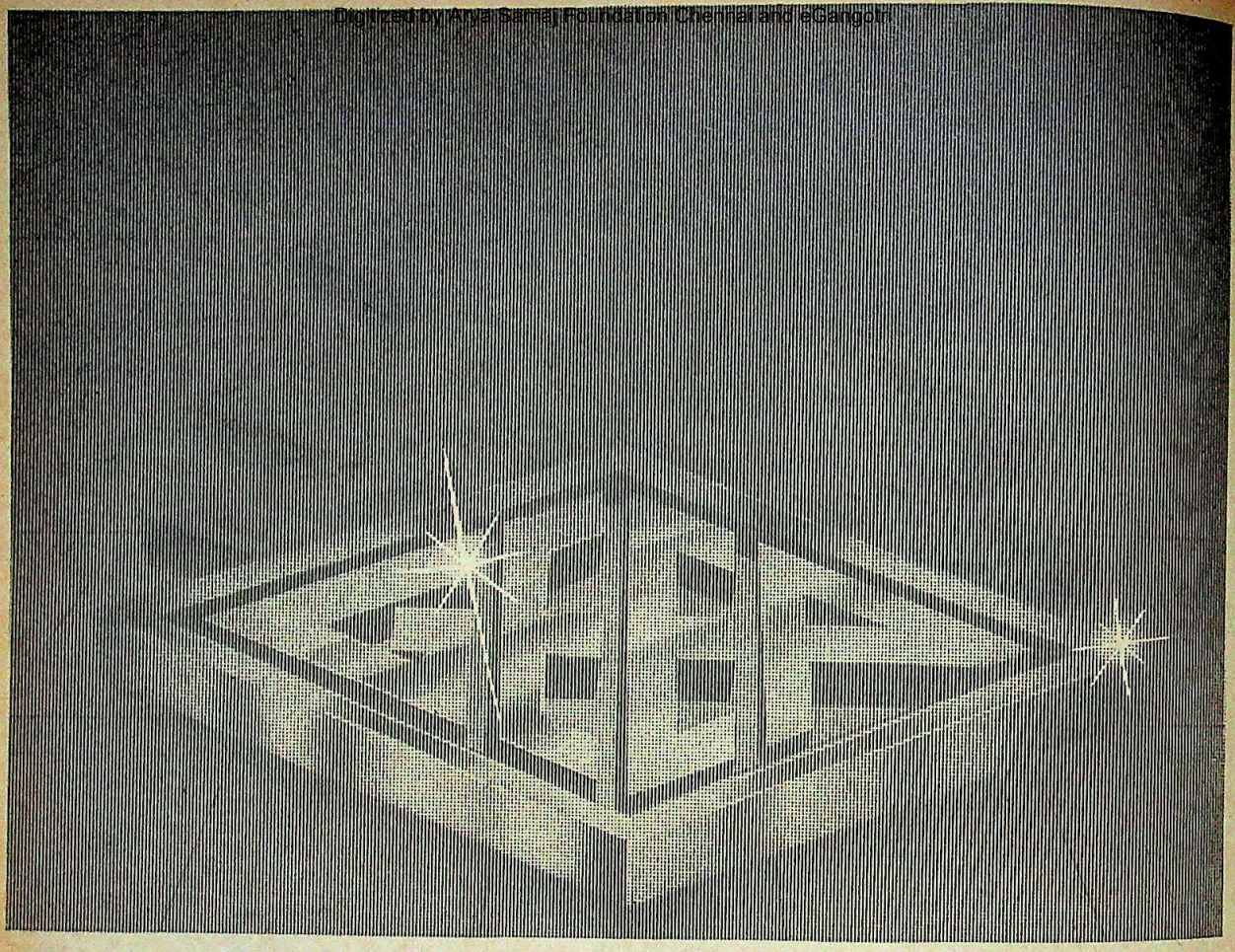

Symbol of Growing Indian Confidence

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GEEP

(A Shervani Enterprise)

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IN THE PIPELINE

THE GOVERNMENT has added yet another dimension to the suspense-filled story of the Hazira-Bijaypur-Jagdishpur (HBJ) pipeline contract. After two official bodies have already examined the matter and given in their recommendations, the Government has appointed another committee to look at which of two types of turbines—aero-derivative or industrial gas—should be used in the compressor stations that will help pump gas through the 1,700-km pipeline. The five-member committee has been given a fortnight's deadline to hand in a verdict. The word in the construction industry is that the Government could decide to delink the supply of turbines from the rest of the pipeline-laying contract. If that is true, the committee's appointment may not lead to further delays in awarding the job to one of the four consortia in the running for it. But it will almost certainly spark off a controversy over the chopping and changing of the contract, for it could affect the decision on which company gets what contract.

BACK AND FORTH

THE INDUSTRY Ministry has shot down an attempt by the Department of Electronics (DOE) to swing the controversial optical fibres project to the Madhya Pradesh State Electronics Development Corporation. The Public Investment Board had earlier given the green signal to Hindustan Cables Ltd to manufacture the high-tech substitute for the copper cables that transmit telex and telephone messages. Nevertheless, DOE apparently pursued the Madhya Pradesh unit's case, arguing that funds would not pose a problem because a private company could be roped in for funds. The Ministry has now pointed out that the project is reserved for the public sector. The much delayed Rs 29-crore venture could be delayed further: a fresh round of tendering by foreign firms is now on.

FRESH LOOK

THE DEJECTION among automobile industry aspirants over the Government's new cold-shoulder attitude may not last. For, contrary to reports that the Cabinet has rejected all applications for new car projects, the Government has merely postponed its final decision. Meanwhile, it has asked the Industry Ministry to prepare a comprehensive policy paper on the automobile industry, taking into account all the relevant issues, including economies of scale, the expected foreign exchange outgo and the overall transport policy framework. This policy paper will be ready in a month, after which the Government will look afresh at the applications for car manufacturing licences.

SURGEON'S SCALPEL

THE GOVERNMENT is going ahead with its proposal to close down five major public sector companies or merge them with other units. The Tanneries and Footwear Corporation of India, Scooters India, Engineering Projects India Ltd, the Cycle Corporation of India and Hindustan Steelworks Construction Ltd have incurred total losses to the tune of over Rs 200 crore. While Engineering Projects employees pointed out that the company's major losses arose on two foreign projects, Hindustan Steelworks' unions claimed that the firm had hefty orders in hand. But the Government remains unconvinced.

HARD ON SOFTWARE

THE FUR could soon fly on the computer software front. Software manufacturers have banded together to form an association and at least two firms, Computer Point and Indian Organics, are seriously thinking of sueing a high-profile pirate. The software industry is plagued by piracy, and even a few well-known computer companies have not been above importing cheap software, plagiarising it and flogging it in the domestic market. But a host of firms is poised to launch software in the country, and they can make a go of it only by coming down heavily on pirates. So some plan on taking recourse to an amendment in the Copyright Act about 18 months ago which enlarged the scope of the law to cover software. The Government too is worried that software exports may not take off if piracy is rampant: foreign firms may prefer to place manufacturing orders in a country where their software will not be copied.

MINUS POINT

WHATEVER credit Finance Minister V.P. Singh may get for his achievements on the tax front, he has failed on one crucial issue: getting a surplus on the revenue account in the budget, for use as investment under the capital account. The budget used to have such a revenue account surplus till 1978-79, but this gave way to a revenue account deficit in 1979-80 of Rs 694 crore. By the time Singh took charge of the ministry, this deficit had grown to Rs 3,497 crore. This year, the originally budgeted deficit figure on the revenue account was a phenomenal Rs 6,060 crore, but has been revised to Rs 6,446 crore. Worse, the revenue deficit is expected to grow next year to Rs 7,308 crore.

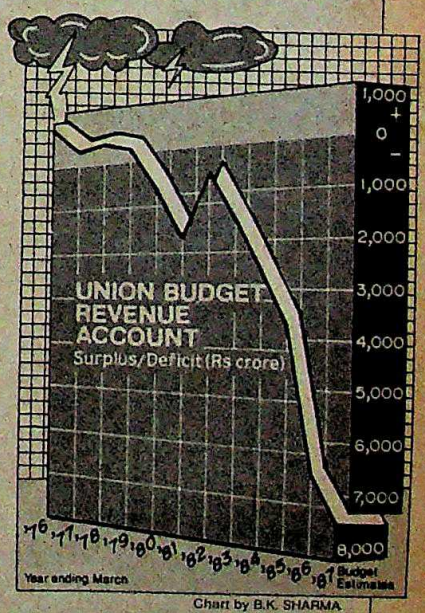

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

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THE BUDGET

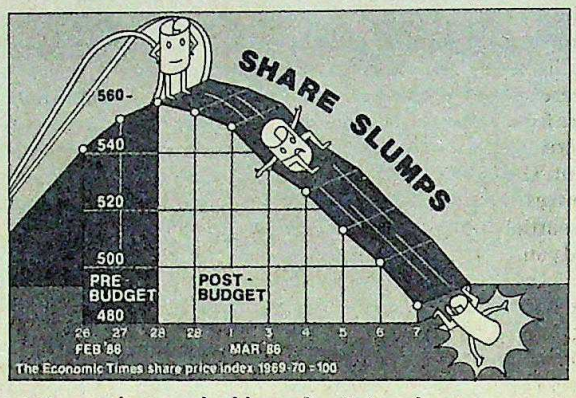
The Balancing Act

THE STOCK-market, as always, is a barometer of the economic mood. And if Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh's maiden budget last year sparked off an unprecedented boom in share prices, his repeat exercise last month had the opposite effect: the share price index headed for a precipitous crash before finally beginning to pull out of its tail-spin late last fortnight.

That initial reaction was understandable. For Singh's budget was greeted with an uproar of protest from industry, both big and small, while the middle class—almost delirious with the tax breaks it had got last year—was lukewarm this time despite his handing out tax concessions of close to Rs 50 crore to salaried employees.

More important, the Government seemed anxious for the first time to get rid of its pro-rich image: it announced unprecedented increases in the outlays on anti-poverty programmes, the same programmes which a leading government spokesman had been dismissive about a year ago. And, trimming its sails still further to the political winds, the Government reversed its earlier tax policy on a wide variety of consumer durables and slapped on new levies that will make everything from cars to television sets and refrigerators more expensive. Finally, in a significant step that indicated official disappointment with the textile industry's response to the tax cuts announced last year as a part of the new textile policy package, some of the taxes on textiles were moved up again.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

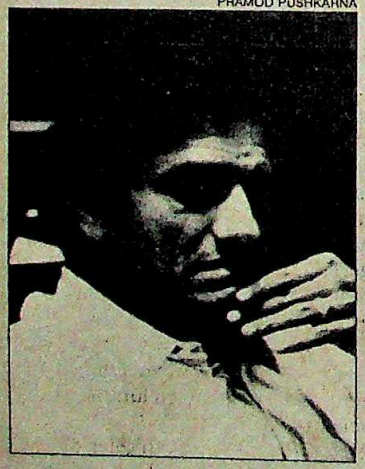


The lesson of the budget was clear: if economics shapes politics, the reverse is just as true, and politics is now beginning to re-shape the Government's economic policy. While doing this, if Singh tried a finely balanced tightrope act by trying to counter the impact of the new levies with evenly distributed carrots, the end result was not what he may have expected: broad swathes of taxpayers turned on the Government in anger and dismay, while a precious few were rooting for the tax changes and the new spending patterns announced.

Inevitably, the loudest cries of protest last fortnight were from the very sections that had been hailing the Rajiv Government a year ago, for the budget rocked the corporate world. Small businessmen threatened to launch a nation-wide protest, Maruti Udyog's cars and vans were likely to cost Rs 12,000 more, and TV manufacturers warned that sales would drop 35 per cent because of the increased duties.

All three—small industry, automobiles and electronics—constitute the fastest growing sectors of industry, and all three will suffer some setback in terms of growth. For good measure, some of the

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



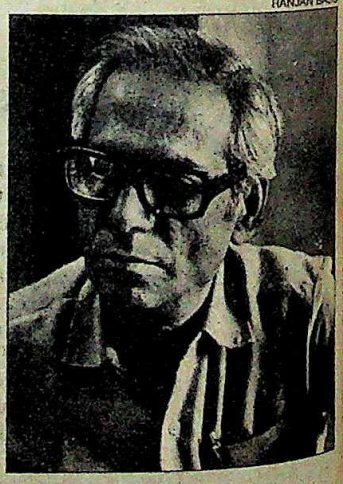
"Certain provisions in the budget have eroded the confidence generated by the last budget."

RAMESH MAHESHWARI
president, AIEI

"The small print in the budget has greater punch than the headlines."

ASHOK GARWARE
vice-chairman and managing director Garware Nylon

RANJAN BASU



"It is a pity that one arm of the Government gives, another takes away."

N. DUTTA
president, FASSI

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fastest growing companies in the country said their own growth rates would falter because their tax burden would go up following the fiat against capitalising interest charges on projects *(see box)* and the scrapping of the investment allowance. Meanwhile, a run was feared on the Unit Trust of India (UTI) because of the withdrawal of a tax concession on inter-corporate dividends: companies were expected to pull out over Rs 200 crore from UTI and invest the money elsewhere.

Chaos reigned on the excise front. The Government announced that the prices of trucks would drop because of the partial shift from excise duties to a modified value added tax (Modvat), but both Ashok Leyland and the Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO) quickly announced that they would, on the contrary, be forced to jack up prices. Maruti held back deliveries of 1,400 cars and vans, hoping that the Government would do some rethinking.

For good measure, lawyer and tax expert Nani Palkhivala came down hard on a new provision empowering income tax inspectors to walk into people's homes as part of a drive to rope in tax evaders, and termed it the first step towards creating a police state. And on the other end of the political spectrum, leftist economists criticised the small increases in plan outlays on core sectors of industry.

The Government seemed taken aback by the negative reaction. Although a Finance Ministry spokesman argued that the Government was by and large satisfied with the public response, and that the points of criticism focused on a handful of proposals ("This is inevitable in any budget," he said), the Government gave every indication of getting ready to reconsider some of the more controversial points in the budget.

SINGH himself told Parliament that the new powers to income tax inspectors would be reviewed and guidelines laid down to prevent abuse, and UTI may be let off the hook through an amendment of the fiat on inter-corporate dividends being taxed. Even Maruti, it seemed, might get some limited reprieve.

Nevertheless, businessmen remained critical. "The budget," said Orkay Silk Mills Chairman Kapal Mehra, "is a cocktail, a blend of everything that can only result in a hangover." Ramesh Maheshwari, president of the Association of Indian Engineering Industry (AIEI), said: "While the budget has some commendable features, certain misconceived provisions in it have eroded the confidence generated by the last budget." And Ashok Garware, vice-chairman and managing director of Garware Nylons, added: "The small print in the budget has greater punch than the headlines."

Amid this chorus of criticism, the good points of the budget were ignored, partly because the Government itself failed to highlight some of the tax concessions, the best example being the one on house rent allowance. Also, the level of plan spending is unusually good: Rs 20,100 crore will be spent this year (the original estimate last March was only Rs 18,500 crore), and another Rs 22,300 crore next year. So almost 45 per cent of the total seventh plan central sector outlay of Rs 95,500 crore will have been spent in the first two years of the plan, whereas the normal achievement is barely 35 per cent. So, although the Government has failed to keep down the deficit or the subsidy bill, it has maintained the development tempo.

Also, some of the criticism was overblown. For one thing, the budget proposals will not have the kind of sweeping impact that was initially feared: companies like Reliance Industries, for instance, were anxious to emphasise that their tax burden would not go too far out of line because of the withdrawal of the investment allowance and the refusal to permit the capitalisation of interest. For another, a leading multinational company worked out sums to show that the lower corporate tax rate and the substitute for the discontinued investment allowance more than make up for the scrapping of the invest-

INCOME TAX

Saving Grace

INDIA is supposed to be one of the most heavily taxed countries in the world. But, with the new tax concessions granted in the budget by Finance Minister V.P. Singh (the higher standard deduction limit and the improved tax break on house rent allowance), it is possible to earn close to Rs 4,000 a month, and still pay no income tax.

Among the several people who realised this a couple of days after Budget day was Rajiv Vaidya, a 32-year-old middle-level executive in a construction firm in New Delhi. Vaidya gets a basic salary of Rs 2,575, plus 30 per cent of that as house rent allowance (Rs 772), and another Rs 500 as conveyance allowance. The total: Rs 3,847.

Vaidya stays in a three-room flat in north Delhi, and pays Rs 800 every month as rent. He also has some basic savings: 8 per cent of his pay is deducted by the company for his provident fund (Rs 206). The monthly premium on his Rs 30,000 life insurance policy, which he took when he got married, is Rs 94. And he has made it an annual practice to buy national savings certificates worth Rs 2,500, which he hopes will build up to a tidy sum by the time his 3-year-old daughter is of marriageable age. For this, he sets aside Rs 200 every month in a recurring deposit account with his bank.

So his total monthly savings (if you include the company's matching contribution to his provident fund account) come to Rs 706.

He is finally left with after all the savings and after paying his house rent, Rs 2,547, which Vaidya finds a reasonably comfortable sum for running his scooter, paying the fees for his daughter's nursery school and for meeting his domestic expenses.

Vaidya's office accountant worked out the accompanying table, to show him he would be paying no income tax in the coming year.

RAJIV VAIDYA'S PERSONAL FINANCES

	(In Rupees)
BASIC PAY	2,575
30% HRA	772
CONVEYANCE	500
TOTAL SALARY	**3,847**
DEDUCTIONS:	
PROVIDENT FUND (8% of basic pay)	206
INCOME TAX	Nil
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	**206**
TAKE HOME PAY	**3,641**

CALCULATION OF TAXABLE INCOME

	(In Rupees)
SALARY	2,575
HRA to extent taxable (10% of salary)	258
CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE (not taxed as spent on duties)	Nil
GROSS TAXABLE INCOME	**2,833**
LESS STANDARD DEDUCTION (30% of salary, with a ceiling of Rs 10,000 p.a.)	833
DEDUCTION ON PF, LIC & NATIONAL SAVINGS CERTS.	500
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	**1,333**
NET TAXABLE INCOME	**1,500**
TAX EXEMPTION LIMIT	1,500
INCOME TAX BURDEN	Nil

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ment allowance. The AIEI disagrees with this finding, but clearly the effects of the new tax regime are not going to be disastrous.

Also, most of the changes had been mentioned in the long-term fiscal policy last December, and discussed endlessly since. And Bimal Jalan, chief economic adviser in the Finance Ministry, maintained that small-scale industry should have no real reason to complain: "The Government has given small business tax concessions worth no less than Rs 75 crore in the budget."

Nevertheless, sections of small industry may be badly hit. N. Dutta, president of the Federation of Associations of Small Scale Industries (FASSI), illustrated this with the case of a stainless steel utensil unit in Malda, West Bengal. The unit got an investment subsidy of Rs 1 lakh by going to a backward district, but it is no more exempt from excise duties and will now have to cough up Rs 93,000 in taxes. Said Dutta bitterly: "What one arm of the Government gives, another takes away."

BUT THE real disappointment in the budget may turn out to be Modvat, the innovation that industry has been clamouring for over the past decade. Based on the principle that taxes on inputs are taxed again in the final product (leading to a cascading effect), Modvat modifies this by giving set-offs for taxes on inputs. The result, however, has not been the drop in costs and prices that both the Government and industry had been hoping for; indeed, prices in most cases have gone up with the introduction of Modvat. A government official grinned at the unexpected result of the innovation, and said: "May be industry was wrong, then, in talking so much about the cascading effect of taxes."

Right or wrong, there were indications that after the initial chorus of protests, industry was beginning to recognise that it could live with the new tax regime. If this was the message of the late upswing on the stock-markets, then V.P.Singh may well have managed to survive his tightrope walk by balancing the stick with the carrot.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

INDUSTRY

Crying Foul

AT LEAST two companies deferred their bonus issues, the stock-markets plunged, and firms gloomily faced the prospect of having to cough up hefty amounts to the Government. Inevitably, a rising chorus of corporate voices forecast mayhem.

The bear that mauled the market and sent many businessmen into a tizzy is a complicated accounting practice that the Government now proposes to abolish retrospectively from 1974. Following a favourable court verdict which the Supreme Court confirmed in 1974, companies had begun tagging on to the cost of assets the interest on the money borrowed to buy the assets. "Capitalising" interest had the obvious advantage of inflating asset values in balance sheets. On the bloated asset values, firms could claim higher depreciation write-offs and claim more of the investment allowance that the Government granted them till this year.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India has always frowned on the practice, and chartered accountants have repeatedly added cautionary notes while certifying the annual accounts of the companies that resorted to it. But backed by court verdicts, many firms went ahead nevertheless. *The Economic Times* reported last fortnight that 26 companies have capitalised Rs 424 crore, while another study put the amount at over Rs 500 crore. The companies include such corporate stars as Reliance Industries (about Rs 190 crore), J.K. Synthetics (about Rs 40 crore),

"Giving a clarification after twelve years on the capitalisation of interest issue is not fair."
F.C. RUSTAGI
president, J.K. Synthetics

Lohia Machines (Rs 13 crore), Ambalal Sarabhai Enterprises (over Rs 10 crore), Orkay Silk Mills (Rs 7 crore) and Wimco (Rs 1.6 crore).

Many of them will have to repay the exchequer some of the rebates obtained on the basis of the higher asset calculation. Exactly how much each will have to shell out is not clear, but last fortnight companies were anxious to clarify that their liabilities would not be back-breaking.

Nevertheless, the criticism was loud and harsh. Said F.C. Rustagi, president of J.K. Synthetics: "The Government had said that the fiscal policy would be long term—prospectively, not retrospectively. Giving a clarification after 12 years is not fair." Added Kamaljit Singh, the vice-chairman and managing director of Wimco, one of the companies that deferred bonus issues: "It is unfair and could create havoc."

After Reliance shares tumbled on the stock exchange, the company hastily issued a press release that its liability would run to Rs 8 crore, claiming that unutilised investment allowance would offset most of the money it would normally have been expected to shell out. Wimco's Singh says that the match company will have to fork out Rs 60 lakh, while Orkay officials put their company's liability at Rs 1 crore.

The official edict could have other consequences. With assets being worth less than what balance sheets have been listing, the affected companies' creditors could now ask for more security. The companies will also have to revise their annual accounts for the last several years.

"There will be a lot of other complications," notes Vinay Kumar Jain, chief executive (corporate planning) at Lohia Machines. "Under company law, dividends can be distributed only after the profit is arrived at correctly. The Government's decision means that companies have paid dividends based on incorrect profits." The Government may not put companies in the dock for this. But that will be small comfort to industrialists up in arms over an accounting practice that has finally been buried by V.P. Singh. —PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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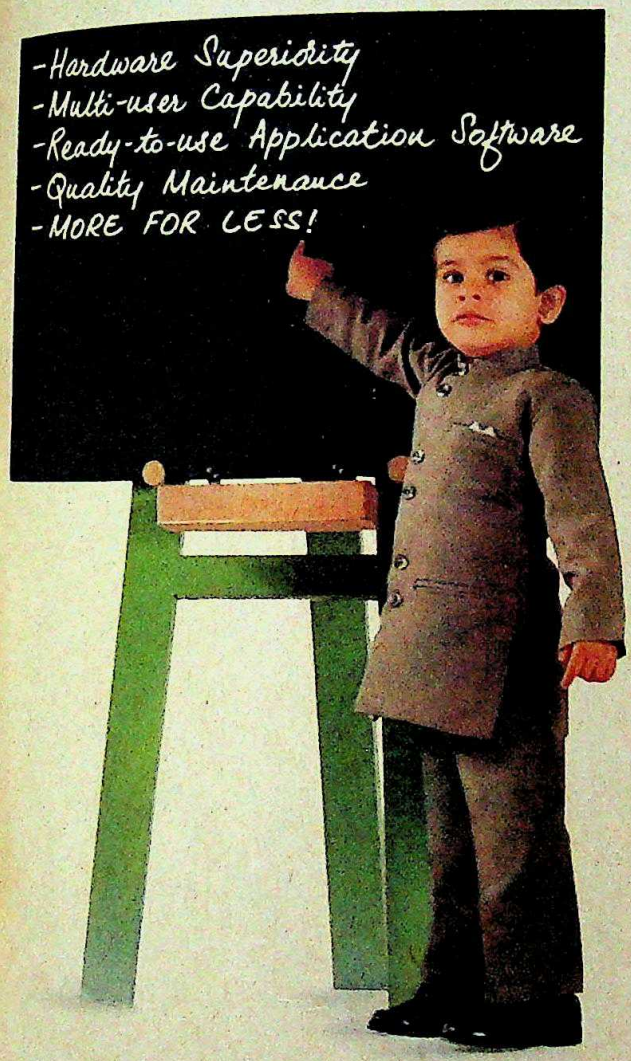

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AHMEDABAD

The Washing Well

KARSANDAS Patel may not have realised it when he launched his Nirma washing powder. But Ahmedabad has been turned into the national capital for the detergent industry: not just because of Patel's whitening success, but also because other entrepreneurs in Ahmedabad have jumped on to the bandwagon. Products like KT, Vimal, Hippolin, Amar and Ranjit have copied Nirma's formula for success and are doing comparably dizzying climbs up sales graphs. Today, over 400 such small-scale units dot the industrial suburbs of Ahmedabad.

Of the annual detergent powder production of about five lakh tonnes, three lakh tonnes are produced by the unorganised sector. Of this, Ahmedabad itself accounts for 2.5 lakh tonnes, worth Rs 190 crore, of which Nirma alone is responsible for Rs 110 crore. But the others are not far behind. Vimal already has a turnover of Rs 20 crore, and Hippolin Rs 22 crore.

If Nirma succeeded because of an advertising budget that has grown to Rs 1.5 crore, and a jingle that was heard on practically every street-corner and in millions of homes across the country, the me-too manufacturers have taken a leaf out of Karsandas Patel's book. Almost all of them have opted for expensive advertising through television, created their own jingles that sometimes sound suspiciously like the Nirma original, strengthened the sales network, and shown an unabashed disregard for such virtues as investment in research and development (R&D). Asks one of the manufacturers: "Why should we sink money in R&D? In spite of all its research, Hindustan Lever's Surf will never be able to catch up with us."

Gujarat is, of course, the ideal place from which to launch a detergent revolution. Both the main ingredients for the detergent, soda ash and linear alkyl benzene (LAB), are readily available in the state. Gujarat produces 90 per cent of the country's soda ash, and LAB is produced by the Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd (IPCL) of Baroda.

Inevitably, the personal rags-to-riches stories rival Patel's too. In 1970, when Bhupendra Shah, one of the partners of Hippolin, churned out just one tonne of detergent a day, he never thought that he would one day be producing 35,000 tonnes a year. Armed with an advertising budget of Rs 1 crore and 200 agents in practically every state (compared to Nirma's 400 agents), Shah foresees a sparkling future for himself.

Ahmedabad has been turned into the national capital for the detergent industry. Today over 400 small-scale units dot the industrial suburbs of the city.

Detergents on sale: shining success

Not very different from the Hippolin success story is Vimal's. Started in 1976, producing just 500 kg a day in a shed in Rakhial, the factory has shifted to a 10,000-sq metre complex at Ramol and produces 30,000 tonnes of detergent a year. Amrit Patel, one of the partners of Vimal, said candidly that he got into the business because he saw quick money. He was right. Vimal also plans to come out with a toilet soap next year, at a mechanised plant in Kalyanpura.

Ojas, one of the foremost detergent powder manufacturers in Ahmedabad, hasn't been so lucky. While the others have grown multifold, Ojas still produces 1,200 tonnes a year. With the advantage of having started in 1969, when it had virtually no competitors, it nevertheless stagnated because it took the market for granted and was not adventurous.

Not surprisingly then, the market for the product has burgeoned. In 1980, detergent powder accounted for only 22.4 per cent of the total production of washing soap. This has already increased to 41.2 per cent last year, and is expected to rise to 50 per cent this year. This is mainly due to the easy availability of cheap detergents and the rising prices of soaps because of the scarcity of oils.

Not satisfied with dominating the detergent powder market, Nirma and its competitors are now readying to capture the detergent cake market as well: it seems the only way to be able to cut into the rural scene. Says Jitubhai Kothari, a manager at Nirma: "In villages, the concept of soaking clothes with detergent powder and then carrying it to the pond is alien. So we are making cakes now. Most of them also bathe with the washing soap. So is it not better that they bathe with a soap which is kinder to their skin?"

There is, however, a fly in the detergent. Observing the boom and the colossal profits that the industry was reaping in Ahmedabad, Finance Minister V.P. Singh decided last year to clamp an excise duty of 15 per cent on all units with sales of over Rs 7.15 lakh. The detergent manufacturers protested loudly that they were being singled out unfairly, and blamed the impost on large manufacturers who have been unable to face the competition in the market. But the Government has been adamant. "This stepmotherly treatment has affected us all," wails Surendra Patel, secretary of the Gujarat Detergent Manufacturers' Association.

But the competition, tax burden and mud-slinging notwithstanding, the boom in the detergent industry remains unaffected. The money is still flowing in, mini-Nirmas are born every other day, and the flood of detergent jingles on the box threatens to drown out all the rest.

—RAMESH MENON

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TRADE UNIONS

Making Capital

HE DOESN'T look like your unfriendly neighbourhood moneylender. Short, stooped, with a shock of white hair and lens-magnified eyes, R.J. Mehta is an unlikely candidate for Shylock's role. One of the most respected trade unionists in the city, if not the country, his clutch of engineering, chemical and textile workers adds up to 1,25,000. But for the last few years, between gate meetings and tending his magnificent roof-top garden, Mehta has found time to lend money to a score and more small companies, often at rates as high as 2 per cent a month compounded.

A few kilometres away, at the head of the dusty P. D'Mellow Road which runs along the docks, in a building whose wooden stairs creak ominously, are the headquarters of the New India Cooperative Bank Ltd (total deposits from 12 branches: Rs 28 crore) which has advanced about Rs 16 crore to companies big and small. Such capitalist doings wouldn't be unusual in themselves, but the 18-year-old bank is a trade union enterprise, the brainchild of flamboyant anti-capitalist George Fernandes and his Hind Mazdoor Kisan Parishad (HMKP).

A stone's throw away from the Bombay Central Railway Station is a huge smelly apartment block, one tenement of which is occupied by the Bombay Taximen's Union (BTU). Its General Secretary, Anthony Quadros, a puffy man who sits hunched as if over a steering wheel, manages the affairs of about 40,000 taxi-drivers in Bombay, besides running two petrol pumps and two spare parts shops. For good measure, he is also setting up a small battery-manufacturing unit in Vashi. Six years ago, BTU had hit the headlines by trying to buy the giant Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company.

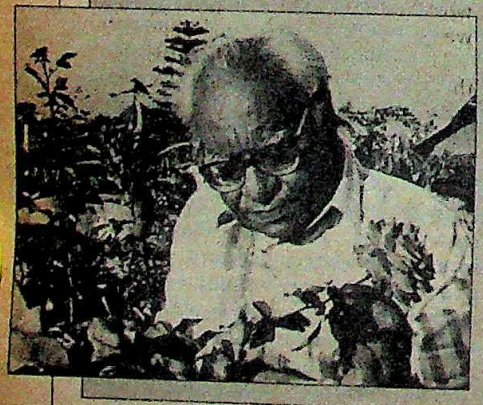
Is all this what Marx would have expected of the leaders of the working class? Perhaps not, but the fact is that some Bombay unions are flush with funds and are branching out into businesses well beyond the trusts and welfare set-ups normally associated with them. Thus S.R. Kulkarni's Port and Dock Workers' Union runs some commodity shops and has bought a small hotel in Lonavla where workers can holiday for a nominal sum and has also loaned Parchas of Holiday Home Rs 15 lakh. But this is a far cry from lending money to the Tatas' flagship companies, as Fernandes' bank does.

But the unions themselves do not see the running of such businesses as deviationist strategy that might subvert the revolution. In fact, as Mehta tells it, he started on the Shylock path in 1973 purely as a goodwill gesture to save the jobs of 650 workers of the Fancy Corporation Ltd, at Lalbaugh—makers of the Hakoba range of fabrics—who were in danger of being thrown on the streets because the partners had fallen out, the coffers were empty and an expected polyester import licence had not come through. The workers were members of Mehta's Bombay Textile Mazdoor Sabha; and to save their jobs the union lent the owners Rs 5 lakh as start-up money at 18 per cent interest. "We did not ask for any security or collateral," recalls Mehta. "All we took was a plain promissory note. After all, 650 jobs are more important than Rs 5 lakh."

However, he found the transactions to his taste and continued along the so far untrodden path. Today, 13 years later, he has 29 companies on his books and has lent a total of Rs 1.78 crore—mostly to save jobs, ensure the payment of wages, and allow closed units to open again. Among his clients are people as varied as the evening paper *Midday* (Rs 5 lakh), Pure Drinks Pvt Ltd (Rs 3 lakh) and Simplex Woollen Mills Pvt Ltd (Rs 27 lakh). The rates of interest vary, but never drop below 18 per cent and on quick short-term loans could go as high as 30 per cent.

And Mehta is no longer satisfied with promissory notes as security. The Shaparia Dock and Still Manufacturing Company—the oldest ship and barge-making firm in Bombay—mortgaged a large house in Mehta's favour for a Rs 24-lakh loan. The directors of Laxmi Spinning, in hock to the tune of Rs 6 lakh, handed their flats over. Trans Auto directors, at their wits' end because the banks had refused loans, gave away their shares to Mehta in exchange for a life-saving Rs 2.5 lakh. And the owners of Kanti Engineering, a sizeable firm with 150 employees, went so far as to pledge ornaments and diamond rings to the union.

Debtors acknowledge that the rose champion is not a bad loan master. As Shiv Prakash Seth of Simplex Woollen Mills (turnover: Rs 5 crore), which has not made a profit in the last two years, acknowledges: "all our 1,100 workers would have lost their jobs if Mehta had not bailed us out." He admits that the interest at 2 per cent a month compounded is a bit steep, but adds that "there was no other way we could get the money". He calls Mehta "both hard and soft" when it comes to repayment: hard because he



R.J. Mehta has 29 companies on his books and lent a total of Rs 1.78 crores—mostly to save jobs, ensure the payment of wages, and allow units to open again.

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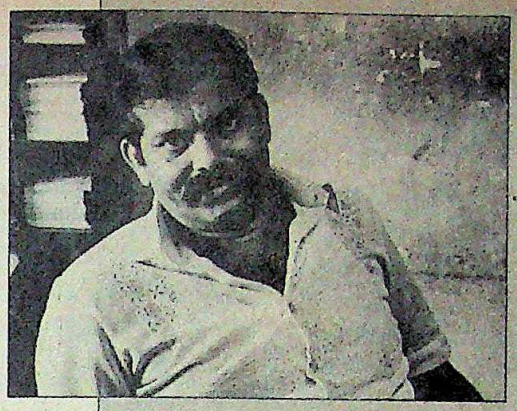

Quadros manages the affairs of two petrol pumps and two spare parts shops. He is also setting up a small battery manufacturing unit.

insists on payments on the due date, and soft "because he always listens to reason". Seth and fellow managers obviously dare not push the union leader too far: for one he controls their workforce, and for another he holds their shares in Simplex as well as three flats.

Mehta can afford to make such payments because, among other things, his workers pay him 10 per cent of whatever arrears they receive as the result of a settlement and 5 per cent of their bonus takings. So, in fact, his union activity finances his loaning activity. But the New India Cooperative Bank was born quite differently, and was the result of an idea George Fernandes had when he visited Germany in the 1960s and saw that the second biggest bank in the country was run by unions. Besides, labour leaders back home realised that they had to have their own sources of money. Taximen, for instance, were being sucked dry by Multani money-lenders who charged an anna in the rupee a month (about 75 per cent per annum), and textile workers were in similar straits. "We had to inculcate the savings habit among the workers," says Vice-Chairman Anjit Bhanu. The Bombay Labour Cooperative Bank began in 100 sq ft of borrowed space with Rs 2 lakh as share capital.

The New India Cooperative Bank Ltd, with total deposits from 12 branches: Rs 28 crores, the brainchild of George Fernandes, has advanced about Rs 16 crores to companies big and small.

The bank's name was changed in 1976 because the managers felt they could attract more people if the word 'labour' was dropped. Today, it is opening a 13th branch, discounts bills for TELCO, has received the final instalment of a Rs 20-lakh loan given to Garware Enterprise at 17.5 per cent interest, and has the proud distinction of financing about 20 small-scale industries from scratch. It also gives out innumerable small loans to people, and a major part of its work is financing taxi-drivers at concessional loan rates.

NEVERTHELESS, the bank appears to have realised that big loans given to single borrowers are better than lending money to a crowd of small borrowers. For it has begun to look out for potential borrowers in a consistent way. Satish Bhatt, a partner in the block-making firm of Liberty Process Works, tells the story of how one of the bank's managers badgered him to take a loan to modernise and buy new equipment. Bhatt says he first tried to get money from a nationalised bank and was mauled in the process: "The bank treated me as if I was a criminal." So he met this manager and was persuaded to take a loan of Rs 1 lakh. And now he says: "I had never borrowed money from anyone in my life, but I found that with the advanced machines I had purchased, my business trebled in size and I was able to pay back the loan very quickly. The bank is a very good creditor. The funny thing is that they don't want me to return the money so quickly as they lose interest on it." Today Bhatt oversees a turnover of Rs 50 lakh, has paid back about two-thirds of the Rs 9 lakh he eventually borrowed, and is daringly thinking of going in for a Rs 25 lakh modern scanner—and asking the bank for the money.

Among the unions which got together to become Bhatt's benefactor was BTU, whose own businesses are doing very well. It had bought two petrol pumps in the 1970s to supply quality fuel to its members. The pumps, bought for about a lakh each, now turn in about the same as yearly profit. The union pays an annual dividend of 12 per cent to its members from the pumps as well as from two profitable spare parts shops. Says Quadros: "We sell genuine stuff, but we don't give concessional rates to anyone. They are run like ordinary business." The union has constructed a 542-flat cooperative housing society in Kurla, and set up a cooperative credit society to give quick and cheap loans to taxi-drivers.

Now it's getting ambitious. By June, it will start constructing the shed for a small-scale battery plant just outside Bombay to produce 500 batteries a month. The total investment is Rs 6 lakh, partly financed by contributions of Rs 500 from each member. Explains Quadros: "A battery today costs anything from Rs 800 to Rs 1,000. We estimate that we can make and sell them profitably at Rs 400 each with no compromises on quality." Such enterprise is only to be expected from BTU—after all, way back in 1980, it had the temerity to bid for Firestone.

But for all their flourishing business activities, Mehta, the New India Cooperative Bank and BTU appear to be the exception rather than the rule, for few unions have the money or the inclination to set up shop in a big way. Indeed, many of the others object to diversification into undiluted business. For instance, S.R. Kulkarni says: "Trade unions are not there to do business. They are there to help workers. What would happen to us if we were consumed by the profit motive?"

Another man says much the same thing, in harsher language. Dr Datta Samant claims a following ten times as large as Mehta's and his union is said to be one of the richest in the city. He has had a huge house built for himself in Vikhroli, the butt of much caustic comment by fellow trade unionists. But he is clear about his priorities: "Isn't there any other work for the trade unions? The larger tasks go unheeded." Perhaps, but what's wrong with a little capitalist seasoning in the socialist stew?

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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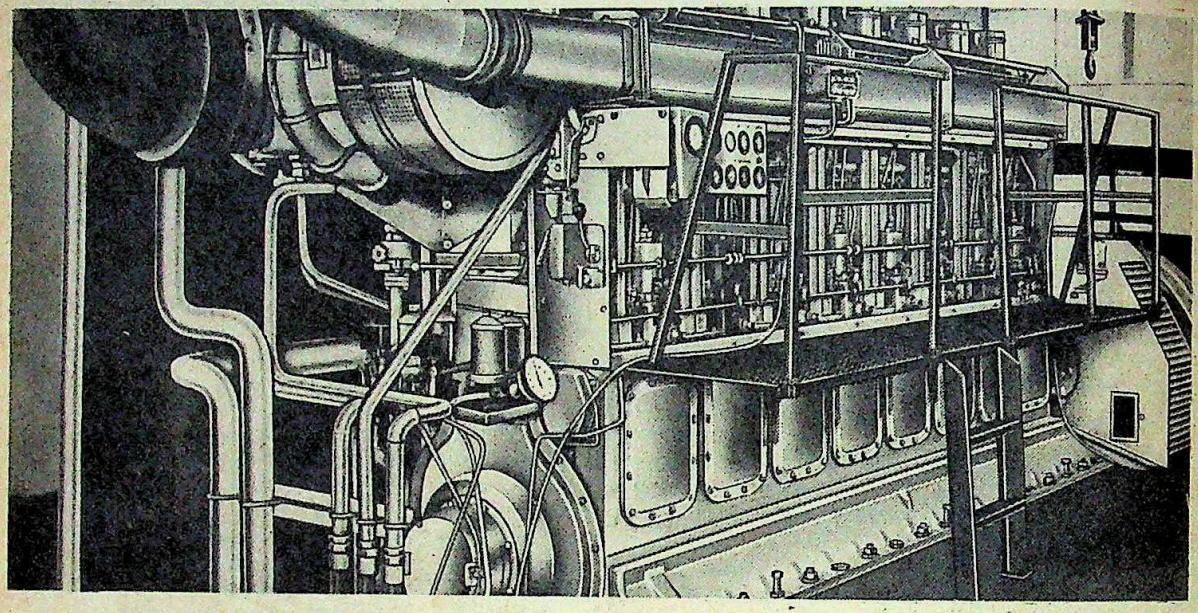

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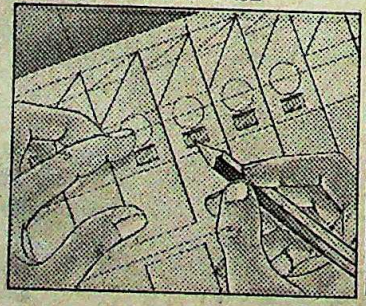

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FROG LEGS EXPORTS

Cold Feet

FROG legs exports from West Bengal have literally been put in cold storage. At Calcutta's Hindustan Ice and Cold Storage complex, stacks of cartons containing nearly 300 tonnes of frozen frogs legs destined for European and American gourmets have been awaiting shipment since September last year. The Calcutta customs authorities are refusing to clear the consignment without permission from the Department of Environment, which has been fighting to put an end to the frog trade.

Harassed Calcutta-based exporters only last fortnight managed to convince the Environment and Forest Ministry to allow shipment of frog legs already processed and ready for export. But the ministry has granted permission on the condition that the export be done only through a government agency. And even if this consignment goes through, it will perhaps be the last time frogs from the paddy fields of West Bengal will end up on western tables.

The ministry appears to have relented this time only because the Union Commerce Ministry had given advance permission to the exporters to send out up to 500 tonnes of frog legs during the current financial year. Moreover, export contracts had already been signed and the exporters were incurring losses of Rs 6.5 lakh—on cold storage and interest charges—every month since the Environment Ministry ban six months ago. Now exporters have been allowed to ship the ready consignments through the West Bengal Fisheries Development Corporation. "We are ready to do anything to clear our stocks since we cannot store frog legs for more than six months," says Kishore Samtani of Veejay Exports, one of Calcutta's biggest frog legs exporters.

"The root of the problem," explains Zoological Survey of India, Deputy Director Dr A.K.Ghosh, "is the Environment Ministry's belief that the trapping of frogs in West Bengal violates the norms laid down at the Convention of International Treaty on Endangered Species (CITES) held in Buenos Aires in April last year." The two species of edible frogs—Rana Tigrina and Rana Hexadactyla—exported from India are now considered endangered and the CITES rules aim at severely restricting, if not altogether stopping, the indiscriminate killing of the amphibians in India, Bangladesh and Indonesia—the three biggest frog legs exporters. To get a CITES permit from the Environment Ministry, the state Government has to certify categorically that the exports will not be detrimental to the survival of the species and that the amphibians are not being obtained in contravention of the wildlife protection laws of the state.

"Frogs, unlike crocodiles and shrimps, are not artificially cultured but are trapped from the paddy fields in Bengal," says Ghosh. Field studies conducted by the Zoological Survey of India in the state suggest an alarming decline in the availability of frogs. Yet the state Government and the exporters are continuing to lobby for liberalisations in frog legs exports. Calcutta-based exporters contend that the ministry's decision is unfair because exporters from Cochin, Madras and Bombay are still in business and there are no studies to prove that the availability of frogs in West Bengal is poorer than in other states. "We also know that trappers are sending out frogs from here to other states for export," claims an exporter, "and the entire objective of the CITES restrictions is being defeated."

The Environment and Forest Ministry has granted export permission but it will be perhaps the last time frogs from West Bengal will grace western tables.

Indeed, field studies carried out in parts of Marathwada and the Konkan by environmentalist Humayun Abdulali show that West Bengal is not the only state with declining frog population. Abdulali also pointed out that attempts at restricting the killings of frogs have had little impact. Although frog legs are being exported since 1963, environmentalists woke up to its potential perils only in 1981 when exports peaked at 4,368 tonnes from an average of 500 tonnes per annum in the 1960s. Considering that frogs consume at least one-tenth their own body weight in insect and other pests every day, it was pointed out that eliminations of several thousand tonnes of frogs over the years would lead to serious ecological imbalances, and increased use of toxic and expensive pesticides.

The early 1980s also witnessed the Salmonella infection scare in Europe and America, as a result of which frog legs exports plummetted. Various international organisations—like the World Wildlife Fund—also began campaigning against the frog legs trade, pointing out, among other things, the cruelty of the methods used for frog leg preparation.

In 1982, the Central Government introduced a quota system to regulate frog legs exports with the ultimate objective of bringing it down to negligible levels. Thus, every year the quota was being brought down and in 1984-85 the export limit was fixed at 2,500 tonnes. At the same time, the Government also

Frog legs' cartons: shelved

KALYAN CHAKRABORTY

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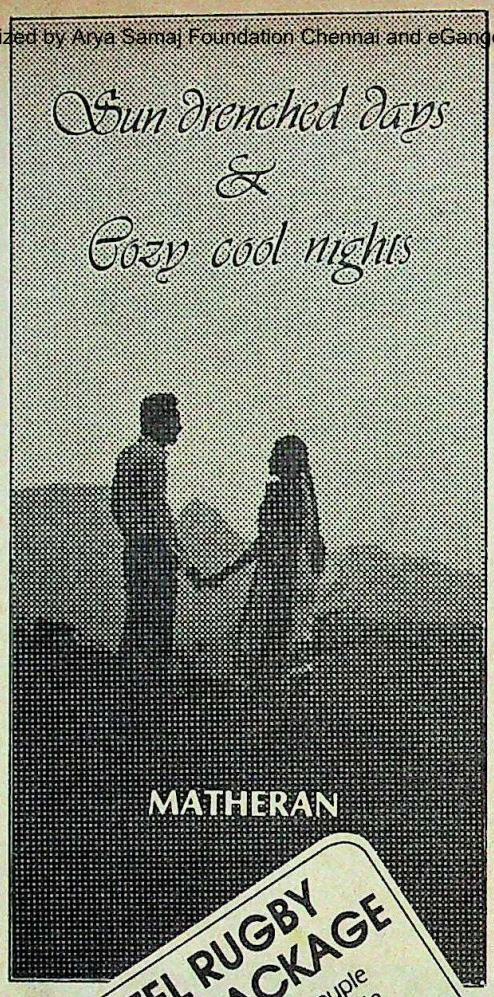

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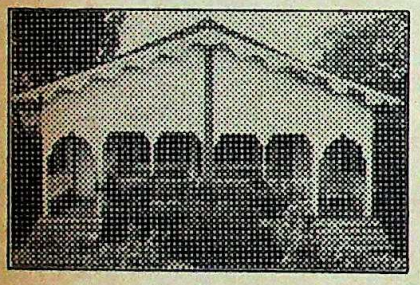

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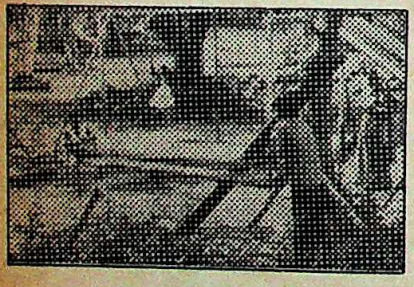
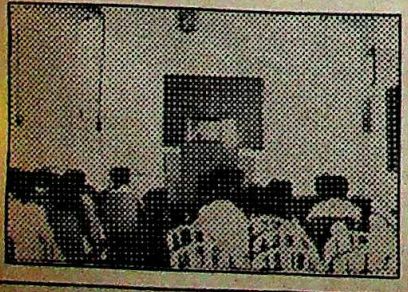


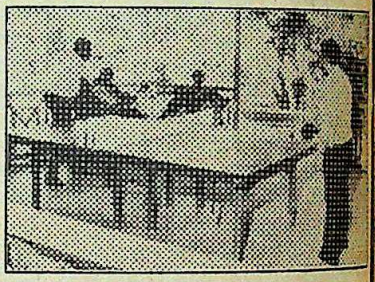
for one and all

At dusk when the crimson clouds turn grey and the twinkle of stars become visible, you can retire to the T.V. lounge before and after dinner.



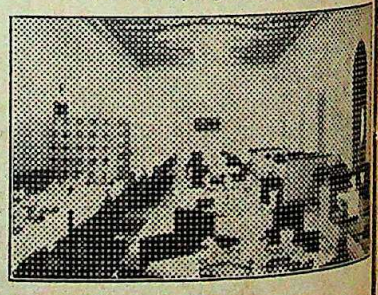
for the young at hearts

For those who consider only a vigorous workout to be adequate exercise, there is the table tennis room.



for the connoisseurs

The dining hall where you can inhale the heady fragrance of flowers and grass in the company that cheers.



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banned the procurement of frogs during the mating season—June 15 to August 15—and also stipulated that immature frogs should not be trapped. There is, however, no administrative machinery to ensure that the frog trappers and exporters comply. Not unnaturally, environmentalists like Ghosh feel that the Government's measures are simply not enough to protect the frogs.

After the CITES meet last year, the export quota was slashed and the Environment Ministry tightened regulations. But state officials feel that the ministry regulations are not very clear. Exporters came to know of the crackdown only in September last year after they had already exported about 100 tonnes frog legs worth Rs 73 lakh during the current financial year and had signed contracts for supplying another 300 tonnes. The state Government tried to help the exporters by granting them legal procurement licences for getting the 300-tonne export consignment cleared by the ministry. But the ministry declined to issue a CITES permit by pointing out that the frogs were not procured by licenced trappers. "This makes it all the more curious how the Environment Ministry can allow exports from other parts of the country!" a Calcutta-based exporter wonders.

Exporters are also lobbying for increased quotas by pointing out that the country earns between Rs 7 crore and Rs 12 crore in foreign exchange every year from the exports, while thousands of trappers and other workers are provided employment by this lucrative trade. On the other hand the ministry points out that indiscriminate killing of frogs only increases the population of agricultural pests. The ministry seems to have made West Bengal the test case to see if it can fight the export lobby. But the Government's allowance to the exporters last fortnight only proves that the trade will resist all attempts to put it in deep freeze.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

FRESH FOOD EXPORTS

Bad Taste

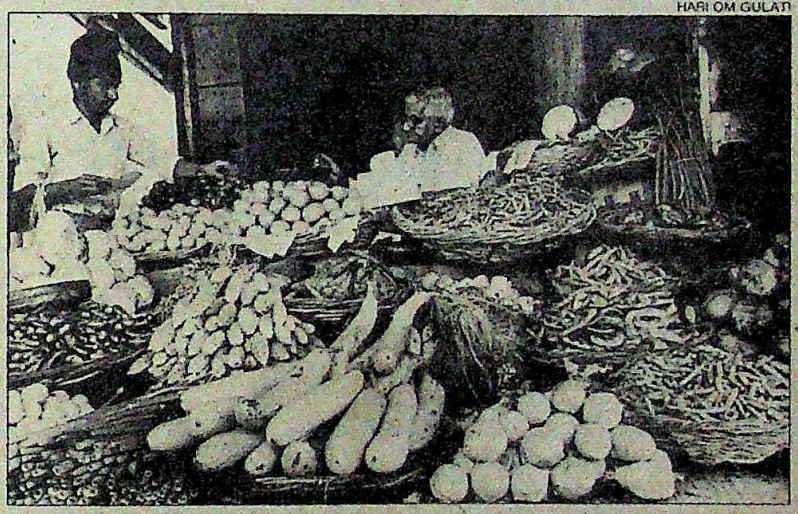
IT'S A classic boom and slump story. But the boom is elsewhere, and the slump is in India. And though the action is in something as insignificant as exports of fruits and vegetables, this could be a cautionary tale.

Till a few years ago, the member-countries of the European Economic Community (EEC) bought virtually no fruits and vegetables from the developing countries in South America, Africa and Asia. But this trade now totals one lakh tonnes annually, worth $85 million (Rs 100 crore). That's not an awful lot of money, going by the normal levels of world trade, but it could become bigger. The problem is that just when trade in this still unnoticed area has been taking off elsewhere, India's exports have slumped 48 per cent in the last two years.

There has to be an explanation, of course, and it comes from a study conducted by the Commerce Ministry, which says that the villain of the piece is none other than Air-India. For while airlines across the world have been cutting their freight rates for this burgeoning trade item, Air-India has stuck to its old rates. Today, as a result, its freight charges for fresh fruits and vegetables are between 80 per cent and 155 per cent higher than those charged by African airlines, 58 per cent higher than the Carribbean, and 44 per cent higher than Pakistan. Result: Indian exports are not competitive.

The irony is that this is an item in

HARI OM GULATI



Fresh fruits and vegetables on sale: lost opportunity

which India has a natural trading advantage. Of the EEC imports of $85 million, $58 million are accounted for by items which India can supply: fruits like mango, papaya, guava, chikoo, and vegetables like okra (*bhindi*), fresh ginger, sweet potatoes, *karela*. Mangoes themselves account for EEC imports of $20 million. Yet, though India is the world's largest grower of mangoes and accounts for a mammoth 62 per cent of global production, it ranks eighth in the list of suppliers to the EEC, behind such countries as Mali, Mexico, Upper Volta, Brazil, South Africa, Kenya and Pakistan.

In fact, the Commerce Ministry's study points out that importers abroad have "evinced a keen interest in the Indian mango" and explains that this is because India grows quality mangoes through a greater part of the year than most countries: February-March in Malabar, April-July in coastal Andhra, May-August in Mysore, and June-August in northern India. "All these regions have good quality mangoes conforming to specifications of European importers," the report says.

With 3 million hectares under fruit and vegetable cultivation, India has a large production base. And its location north of the Equator is an added advantage. But as the study points out, "Despite there being a taste preference for Indian fruits and vegetables, it is not possible for importers on the continent to import large quantities of these products. Importers in the surveyed countries contended that air freight rates from India to continental destinations should be at par with those of other developing countries." The moral of the story is clear: an opportunity to capture a rapidly growing market is slipping by.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

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CASSETTE PIRACY

High Stakes

SOMEWHERE in Bombay, in one of the offices along the busy Fort area, sits a man who has a most unusual job. A lawyer who heads the newly-formed anti-piracy cell of the Indian Phonographic Industry (IPI), his job is to deal crippling blows to one of the biggest and the most open illegal rackets ever.

Last fortnight, when the IPI met to celebrate 50 years of existence, its members took stock of just how virulent that plague was. In 1985 legitimate companies sold five million cassettes while the pirates sold 180 million, or 95 per cent of the market. The potential loss was Rs 450 crore in sales. No wonder that the three biggest recording companies—Gramophone Company of India (GCI), Music India Ltd (MIL) and CBS—have accumulated losses of Rs 15 crore over the last three years on a total turnover of Rs 25 crore. Says Sukumar Shidore, secretary, IPI: "We realised that if anybody was going to do anything about musicassette-piracy, it had to be ourselves. Hence the setting up of this cell."

Funded by a 32,000-Pound Sterling grant from the International Federation of Producers of Phonograms and Video-grams (IFPPV), its aim is to enforce the provisions of the Copyright (Amendment) Act, 1984, which allows for imprisonment up to three years and fines up to Rs 2 lakh for second and subsequent offences. Still, says IPI and GCI president Pradip Chanda: "It seems that the police do not give this problem any importance. That's a great pity, because it costs the exchequer Rs 80 crore in income tax and sales tax revenues every year." Chanda feels that with the formation of the cell, the industry will be able to carry out organised raids at the places where the raids will hit the most—the duplicating centres where machines churn out 500 cassettes an hour from one master cassette.

Musicassette piracy is comparatively new in India. Industry spokesmen reveal that, while in 1980 pirates had just 10 per cent of the market, by 1985 legitimate producers had been reduced to barely 5 per cent of the market. In 1980 the two biggest companies, GCI and MIL together controlled three-fourths of the market and sold 9.41 million cassettes and long-playing records (LPs). In 1985 their combined sales were just 9.82 million, a growth rate in sales of less than 1 per cent a year. GCI now has losses of Rs 12 crore and CBS of Rs 1.2 crore. Only MIL made a tiny profit of Rs 11 lakh last year, mainly because of its aggressive championship of ghazal singers.

But the industry has been driven to the wall and there's nothing left to do but fight. Says A.S. Subburaman of CBS: "How are we expected to promote new music when we are not making any profits at all? The pirate can choose the successful cassettes to copy, he has none of our overheads, he pays for no promotional campaign and he can lure the dealer with margins that are twice the ones we offer." He points out that the harm done by piracy is not just monetary, but also aesthetic, for newer artistes cannot be promoted. The 100-odd senior artistes whom the industry features on its inlay cards lose an estimated Rs 57 crore in royalty every year.

What is more, the pirates now turn out slicker copies—identical down to the copyright warning—which are sold at just a few rupees below the legitimate price. A significant portion of these upmarket pirated cassettes is marked the "T" series. This is also the legitimate brand of Supercassettes Industries Pvt Ltd of Delhi, a fast-growing enterprise run by Delhi-based Gulshan Arora. Arora now prints his posters with the warning that customers buy original cassettes only. Both the "T" series—legitimate and pirated cassettes—use the same kind of ground glass cases, but spokesmen of the industry deny the possibility that Supercassettes could be doing both legal and illegal business.

The stakes in the battle against piracy are very high. Vijay Lazarus (MIL) feels that the entry of the compact disc notwithstanding, the cassette as a sound carrier will continue to rule the roost well into the 1990s. Says Subburaman: "Nothing is going to replace the cassette as an inexpensive, convenient medium for the next 10 years. So it is all the more urgent that we kill piracy now, otherwise it will grow to horrendous proportions." Clearly, much hope hinges on that nameless lawyer in his office.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

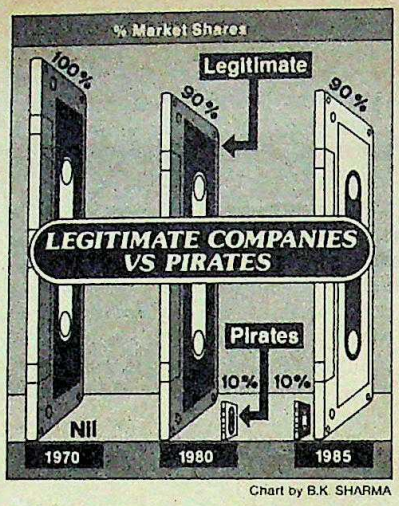
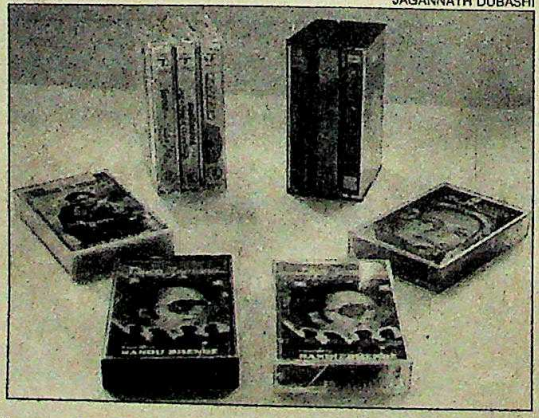


Chart by B.K SHARMA

PRADIP CHANDA
president,
Indian Phonographic Industry

"The police do not give this problem any importance. It costs the exchequer Rs 80 crore in income tax and sales tax revenues every year."

JAGANNATH DUBASHI



Pirated cassettes: cornering the market

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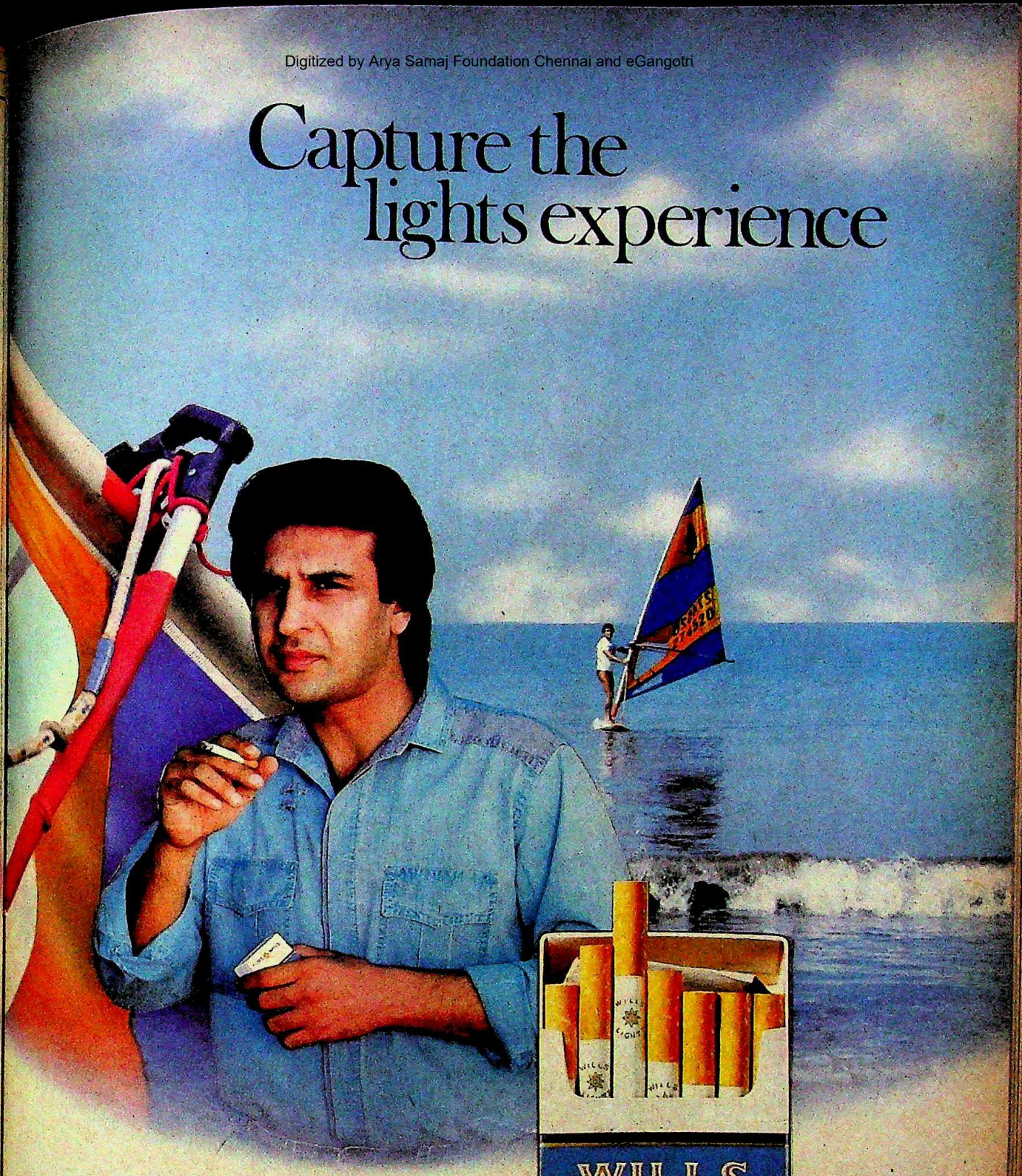
Capture the lights experience



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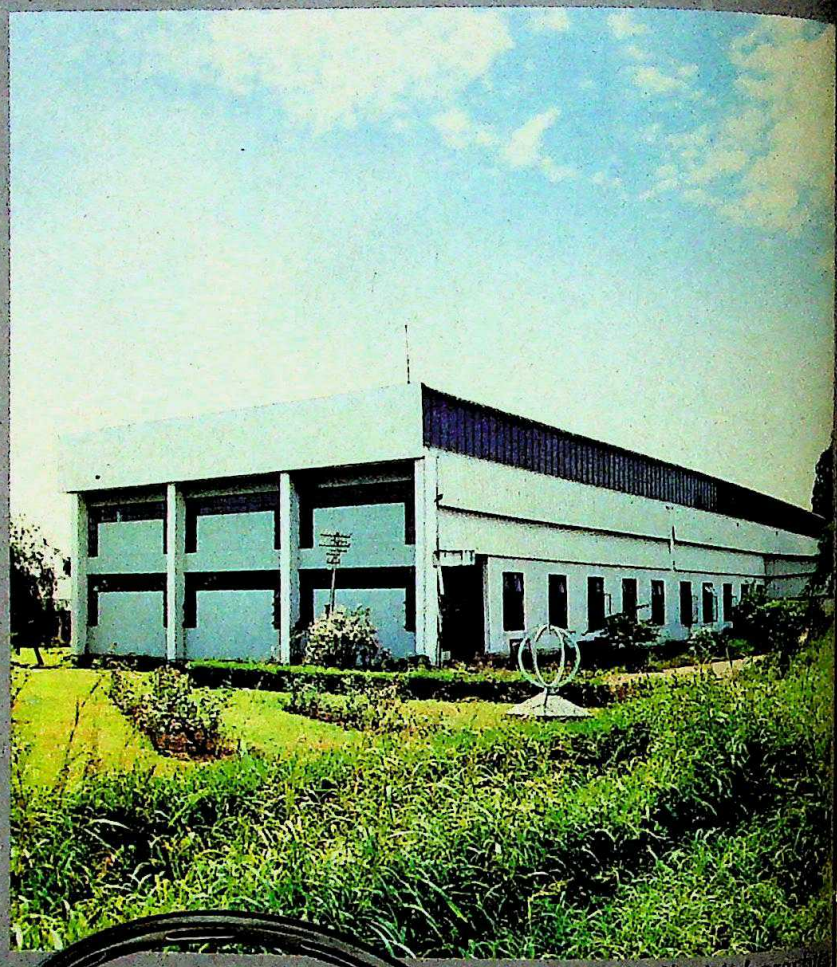
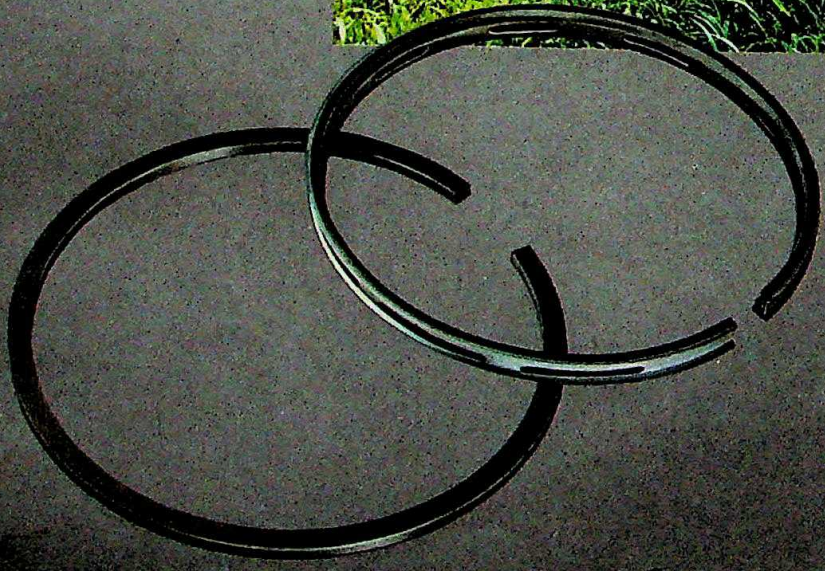


Nasik, Maharashtra



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Perfect Circle Vict

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BANKS

Wrong Target

IT WAS billed as the banking scandal of the decade: the London-based Indian businessman Rajendra Sethia was alleged to have defrauded three Indian banks of countless crores. Sethia himself landed in jail, awaiting trial, the chairmen of the Punjab National Bank (PNB) and the Central Bank of India (CBI), which had lent Sethia most of the money, were sent packing. And PNB's London-based general manager, Amarjeet Singh, was transferred to Delhi, then summarily sacked and finally arrested on the charge of having conspired with Sethia to defraud PNB.

An outraged nation and Parliament were mollified by the swift retribution. But last fortnight, it was the Government that had egg on its face: because, it now turns out, it got the wrong man.

In a stinging verdict that must mock the Banking Deparment and the PNB, the Delhi High Court quashed Amarjeet Singh's dismissal and not only awarded Singh compensation of Rs 1 lakh, but also awarded him legal costs totalling Rs 75,000. Singh had challenged his dismissal and argued that he had been the victim of a conspiracy hatched by other officials in the bank.

But even as the case got under way, it became clear that the Government didn't have a very clear idea of what it was doing in the whole case concerning Sethia. Lawyers representing the Central Bureau of Investigation had initially said in court that the "amount of total fraud may run into $ 1,000 million", but then clambed down somewhat shamefacedly to no more than $ 10.4 million.

The bank's defence in the case that Singh filed against his dismissal was no more convincing. While PNB submitted that Singh had "entered into several transactions which have put the bank in a difficult position and may lead the bank into loss of crores of rupees", it was later forced to admit, again in court, that it had not relied on Sethia's accounts while deciding to dismiss Singh. There was little else the bank could have done. Of the $92 million that was owed by Sethia to PNB at the time of Singh's arrest, all but $1 million were backed by securities or irrevocable letters of credit.

In the stinging verdict that must mock the Banking Department and the PNB the Delhi High Court quashed Amarjit Singh's dismissal

Indeed, Singh's lawyer Lalit Bhasin was able to argue in court that Singh had been one of PNB's most successful officials, and that he had been rewarded with quick promotions because of his track record. Bhasin claimed that during Singh's four-year term in London, he had taken the bank's London deposits from barely 9 million pounds to 185 million pounds, while profits had soared from 200,000 pounds to 6 million pounds. Bhasin argued that by dismissing Singh the bank had ruined the career of a "brilliant" official, and the court agreed when it said that the "present case is one of stigma, and a stigma is not removed until the order is demolished".

Singh's strongest argument, predictably, was that the bank's money that he had lent to Sethia was safe because of the securities pledged to the bank. In fact, Sethia's advocate said that PNB had already recovered $40 million from various securities since 1984 and Singh argued last fortnight that the bank would get more than its due if it decided to sell the shares in Jokai India pledged to it. Asked Singh: "Why aren't they selling the securities lying with them? They are not doing it because they are not interested in recovering the money. Every penny advanced to Sethia was secured with three pennies worth of securities."

Meanwhile, the intriguing question remains: why did the Government go with a vengeance after a PNB official when most of the bank's loans to Sethia were secured, unlike the loans given by the Central Bank of India, which has so far recovered only 10 per cent of the money that was due to it a year ago? —

—PRABHU CHAWLA

ORKAY

New Twist

KAPAL Mehra is something of a stoic, but on February 25 he was grinning from ear to ear. The chairman of Orkay Silk Mills had just heard that the Bombay High Court had struck down an excise order for Rs 10.5 crore imposed on June 1, 1985.

More important were the strictures that Justice M.L. Pendse passed against the former director of anti-evasion (central excise), M.S. Bindra. He scolded the now compulsorily retired officer for a number of sins of omission and commission. Specifically, since Bindra supervised the raids and the subsequent investigation of allegedly undeclared production of 535.5 tonnes of yarn, he should not have judged his own case.

Also, the method of passing the order "creates serious suspicion in mind about the bona fide exercise of the powers," for Bindra had claimed to have dictated the 130-page order in eight hours in two sessions over two days—one of them a holiday.

Further, Pendse discovered that about three-fourths of the original order was missing, and that there were corrections and interpolations in the remaining of which some were not in Bindra's handwriting. Pendse concluded that either Bindra had written out the order before the hearing or that somebody else had written it and Bindra had merely signed it without reading.

Mehra: 'justice has been done'

The judge also pointed out that Bindra had, in the "atrocious order" levied a personal Rs 50 lakh fine on Mehra—without a show cause notice. However, the order only quashed the Bindra order and not the show-cause notice which led to it, so the entire process will start all over again. Mehra merely said: "Justice has been done".

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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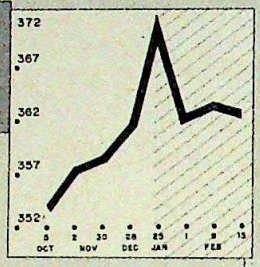
WHOLESALE prices have continued to rise while industrial production and manufactured outputs show a rather sluggish trend. In spite of a reduction in commercial bank credit, money supply is rock steady. Power generation is not growing as rapidly as before. There has been a sudden bullishness in the bourse and, come hail or high water, gold prices continue to fall.

All data are seasonally adjusted. The current trend is computed on the basis of the past six months data to which a regression is fitted.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
7.2% p.a.

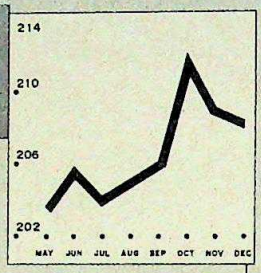


De-seasonalised, the wholesale price index has gone up without accounting for the new price rises which, with leads and lags will show up later.

Industrial Production Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend
6.5% p.a.

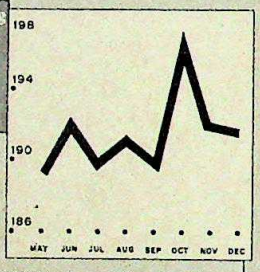


Growth would have to be more than 6.5 per cent to fulfil seventh plan targets and offset a production drop of 2.69 per cent.

Manufacturing Output Index

1970-100

Current Trend
3.3% p.a.

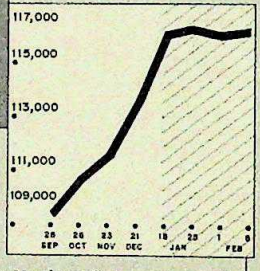


Manufacturing fell 2.69 per cent from October to December—industrialists are seemingly not chewing the Government's many carrots.

Money Supply (M3)

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.8% p.a.

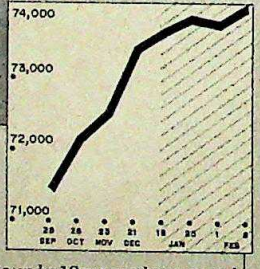


As steady as the Northern Star, money supply remains between 17 and 18 per cent. The RBI has been in unusually successful control.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
9.5% p.a.

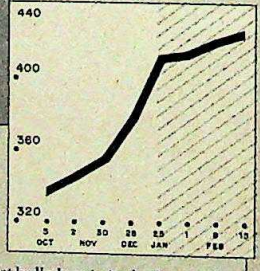


Bank credit fell to under 10 per cent between end of January and early February, either due to supply tightening or the lack of demand.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
40.7% p.a.

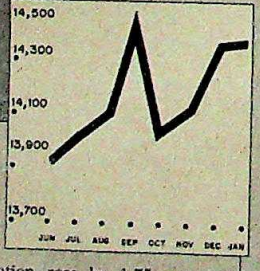


The share market bulled again in the first week of February with prices jumping by 2.8 per cent, contributing to the rise in the long term trend.

Power Generation

Million KWH

Current Trend
2.8% p.a.

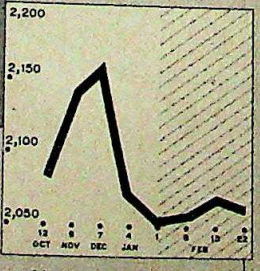


Though generation rose by 1.75 per cent between November and January, the long term trend is under 3 per cent per year.

Closing Gold Price

Rs per 10 gms

Current Trend
–9.% p.a.



The steady fall in gold prices continued. Is this because of a jump in supply or are people investing in other things? It is too early to say.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of Items in October, 1985

	%Growth
Ferro-Alloys	111.10
Rubber Footwer	98.48
Jute Machinery	75.96
Sugar Machinery	53.34
Paper Machinery	48.23
Coffee Curing Works	41.48
Railway Rolling Stock	40.39
Storage Batteries	38.81
Insecticides & Pesticides	37.06
Tobacco Manufacture	34.94
Linoleum & Similar Products	30.75
Earth Moving Machinery	29.74
Locomotives	22.93
Conveying Equipment	20.45
Hand & Small Tools	18.52
Footwear	17.77
Typewriters & Duplicators	17.05
Compressors	16.55
Electrical Motors	16.24
Paints & Varnishes	15.84
Electrical Machinery	13.80
Bolts & Nuts	13.70
Matches	12.87
Cosmetics	12.66
Chemical & Pharmaceutical Machinery	12.15
Iron & Steel Structurals	11.92
Bakery Products	10.55
Tyres & Tubes	10.45
Jute Textiles	10.14
Grain Mill Products	8.92
Telecommunications	8.47
Motorcycles & Bicycles	8.04
Paper	7.73
Pens & Pencils	7.58
Cotton & Blended Yarn	7.39
Machine Tools	7.31
Paper & Straw Board	6.60
Buses, Trucks & Jeeps	6.38
Textile Machinery	6.22
Cotton & Blended Mixed Fabrics	5.04
Mining & Quarrying	4.94
Dairy Products	4.64
Steam Generating Plants	3.78
Synthetic Resins & Plastics	3.75
Electrical Lamps	3.70
Hydrogenated Oil	3.62
Organic Chemicals	3.27

Of the 86 series considered, 58 of them with a total weight of 57.603 had a positive growth and 28 of them with a total weight of 30.372 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1986	1985
Nitro-Fertilizer Thousand Tonnes, January	407	406
Phosphate Fertilizer Thousand Tonnes, January	139	104
Thermal Plant Load Factor Percentage, January	55.5	54.5
Industrial Licences Issued Number, January	58	51
Letters of Intent Issued Number, January	42	54

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Amul Fruit & Nut, Amul Orange.

Amul Chocolates
a gift for someone you love

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its creaminess sealed in silver foil...

and foil-board carton to keep it fresh.

Marketed by: Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd., Anand.

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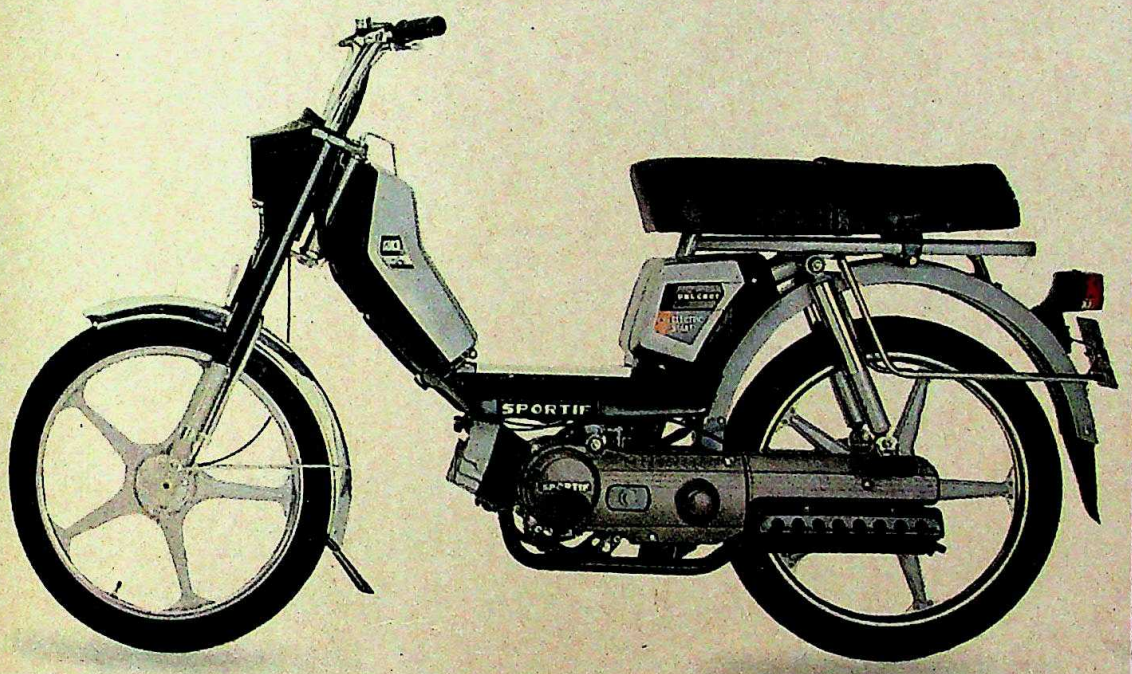
Trust the French to do it in style



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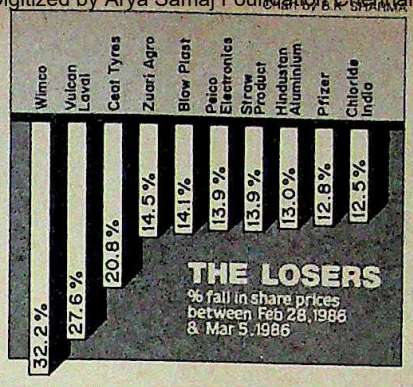
THE MARKETS

Budget Blow

IF THE budget last year sparked off the most explosive boom India's stock-markets have ever seen, this year's fiscal packet fell like a sledge-hammer on what had till recently been the rising curve of the share price index. Trading immediately after the budget proposals were known indicated early disappointment, and this was confirmed the next day, when share prices dropped further. If any doubts still remained as to how investors viewed Union Finance Minister V.P. Singh's Friday evening announcements, they were dispelled during trading on the following Monday, when scrips suffered a pronounced setback after the market had been able to assess the full implications of the budget.

This distinct bearish trend was not without good reason. For the finance minister had made the imports of both raw materials and capital goods and technology costlier, he had also failed to implement some of the promises made in the long-term fiscal policy—he did not



abolish the surtax on company profits, nor cut corporate income tax by the promised 5 per cent. And the reforms on the indirect tax front did not go beyond what had been promised in the December policy statement, and stopped short of the kind of changes he had initiated in direct taxes a year earlier.

Several other prominent features in the budget aided the bearish trend. The withdrawal of the investment allowance the reduction in earlier tax concessions to the polyester industry and the move to stop capitalisation of interest charges was a third blow. On top of all this, the finance minister withdrew the tax concession available so far on inter-corporate dividends. There was no mention in the budget of the kind of capital gains reliefs that would have made investment in shares more attractive for investors.

One or other of these budgetary features is bound to affect the prospects of most companies in the country. And despite the occasional silver linings—like the concessions in excise duty on life-saving drugs and the reliefs in the rate of excise duty on edible and solvent extraction oils—the overall message signalled to the market was not very favourable.

The market had already been nervous before budget day, and the investors' worst fears would seem to have been confirmed. Thus, between budget day and March 5, Wimco had dropped 32 per cent, Ceat 21 per cent, Zuari, Blow Plast, Straw Products and Peico 14 per cent, Hindustan Aluminium 13 per cent, and so on down the line. These are not small drops, and almost every share available on the market lost value. It now remains to be seen how long the market will take to fully discount share prices for the impact of the budget and begin to show some optimism again regarding the future.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1986 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 5.3.86	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	37.50	37.50	2.00 –
Associated Bearings	990.00	775.00	890.00	65.00 –
Associated Cement	389.00	341.00	345.00	27.00 –
Atlas Copco	92.50	77.00	81.00	7.50 –
Bajaj Auto	2775.00	1950.00	2500.00	240.00 +
Ballarpur	65.50	55.00	56.00	nil
Baroda Rayon	490.00	390.00	390.00	30.00 –
Bata India	82.50	70.00	70.00	3.00 –
Bayer	680.00	445.00	600.00	40.00 –
Bharat Forge	86.00	55.00	55.00	14.00 –
Birla Jute	97.00	47.50	47.50	45.50 –
Blow Plast	160.00	105.00	116.00	4.00 –
Blue Star	110.00	87.50	92.50	2.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	120.00	86.00	90.50	0.50 –
Brooke Bond	95.50	74.00	86.00	1.00 –
Ceat Tyres	520.00	240.00	400.00	50.00 –
Century Spinning	1690.00	1430.00	1465.00	170.00 –
Chloride India	122.00	98.00	98.00	5.00 –
Cimrgia	65.00	47.00	47.00	3.00 –
Colgate	262.50	215.00	220.00	15.00 –
Cyanamid	100.00	70.00	87.50	3.50 +
DCM	58.50	37.00	37.00	6.00 –
Dunlop	74.50	49.75	64.50	3.50 –
Elecon Engg.	117.50	82.50	95.00	nil
Escorts	94.00	70.50	71.00	3.00 –
Food Specialities	285.00	230.00	242.50	10.00 –
Gearware Nylon	61.50	40.00	40.50	2.50 –
Glaxo	87.00	66.00	74.00	2.00 –
G.E. Shipping	36.00	24.50	25.00	2.00 –
Gujarat St Fertilisers	1700.00	925.00	1385.00	120.00 –
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	74.50	74.50	8.00 –
Hindustan Lever	163.00	127.50	139.00	7.00 –
Hindustan Motors	128.50	116.50	116.50	8.00 –
Indian Explosives	84.50	69.00	72.00	4.00 –
Indian Hotels	157.00	115.00	135.00	2.50 –
Indian Organic	90.00	74.50	75.00	6.50 –
Indian Rayon	151.00	114.00	116.00	18.00 –
Indrol	390.00	285.00	350.00	25.00 –
Ind. Suzuki	81.00	58.00	62.00	7.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	480.00	360.00	415.00	5.00 –
ITC	76.50	53.00	68.00	2.00 +
J.K. Synthetics	132.00	106.00	115.00	7.00 –
Kinetic Engineering	325.00	270.00	282.50	7.50 –
Kirloskar Cummins	715.00	580.00	580.00	10.00 –
Lakme	195.00	120.00	120.00	67.50 –
Larsen & Toubro	204.00	175.00	175.00	15.00 –
Lipton	69.00	46.50	59.00	4.50 –
Lohia Machines	70.00	50.00	52.00	10.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	66.00	66.00	7.00 –
Motor Industries	910.00	680.00	680.00	65.00 –
National Organic	777.50	585.00	705.00	12.50 +
Nirlon	77.00	54.00	55.00	4.00 –
Orkay Silk Mills	167.00	125.50	143.00	10.00 –
Peico Electronics	104.50	62.00	62.00	7.00 –
Premier Auto	745.00	632.50	655.00	37.50 –
Ranbaxy	160.00	115.00	135.00	6.00 –
Raymond	97.00	79.00	82.00	nil
Reliance Industries	367.00	226.00	331.00	5.00 +
Sandoz	88.00	62.00	83.00	1.00 –
Shriram Fibres	88.00	70.00	72.00	9.00 –
SPIC	184.00	129.50	154.00	13.00 –
Tata Steel	1440.00	1142.50	1340.00	20.00 +
Telco	910.00	735.00	745.00	70.00 –
Vulcan Laval	162.50	85.00	105.00	37.50 –
Wimco	98.00	58.00	69.00	28.00 –
20th Century Leasing	77.50	55.00	63.00	nil

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.6032	8.5199
Austria	Schilling	100	77.6352	76.3741
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.8732	33.6530
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.8660	42.3130
Canada	Dollar	1	8.6723	8.5902
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.4746	1.4615
Egypt	Pound	1	15.3722	15.3012
France	Franc	1	1.8066	1.7652
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5682	1.5567
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1330	1.1011
Iran	Rial	100	15.5001	15.4332
Italy	Lira	100	0.8030	0.7900
Japan	Yen	100	6.8187	6.7593
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7870	0.7701
Kuwait	Dinar	1	44.9910	44.7332
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.8647	4.7859
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9032	0.8730
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6130	0.6001
Netherlands	Guilder	1	4.8337	4.7930
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7990	0.7832
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.6706	5.6150
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0860	0.0803
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4590	0.4513
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.6931	1.6757
Switzerland	Franc	1	6.4368	6.3769
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7823	0.7701
Thailand	Baht	100	48.7320	48.6002
UK	Pound	1	17.8173	17.6959
USA	Dollar	1	12.4075	12.2925
UAE	Dirham	1	3.4332	3.4001
USSR	Rouble	1	14.3632	17.3231
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	5.6242	5.4854

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 7.3.86.

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GEORGE FRANCIS/Scorp News

Maruthi college; and (below) students who have left: wasted effort

PRIVATE COLLEGES

Affiliated Problems

WHEN V. Narayan registered at the Maruthi College of Engineering (MCE) in Chittoor district in 1983, the year it opened its impressive doors, he thought his future was secure. With the affiliation of the college to the International University (IU) at Missouri in the US, Narayan had visions of completing his education with a fancy foreign degree. Today, his ambitions have met a dusty death. "This college has completely ruined my life. I am now over-age for trying for admission to any other engineering college and don't know what to do."

One hundred and forty students of the MCE now face a bleak academic future since the university it is affiliated to is not recognised by the US educational authorities. Frustrated over the fact that their years of effort had come to nought, the students of the MCE quit late last year, foregoing in many cases, handsome amounts paid by way of donation at the time of admission. Filling their cup of sorrow is the refusal by other Indian engineering institutes to allow them to sit for their qualifying examinations since MCE is not recognised by them. T. Krishnababu, a student, echoed the feelings of the others when he lamented: "We were all told at the time of admission that this international university affiliation was only a temporary arrangement and that the college would be trying for affiliation to a local university. After all, not many students would be interested in going to the US for higher studies when they can get a locally recognised engineering degree."

Their disillusionment reflects their sense of shock when it was revealed last year that the IU was not accredited to the US council of post-secondary education. Said Geeta Nayar, student advisor of the United States Educational Foundation in India: "International University, Missouri's degrees in engineering and technical areas awarded upon completion of course work in India may not be recognised by accredited institutions." The situation might have continued had it not been for a student agitation about non-affiliation to local universities which forced the college management to suspend admissions for the 1985 academic programme. The agitation assumed such major proportions that the state Technical Education Minister, Ayyanah Pattrudu, told the Assembly in November last that the state Government was investigating cases of institutions like MCE claiming affiliation to foreign universities. The state law department was examining last fortnight whether any law could be made to check such practices.

It will not be too soon. The mushroom growth of locally unaccountable private institutions claiming foreign affiliation has assumed the dimensions of a plague, and not only in Andhra Pradesh. In Madras, 18 students joined the Sri Krishna College of Engineering and Technology (SKCET) to study computer science for four years when it was started in early 1984. This college also claimed IU affiliation. Many students had to cough out large donations of Rs 5,000 each to gain admission. But one and a half years later, in November 1985, 11 of the 18 students have left the college and are starting their professional education all over again. Incredibly enough, the remaining seven have joined the MCE to study electronics knowing fully well that the same fate might await them here too.

Such academic malpractices extend to institutions of management courses

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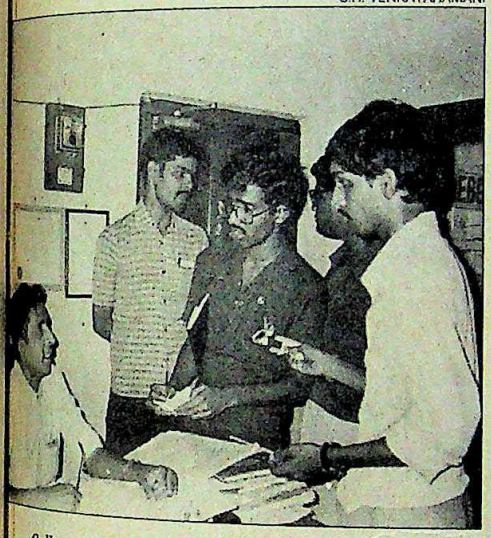
also. The Andhra Pradesh College of Business Administration, Vijayawada, which got IU affiliation in April 1983, has now been dis-affiliated by the American university itself. Explained Dr G.K. Kothari, advocate who is the representative of the IU in India: "Affiliations of four institutions were cancelled because they were found to have indulged in unfair educational practices. We may point out that our rules prohibit any affiliate from charging any premium or capitation fee for giving admission. Affiliates can charge only college fees. In the case of the MCE we have not received any complaints from students for us to investigate."

S.H. VENKATARAMANI



College Chairman Parthasarthy and agitating students: shattered dreams

Dr Kothari revealed that there were 15 IU affiliates in India at the beginning of 1985. Altogether 35 private Indian institutions had obtained IU affiliation so far but the affiliation lapses unless renewed periodically. IU conditions for affiliation stipulate only such institutions that can organise the necessary expertise to impart training in the chosen field of study, can keep a reasonable security deposit and can pay the required fees. He claims that the IU undertakes periodic inspection of its affiliates to ensure that they conform to reasonable academic standards. There are only six IU affiliates still functioning in India—two in engineering, two in management studies, and one each for computer training and maritime studies.

The City University of Los Angeles and the Newport University of California also have a few affiliates in India. Once again, the problem is that since none of these universities has been recognised by the US Department of Education, degrees from these universities will be virtually valueless in India.

To add to their problems, the students are not qualified to sit for examinations conducted by institutes like that of the Electronics and Telecommunications Engineers and the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. Memberships of these institutes help students get government jobs in case foreign engineering degrees do not get local recognition.

But N.M. Parthasarathy, chairman of the Vellore Educational Trust which runs the MCE, is unfazed by all the controversy. He says: "I didn't want affiliation to any university in Andhra Pradesh at all, because it would have meant that applicants for admission into my college would have had to go through the common engineering entrance exam in the state. Also 95 per cent of the students admitted would have to be Andhra Pradesh domiciles and the remaining 5 per cent would have to be admitted according to an inter-state exchange arrangement." The explanation rings hollow in light of the fact that the Vellore Educational Trust filed a case in the Andhra Pradesh High Court challenging the grant of local university affiliation to two engineering colleges started in the state after MCE was denied local affiliation. It lost the case and is now planning to appeal again to the Supreme Court.

He also started a parallel Maruthi Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1984 affiliated to the City University of Los Angeles and took in 25 students that year and 23 the next. And now classes are being conducted jointly for both MCE and MIT students with the Sri Krishna students also being thrown in for good measure. To cap it all, Parthasarathy has clubbed the third year and second year students so that they attend the same classes—a practice unheard of in the annals of engineering education. But as long as students are willing to join such institutions, and the state Governments dilly dally over clamping down on them for flying under somewhat false flags, unheard of educational practices are bound to force their way into the groves of academe.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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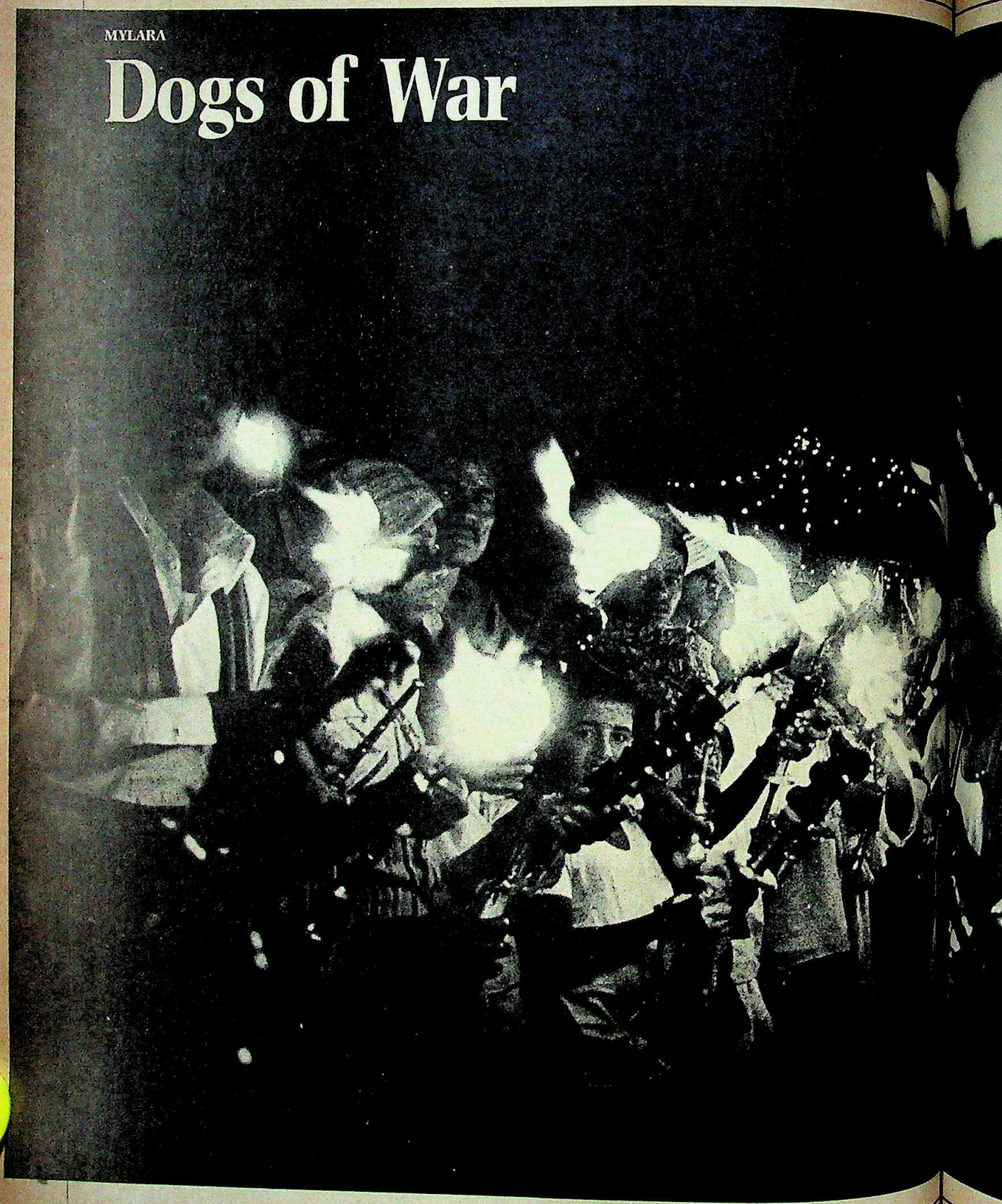
MYLARA

Dogs of War



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MYLARA is a sleepy little village in Karnataka's Bellary district, some 250 km from the state capital of Bangalore. But once every year in February, it springs to unusual life, transformed into a colourful and epic-related 'battlefield' complete with ancient rites and voodoo-like prophecies. For three emotion-charged days, Mylara transports itself back into the age of legend and mythology, of gods and demons, and warrior-kings and witchcraft.

Two days after the first full moon in the month of February is sighted, 'armies' march into Mylara from parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra comprising followers of a cult which enacts the mythological battle between Lord Shiva and the two demon kings, Mallasura and Manikasura. Shiva, according to the legend, defeated the demons by making his soldiers, numbering 7 crore, take the form of dogs, horses and other animals. The entire sequence is re-enacted on the site where the battle is supposed to have taken place.

Last fortnight, Mylara echoed once again to the sounds of barking dogs, the cracking of whips and victorious war cries as Lord Shiva's soldiers once again engaged the demon twins in epic battle. The ceremonial start to the enactment is as solemn as it is sinister. A black flag is hoisted amid the hush, signalling the start of the battle. Rows of torch-bearing devotees file past like ghosts in the night while other devotees, called Gorravas, clad in black robes, carrying *trishuls*, brass bowls and fans made of black animal hair dangling from their necks, form a menacing backdrop.

Lord Shiva's 'soldiers', possessed by God, drop to the ground on all fours, barking like dogs or prancing about like horses, whipping themselves with quirts. The mock battle, staged in an open field under the scorching sun, is fast and furious with the din raised by the 'dogs' and 'horses' lending cacophonic accompaniment. And as the sun sets and the dust settles, the battle ends with the torch-bearers walking in single file to a nearby hillock where they let out full-throated victory cries, thus declaring the armies of Shiva the victorious side. The Gorravas lift their brass bowls symbolising the *done* believed to have been used by Shiva and his army for the victory feast. The black robes they wear are meant to represent the black cloak worn by Shiva during the battle to disguise himself.

The womenfolk join in the victory celebrations, some of them carrying bags made of leaves with betel nuts inside. The bags are placed reverentially on the palanquin of Lord Shiva and then taken

Torch-bearers line up for the 'war'; and (below) a 'soldier' portraying one of the dogs of Shiva's army

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home to be worshipped. The rites continue at the main Shiva temple in the village which forms the centrepiece of the ceremonial side of the drama—families bring their sons to the temple to be given their first hair-cut.

The 'battle' over, the crowds gather in eager anticipation for the main event—the annual prophecy by the temple's 'prophet'. The prophecy is made at sunset and the believers start congregating on an open patch of ground near the hillock to gain vantage points. Some scramble for a place on the slopes of other hillocks, others squat in the dried fields parched from the prolonged drought that has affected the area, while the more enterprising clamber into the branches of nearby trees. Chants of *elu koti, elu koti*, meaning 7 crore, punctuate the animated debate on what possible predictions the prophet will make for the coming year.

As the historic moment approaches, a hush settles over the crowd and all eyes are rivetted on the area marked out with bamboo stakes. A huge, collective sigh goes up as the foot-long shoes, supposedly worn by the God and the Goddess, are brought in to be followed by a 'soldier' bearing a shining five-foot-long sword, heralding the arrival of the head priest of the Mylara temple, Shri Guru Jayachandra Wodeyar Swamy, riding a sleek white horse and followed by his sons and selected devotees holding an umbrella over his turbaned head. The priest circles the 70-foot circular arena thrice, his expressions alternating between the aggressiveness of a warrior and the benevolence of a victorious God, to seemingly ensure that all is in order for the arrival of the prophet.

THE APPEARANCE of prophet Karnik Malappa—undoubtedly the star of the show—is elaborately staged for maximum dramatic effect. First arrives a huge, 15-feet bow borne aloft by devotees, believed by those present to be the same weapon used by Shiva to slay his demon enemies. The simultaneous arrival of the prophet, also carried into the arena on the shoulders of devotees, is the signal for breathless silence. In the midst of the quiet, betrayed only by the rustle of dry leaves, the prophet touches the feet of the head priest and seeks his blessings for the awesome task he must now perform.

As the sun dips below the horizon, the bow is lifted up and Malappa nimbly shins up the elevated bow and once on top, gazes at the sky and announces his prediction. The entire rite takes a bare 30 seconds and after uttering the prophecy, he falls back into the waiting arms of his devotees below. This year, the prophecy, which the cult accepts as gospel, was sufficiently ambiguous to lend it the appropriate air of mystery and magic.

The four Kannada words he spoke were: *"Akashake gundu toogitale, parak,"* which left those assembled initially puzzled since most of the villagers translated it

Women take out the sacred procession; and (below) the black-robed Gorravas

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The prophet making his prediction for the coming year

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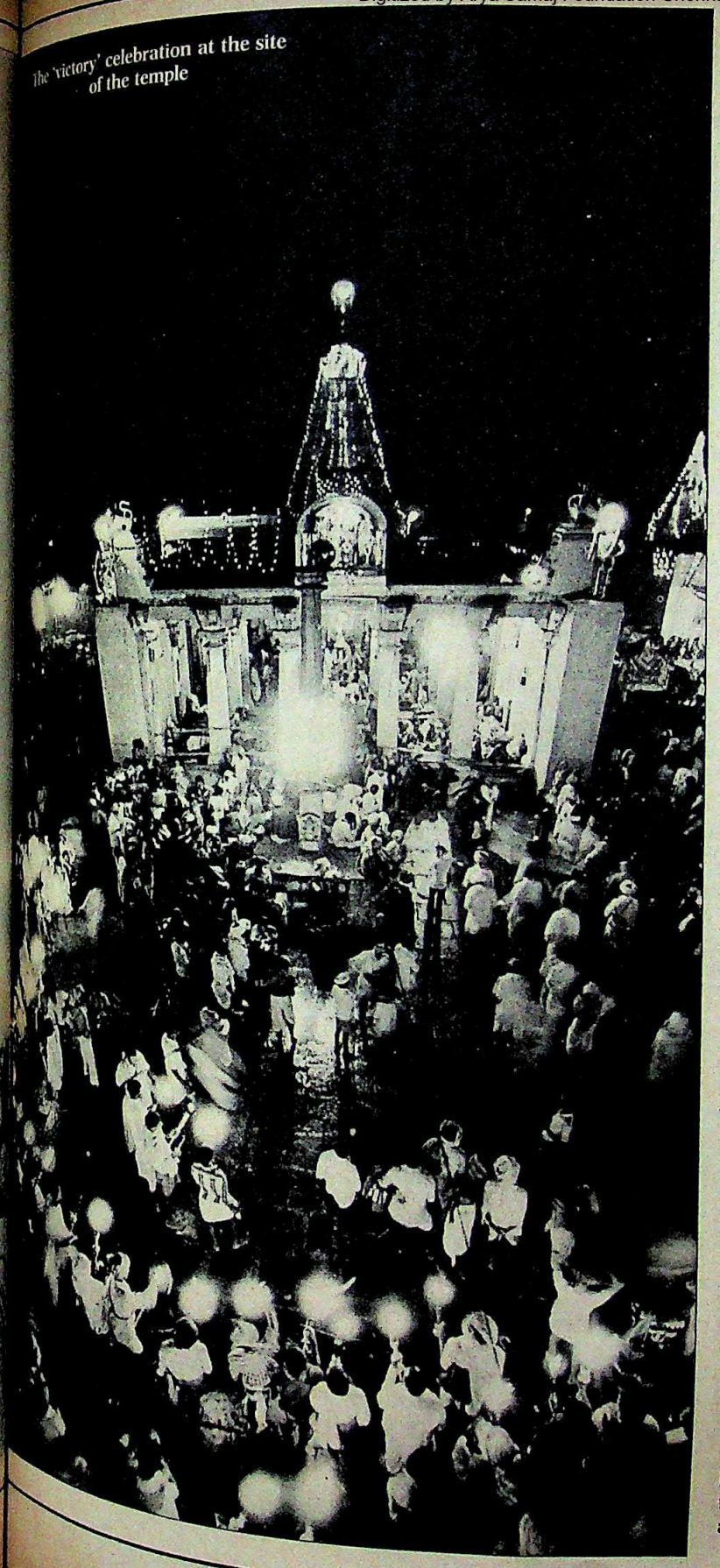

The 'victory' celebration at the site of the temple

into: "The earth and sky are joining. Beware." But the special deputy commissioner overseeing arrangements translated it as: "Bullets are hanging in the sky, be careful." He felt the prophet was warning the world about the implications of US President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative, or Star Wars programme as it is more commonly known. However, state Agriculture Minister M.P. Prakash, who is a devoted follower of the cult, insists that the correct translation is: "Bullets are being fired at the sky. Be careful."

IN FACT, official patronage of the Mylara *jathra* is in abundant evidence. Policemen take part in the flag-hoisting ceremony and salute the head priest who garlands them and their weapons and smears their foreheads with sacred turmeric powder. A special deputy commissioner of police is drafted to make arrangements for the event and he receives the head priest when the latter arrives for the ceremony. Prakash, who belongs to the area, even ordered the Irrigation Department to release 900 cusecs of water into the drought-affected Tungabhadra river that flows past Mylara and is considered sacred by the cult's followers. In fact, till 1953, when the village was transferred from the then Madras state to Karnataka, the annual prophecy was dutifully recorded in the Government's gazette.

The prophet's post, like that of the temple head priest, is a hereditary one handed down from generation to generation. "My ancestors were blessed by the head priest's ancestors to do this job and my family has been doing it since," says Malappa, 50, who took over from his father 20 years ago. He admits that his prophecies are open to various interpretations. "Even I don't know what I am going to say. I am in a trance when I utter the words. I have to ask others what I said." Last year he prophesied that the Universe would be "covered by darkness", which local devotees interpreted to mean that the prolonged drought they have been experiencing in the state would intensify. It did. In 1983, his prediction was that there would be heavy rains and in 1984 he prophesied that "there will be pearls everywhere" which was translated as farmers would have a good harvest. Neither came to pass though the prophecy is admittedly meant to apply to the "universe". This year again, the prophet had left his prediction sufficiently vague to add that much more mystery to the Mylara aura.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD in Mylara

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SYLVANIA & LAXMAN LTD.

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

Laxman S. Agarwal

Ladies & Gentlemen :

I extend to you all a hearty welcome on behalf of myself and my colleagues on the Board to the 23rd Annual General Meeting of the Company. The Annual Report and the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 30th September, 1985 have been in your hands for quite some time now and with your permission, I shall take them as read.

OPERATING RESULTS

During the year under review, our turnover has increased only marginally primarily due to stiff competition in the market in the face of Lighting Industry over-production viz-a-viz. demand, particularly GLS. The profitability of your Company is also under pressure due to escalating input and operational costs.

As a measure of diversification, your Company started marketing both Colour and Black & White Television Receivers under its own brand name. But due to teething trouble in the initial stages, which is not unusually abnormal, your Company could not achieve its targets. However, it is expected that the Electronics Division will break even in 1986.

DIVIDEND

You will be pleased to note that your Directors have recommended that Dividend on Equity Capital be stepped up to 23% this year against 22% last year. You are requested to approve it so that payment thereof can be made to the members whose names appear on the Company's Register of Members.

BONUS ISSUE

The General Reserves of your Company as at 30th September, 1985 stood at Rs. 301.03 lacs compared to the issued and paid-up Equity Share Capital of Rs. 198.70 lacs. In view of the healthy free reserves of the Company, your Directors recommended issue of Bonus Shares in the ratio of 1 : 2 for which the proposal is before you for approval, subject to further approval of the Controller of Capital Issues and the Reserve Bank of India.

ECONOMIC SCENE

Since assuming office, our new Prime Minister has initiated many new policy decisions which has created a new, more challenging economic environment. The Government Policy liberalising measures for improvement in industrial activities, de-licencing, broad banding of industries, permitting higher production over licenced capacity, increase in MRTP Ceiling, relaxing various controls, restructure and rationalisation of corporate and personal taxation keeping them stable for five years and other long term fiscal policies have begun, to make suitable impact in widening the production base to generate revenues and creating upsurge in Tax Revenues as well.

It is expected that all these measures will prove favourable for the growth of business provided there is also normal industrial peace and stability. In such an environment your Company would further gain its position of strength.

FUTURE OUT-LOOK

(A) LIGHTING DIVISION

In the first four months of the current year, your Company has achieved a turnover of Rs. 1008 lacs compared to Rs. 912 lacs in the previous year registering a growth of 10.5%. The profit in the same period also increased from Rs. 64 lacs in the year 1984-85 to Rs. 70 lacs in the year 1985-86. However, the GLS segment has become extremely competitive due to unrestricted competition with corresponding erosion on GLS margin. But the prospects in the Fluorescent Tubes sector is encouraging. Therefore, we are expanding the capacity of Fluorescent Tubes by installing a Plant for Slim Line 26" Tubes with a licenced capacity of 2.5 million pcs. P.A. The Plant & Machinery has been received and the same will be installed for production in NOIDA, U.P. where the Company will enjoy Sales Tax exemption for a period of 5 years. In addition, your Company is making investment in our Associated Company—Ajay Electrical Industries Ltd., which is installing a Fluorescent Tube Manufacturing Plant as a measure of diversification of its Product Line which will also augment the captive supply of Fluorescent Tubes to the Company. To cater to our existing and captive additional requirement of Plain Glass Tubes, your Company has decided to install a more modern Glass Tube Draw Plant involving a capital expenditure of about Rs. 125 lacs. This will enable the Company to boost the production from the existing 5 million Plain Glass Tubes to 9 million Glass Tubes per year of better quality and at more economical cost.

Your Company has also taken steps for expansion in allied fields like Lamp Caps, Lamp Filaments and Lamp Making Machinery Projects.

(B) ELECTRONICS DIVISION

As you know that your Company has already made a steady entry into the field of entertainment electronics with the introduction of its Televisions in the market in the year 1984-85. In the first four months of the current year, the Electronics Division, despite competition in the market, have achieved a turnover of approximately Rs. 2 Crores.

We have entered into a memorandum of understanding with SABA of West Germany for technical co-operation in the field of entertainment electronics. The first 1000 high technology TV Sets using know-how from SABA are expected to be released this month. It has a cord-less Remote Control with a Digital display for Volume, Colour, Contrast, Brightness, Compatibility with Teletext and Personal Computers and a host of special facilities. With this product introduction, we expect to firmly establish your Company's name in the highly competitive TV market.

Although the TV market is competitive it is nevertheless very large considering the population coverage of TV Transmitters shall increase from the present 80% to 100% over the year. The Company is already marketing a range of Colour and Black & White TV Sets including Portable Models and Table Models and with the introduction of SABA Sets, the range shall be complete and attractive to our Dealer net work.

Your Company has also arrived at a memorandum of understanding with a multi-national US Company for establishing a joint venture in India for the manufacture of latest technology Microwave Ovens and Laundry Equipment.

Therefore, the future of your Company is expected to be bright both in turnover and profit.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

I would like to place on record the cordial relationship that exists between the Management and the work force of your Company. The results your Company has achieved would not have been possible without hard work and excellent co-operation of the employees at all levels particularly the Managers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Before I conclude, I wish to express my sincere gratitude on behalf of my colleagues on the Board and on my own behalf to the Financial Institutions, the Banks and Messrs. GTE International Inc., U.S.A., our Foreign Collaborators, for their co-operation and assistance.

I also wish to thank you all, the esteemed shareholders, particularly those who are present here, for the continued trust and confidence in the Management of the Company.

Dated : February 26, 1986

LAXMAN S. AGARWAL
CHAIRMAN

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GAUR SCULPTORS

Hard Times

HIS FACE is gaunt and dry. His frame is emaciated and his fingers have been worked to the bone. With these fingers, Bhagwan Das Gaur has chipped and chiselled images of the gods from lifeless stone over the years, working out a rocky symphony with hammer and chisel. The ravages of his 70 long and barren years are all too obvious as he spreads out his calloused hands and says: "Nothing has changed in my life. Our fate is as hard as the rocks and even the gods do not want to give it shape."

He is not alone in his suffering. In the village of Pattharkatti at the foot of the rocky Vishnupad range, 37 km northeast of Gaya, the sound of hammer and chisel reverberates throughout the day as this small community of Brahmin artisans tries to carve its destiny out of barren stone. They are the descendants of the 900 Gaur Brahmin artisans who were brought from Rajasthan about 300 years ago by the Maharani of Indore to build the Vishnupad Temple at Gaya and stayed on, giving the village its name.

But little has changed for the artisans since that ancient era. While the artisans grapple with hardship and want, their art is on the verge of fading out. "Lack of state patronage, lack of raw material, exploitation by middlemen and poverty have led to the death of this rare traditional art," says Rama Swaroop Gaur, an aged sculptor. And Ramesh Chandra Gaur adds: "We have been making Vishnu, Parvati, Ganesh, Saraswati, Laxmi and Buddha for generations but none of them has come to our rescue."

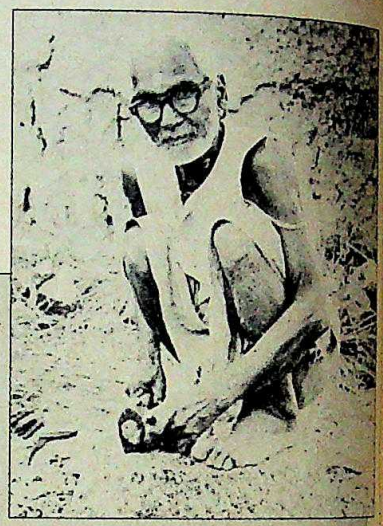
The artisans get next to nothing for their work. Ramesh Chandra laments that it takes between one and two weeks to produce one piece. The middlemen buy it for Rs 50 and sell it at exorbitant prices ranging from Rs 500 to Rs 5,000. The artisans have little option since they cannot handle the distribution and sale on their own. Says Bhagwan Das: "Everybody tries to exploit us. Art pieces worth Rs 2 lakh are lying with us unsold and uncared for."

The situation grew so bad that the whole community would have fled the area had it not been for the then district collector of Gaya, J.C. Mathur, an art-loving ICS officer, who used his discretionary powers and helped them by distributing free food, helping them get loans and setting up a cooperative society. Later, the Government also set up a Pashanpatra Vikas Kendra (stoneware development institute) in the village.

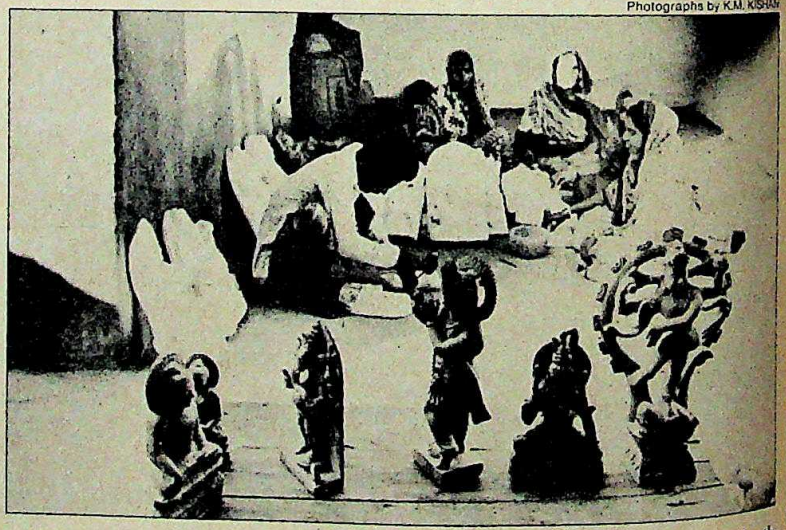
But this has hardly helped matters. Dinanath, skilled artisan at the institute, asserts that the fear of a bleak future and lack of official patronage has all the artisans in the grip of insecurity with barely 20 artisan families now left in the village.

To make matters worse, the artisans are now finding it difficult to get raw material. The Vishnupad range, which provided most of the stone for the Vishnupad temple, used to be rich in special stones like Tamra, Motia, Kasauti, Dham-Mahua and Pagijeet.

> "Our fate is as hard as the rocks and even the gods do not want to give it shape."
> BHAGWAN DAS GAUR



Photographs by K.M. KISHAN



Artisans at Pattharkatti with their works: rocky road

But parts of the range are caving in as the artisans have practically tapped its reserves to the core over the years.

The Government, on its part, says it is doing all that it can to improve the lot of the artisans. Minister of State for Handlooms and Handicrafts Khalied Rashed Saba says that the Government has decided to set up a Rs 18-lakh common facility centre at the village and Rs 3.18 lakh have already been released for the construction of sheds and clearing the stone mines. Saba claims that the Government will open two showrooms exclusively for these artisans—one in Patna and the other outside Bihar. Efforts would also be made to create a market for these objects outside India through the export corporation and the Government would make an in-depth study of their problems. "We are committed to preserve this art," he added.

But the villagers are pessimistic about the future. Such promises and studies have been made in the past and have hardly helped—witness the continued migration from the village and the destitute state of those who have remained and now visualise a rocky end to their rare craft unless the gods they make so lovingly finally decide to smile on them.

—FARZAND AHMED

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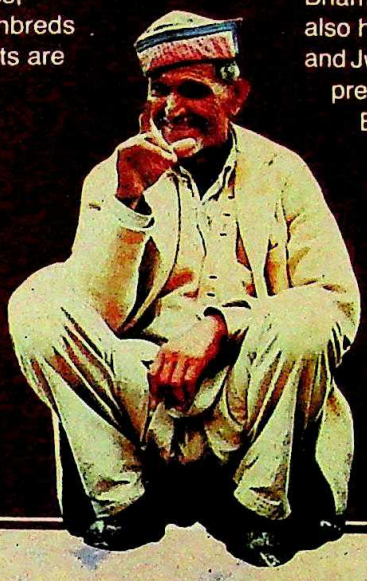
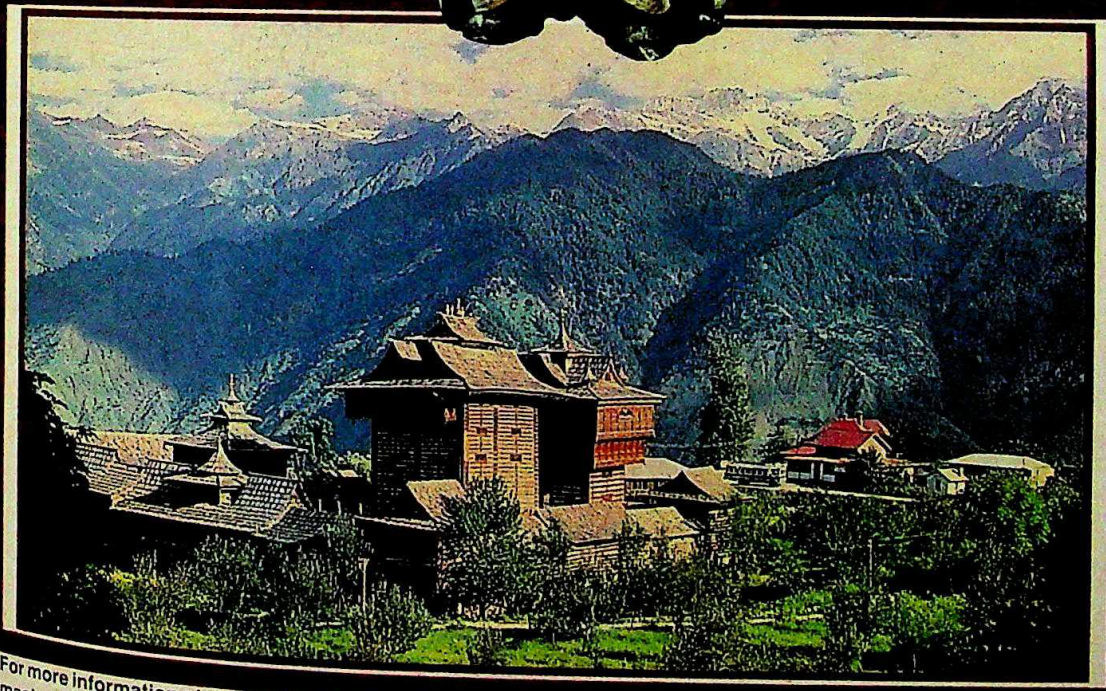
For the devout ones with a deep interest in temples and Godheads, Himachal has a lot to offer. Temples of great architectural excellence and beauty are spread throughtout the state. Some of them are Chaurasi in Bharmour and Baijnath in Kangra. Kangra also has the famous Naina Devi, Chintpurni and Jwalaji, shrines of the Holy Mother, whose presence is also felt in the Bhimakali temple in Sarahan shown here against the picturesque backdrop of the Srikhand range. Himachal also offers picturesque spots as varied as Dalhousie, Dharamsala, Manali and Shimla.



Where to stay: For accomodation there are many hotels to suit all budgets in Himachal, both privately run and others managed by Himachal Tourism Development Corporation.



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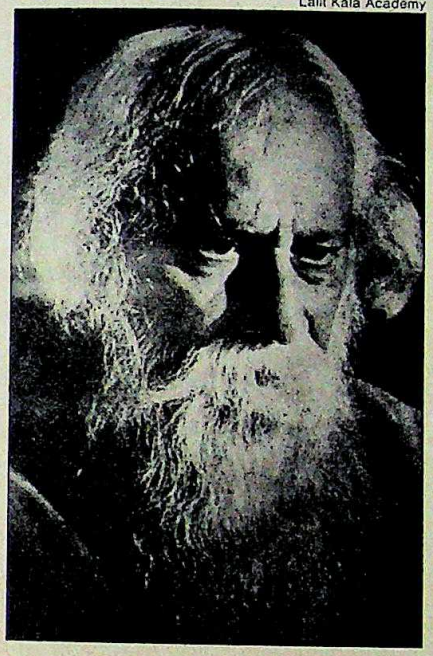
TAGORE PAINTINGS

The Master's Due

"I know not who paints the pictures on memory's canvas; but whoever he may be, what he is painting are pictures; by which I mean that he is not there with his brush simply to make a faithful copy of all that is happening."

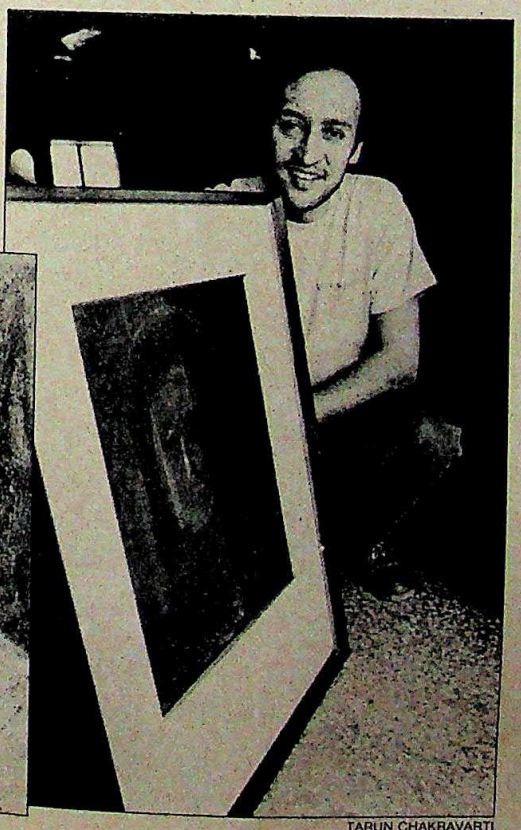
—Rabindranath Tagore in Jivansmriti (Memoirs)

Lalit Kala Academy



THE FACES are gaunt and sombre. The highlights on their surface defy all principles of optics, as if lit up by unexpected chinks in some cloistered studio of the psyche. The landscapes are marked by lines that change their course and hardness following some inner dictate of the soul. The lines are far from geometric, as if corresponding to some nervy impulses of auto-drawing. But regardless, the paintings of Rabindranath Tagore have left art-lovers stunned by their simplicity and the artist's ability to paint from the heart.

But Tagore the artist never really received the commercial acclaim his works deserved—till now, that is. For the past year, Calcutta's traditional art dealers have been receiving enquiries for "any Tagore" with cash offers of Rs 1 lakh or above, the highest offer for the bulk of work of any modern Indian painter, alive or dead. Film actor Victor Bannerjee, who is also an avid collector and the owner of Calcutta's first commercial gallery, bought in 1982 an unnamed portrait by Tagore, painted on paper and not larger than 18 x 10 inches, for only Rs 10,000. Today he is being offered Rs 80,000 to Rs 1 lakh but he refuses to part with it. "I must hold on to it till the temptation is too great, and the pride in possessing a Tagore may eventually outweigh all financial temptations," declares the actor.



Tagore, Bannerjee (right) with his painting; and Kadambari's portrait

TARUN CHAKRAVARTI

Rani Chanda, who authored many books on Tagore and now lives at Santiniketan, jealously guards her eight Tagore paintings from dealers foraying to her home with offers of Rs 5 lakh for the entire collection. Pradip Roy Chowdhury, a dealer who possesses seven paintings by Tagore, besides an extensive collection of documents, manuscripts and other Tagore memorabilia, would not sell "even a scrap of paper" because he senses that the prices are on a steeply upward curve now.

Of the 3,000-odd paintings that Tagore had done in the last four decades of his life (1901-1941), a little over 2,000 are to be found in the catalogues of various museums of the world, the lion's share of course being accounted for by Visva-Bharati, the university founded by the poet-painter, whose museum has 1,600 of them. Though 1,000 paintings are now held by private collectors, many of whom had family associations with Tagore and often got the paintings gratis, very few have a chance to surface now—such being the fierce pride in their acquisition. Since 1985, no Indian museum has been able to identify potential buys because of the price factor.

The most recent purchase of privately-held Tagore paintings was made by Rabindra Bharati museum, located in Tagore's ancestral house at Jorasanko in old Calcutta, when it acquired two of them late in 1984—one called *Faust* and the other a landscape—at a price which its curator, Samar Bhowmik, would not disclose. All facts can never be known in the world of art purchase, and dealers hide the names of potential buyers till the last moment. But a museum in Bombay, owned by a large industrial house, is believed to have paid an "earnest money" of Rs one lakh to a dealer in Calcutta to identify and acquire on its behalf a modest collection of Tagore paintings at "any price".

The popularity of Tagore is not altogether a freak phenomenon accountable only by the passing vagaries of art connoisseurs. Says celebrity painter M.F. Husain: "Even though Picasso had painted a lot of

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child art late in his life, it was essentially cerebral painting. But Tagore as a painter had a pristine quality about him—something unprecedented in the history of art." The famous erasures in Tagore manuscripts began as early as 1874, when he was only 13, but his most intense phase as a painter started with his exposure in the early 1920s to the Bauhaus painters—Wassily Kandinsky, Lionel Feininger and Paul Klee. He absorbed contemporary western influences and created what is regarded as a one-man genre.

It is this distinctiveness which perhaps explains the phenomenon of the rising prices. "Add to that," says Roy Chowdhury, "the aura of a poet of world renown, the age to which he belonged, and the fact that he being a dead artist, there is a natural limitation on the number of his available paintings."

MEANWHILE, forgers have started cashing in on the new demand. Bhowmik was approached last year with two portraits, allegedly by Tagore, for which a suspiciously modest price was asked. A close check of the paper showed that it did not carry the obligatory monogram of Visva-Bharati, nor did the signatures at the back tally with Tagore's own which changed with the passing years so regularly that one can always place them in time provided they are genuine. But by the time the two paintings were established to be fake, the fly-by-night dealer had disappeared. Roy Chowdhury says the fake Tagore paintings have a burgeoning market in middle class homes whose owners would buy the stuff knowingly, "in the spirit of buying a copy". But the price of even a crude copy—it is not easy to imitate Tagore's spontaneous lines—has soared to Rs 2,500 or around if the buyer is conscious of what he is buying; otherwise the tag can be even higher.

The estimate of 3,000 paintings are based mostly on versions of close Tagore-watchers and his personal staff and friends. But Bhowmik agrees that "there may be a lot of paintings freely afloat in private homes". Except a few well-known private collections, like the Sarabhais' in Ahmedabad or industrialist B.K. Birla in Calcutta, no individuals are known to possess Tagore paintings in any large numbers. The last collector to sell in bulk was Nirmal Kumari Mahalanabis, widow of the statistician P.C. Mahalanabis, who parted with all her 37 paintings—often for a song—in the four years between 1977 and 1981. Those who dealt in the Mahalanabis collections now repent having allowed them to pass into collectors' hands without anticipating the rise in the prices.

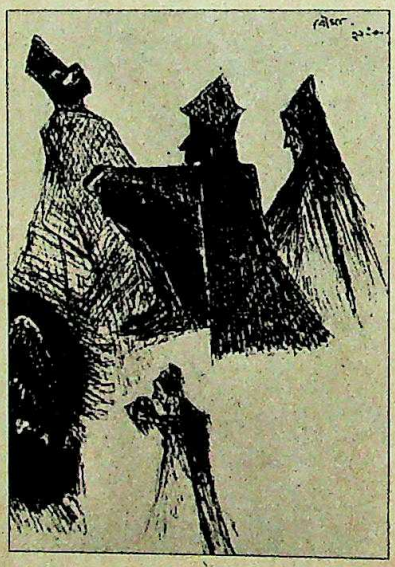
In the art market, spiralling offers often push the paintings under the carpet until the bids plateau off at a high level. "Tagore paintings are passing through a period of speculative hoarding," says Bannerjee. But, even at the present level of bidding, Tagore far outstrips Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and Jamini Roy—all celebrated masters of the Bengal school—whose works are continuously changing hands at prices well within the Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000 range.

The last exhibition of Tagore paintings was held in Calcutta in April 1983 at the Birla Academy of Art and Culture in which 50 collections, all drawn from the repertoire of private collectors, were on display. Though bringing out in the open only a fraction of the paintings and sketches that are privately held, it gave a fair indication about the current owners. Maitreyi Devi, novelist, essayist and an associate of the poet, had seven paintings on display; the owners of the Ananda Bazar group of papers had 14; Roy Chowdhury had six; Bannerjee had his lone possession as an entry; Birla himself had four; dealer Dilip Roy had six; and the Academy 11. Of the two entries from Nihar Ranjan Chakraborty, a well-known city businessman, the one that is considered priceless is the portrait of Kadambari Devi, wife of the poet's elder brother who had committed suicide leaving a void which literary critics have often traced to his later works.

Museologists say there is no way of knowing how many of the sketches and paintings Tagore had gifted away and how many of those painted during his long sojourns abroad have still been lying outside the country. It was only last year that the Rabindra Bharati Museum acquired from West Germany a 1935 portrait by Tagore of Mussolini, the fascist leader, drawn with a ringing satirical force which is quite uncharacteristic of him. The British Museum has a dozen of his paintings, all acquired from non-Indian sources. But, as a collector says, "it is the Bengali elite of Tagore's lifetime, connected to him in the social circuits, which has the lion's share". And, at the rate their prices are spiralling, the full scope and value of Tagore's artistic endeavours might finally be forced out into the open.

—SUMIT MITRA in Calcutta

Five persons, scene from freedom struggle and *Portrait at Lahore*



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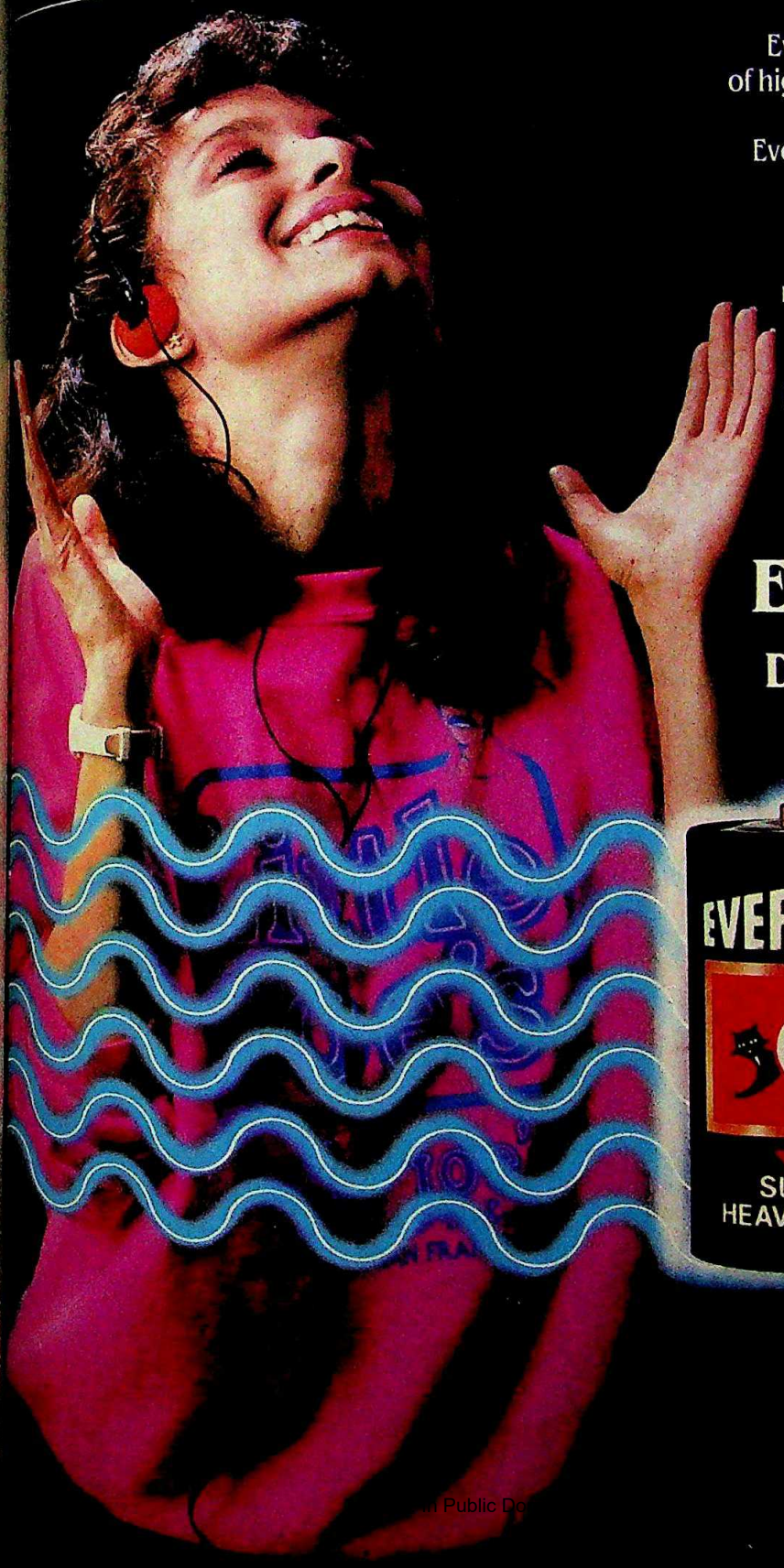

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The Salar Jang Museum in Hyderabad is one of the finest one-man collections in the world. An intriguing array of treasures, which includes Emperor Jehangir's thumbing dagger and Marie Antoinette's writing table, it also has priceless collections of jade, ivory and porcelain. Exquisite furniture, clocks and paintings fill its 36 halls.

Hyderabad is not just the Salar Jang Museum. It has the Qutab Shahi Tombs — just outside the Golconda Fort; the imposing Temple of Naubat Pahad by the city's Sagar Lake; and of course the Char Minar.

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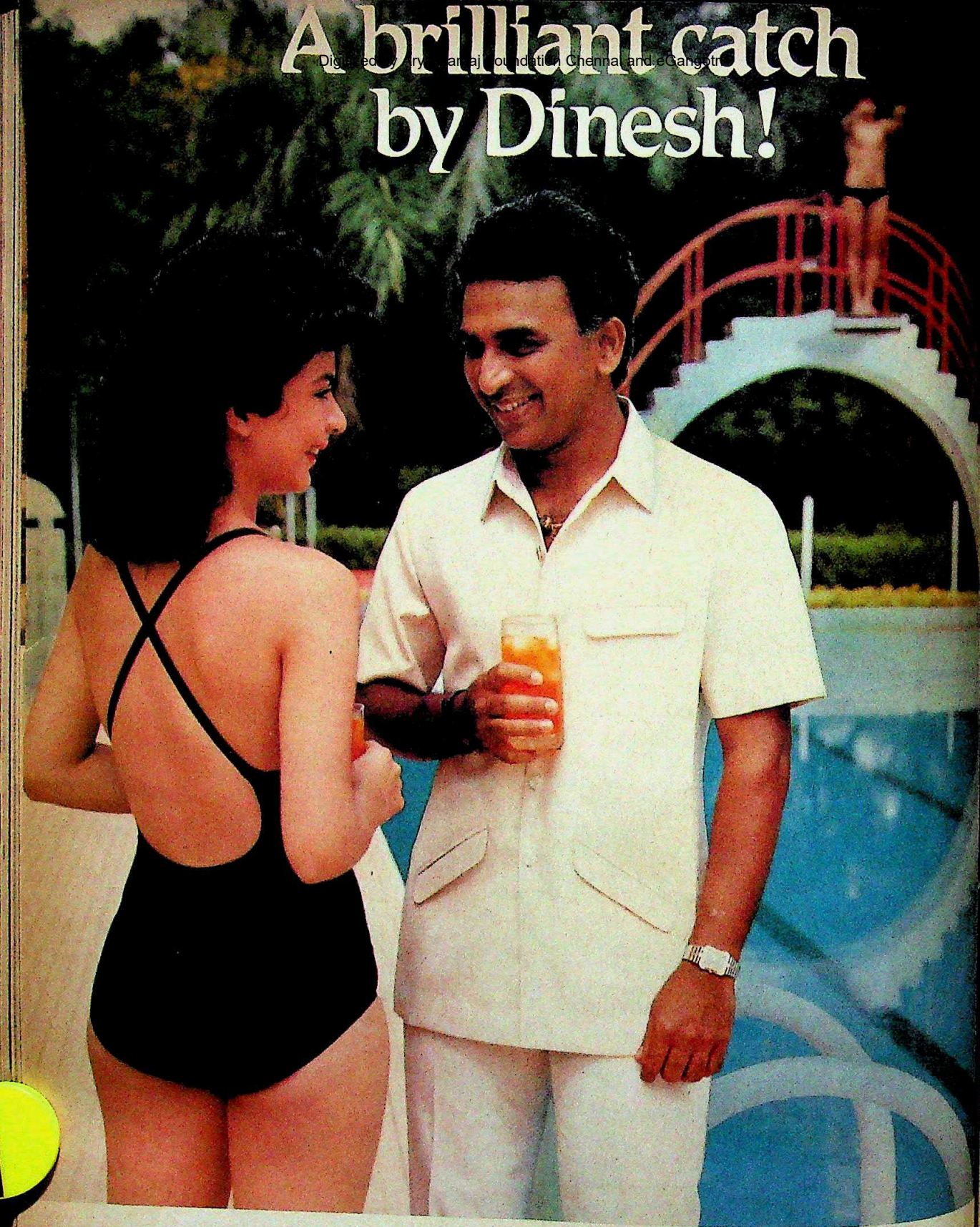

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IAN CHRISTIANS

Women's Victory

IT HAD become a *cause celebre* in Kerala's Christian community by the time Mary Roy finally won her three-year-long battle in the Supreme Court last fortnight, allowing her and other Christian women to claim an equal share in ancestral property. It was a victory for gender equality—more so because Kerala has had a reputation for liberated womanhood despite the archaic law that allowed ancestral property to pass mostly to men.

The Travancore-Cochin Christian Succession Act dated back to 1916, and stated that if the head of the household died without leaving a will, his widow could only claim a maintenance allowance, and daughters could claim only a quarter of each son's share, or Rs 5,000, whichever was less. The law had general social sanction because most women in the community took substantial dowries with them at their marriage, so it was considered natural that they should not get a share of their father's estate. The church approved, and got a small percentage of the dowry paid.

But there were the exceptions, including Mary Roy, who married a Bengali but then was divorced, and because she couldn't claim a share of her father's estate was thrown out of a bungalow owned by her father.

Two other women who impleaded themselves in the case had also been affected by the inequity of the law. One was Elikutty, a retired nurse, who had to move out of her ancestral house along with her mother although she had once been the family's bread-winner and had helped educate or marry her brother and sisters. The other was Mariakutty, a former schoolteacher who never married because there wasn't enough money offered as dowry, and who was left virtually homeless because she had no stake in her father's property.

Given the fact that there were numerous other such cases in the state, there was barely a whimper of protest in the community over the verdict. Said Trivandrum Archbishop Mar Gregorios: "The time and conditions when the law was made (in 1916) have changed. I am happy that women have been given equal rights, and the church will not stand in their way." Nevertheless, the church had failed to come out in Roy's favour before the judgement, despite repeated appeals, and the state Government, opposing her petition, had said in court that "the Christian community has not asked for a change in the law".

This is a major victory for Indian women's fight for equality, especially when the Government has done a volte face on the rights of Muslim women.

MARY ROY

Roy herself sat triumphant in her office at the prestigious Corpus Christi School that she runs in Kottayam, an hour's run from Cochin, and said: "This is a major victory for Indian women's fight for equality, especially when the Government has done a *volte face* on the rights of Muslim women."

Roy said she had fought not for the money (she's comfortably off, but nevertheless stands to gain her fair share of property valued at Rs 1 crore), but because she couldn't stomach the injustice meted out to her.

Roy had advertised in the newspapers, asking other women to help her fight the battle. She said that "The response was tremendous, but almost everyone backed out because of pressure from the male members of their families." The exceptions who fought it out with her were Elikutty and Mariakutty.

The court verdict has also set off changes in the community. Until now, large dowries were openly sought and paid. But with the passing of a new anti-dowry bill by Parliament last October, Christians in the state had resorted to camouflaged payments. Now, with the latest court verdict, matrimonial advertisements have begun to mention "girl with property worth..." instead of the earlier "will give dowry for...".

Nevertheless, the death of the dowry system cannot safely be predicted in a community where it has common acceptance, and the rapacious hunger for large dowries often dictates the choice of daughters-in-law. According to a businessman from Kottayam: "Those who have already received a fortune as dowry will now insist that they get an equal share of their father's property; this will mean a lot of bad blood and litigation." Added Roy Matthew, a private financier from Kozhencherry in central Travancore: "The Supreme Court judgement precludes dowry, but I don't think there will be any overnight changes."

Elikutty (top) and Mariakutty: joining hands

But Mary Roy said she wasn't concerned with people who could afford to pay large dowries. "It is the common Christian girl exploited by her family while she works as a nurse in the Gulf or a teacher in north-eastern states or becomes a nun, who will benefit from the judgement." Added Oommen Chandy, one of the leading politicians in the state: "Unlike the Shah Bano case, the Mary Roy case will not even create ripples in the Christian community or the church. Christians as a whole welcome it, and I personally feel there should not be any kind of discrimination against women."

Mary Roy, however, is not content. She next plans to take up cudgels on behalf of Muslim women.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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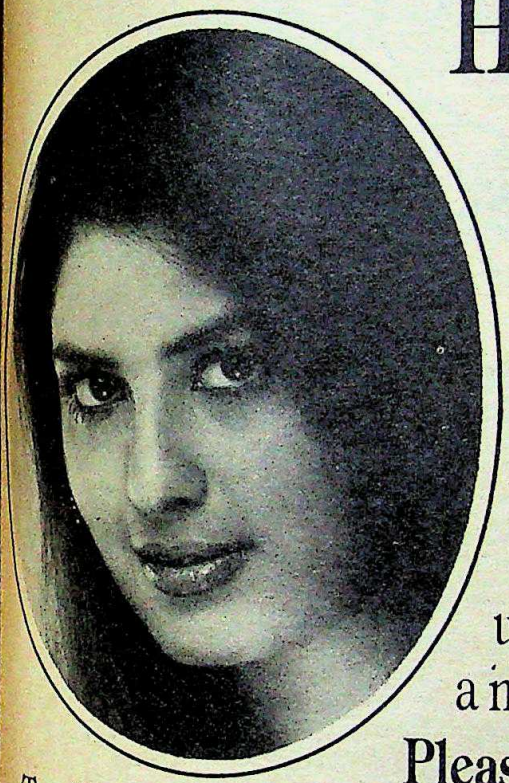

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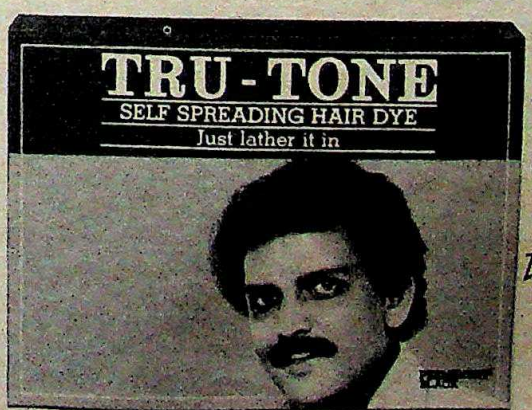

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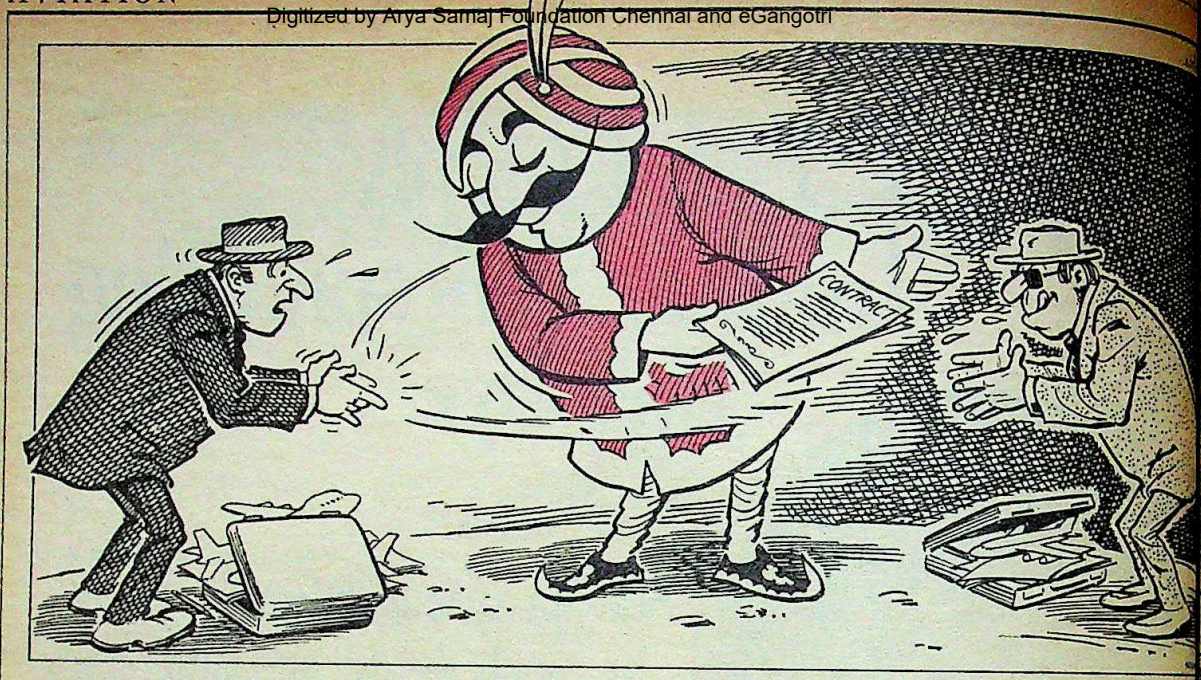

AIR-INDIA

Double Dealing

AIR-INDIA's corpulent corporate symbol, the Maharaja, may acquire the reputation of a shabby wheeler-dealer as a result of the manner in which the airline's top management has negotiated two major contracts. The deals, one relating to the lease of three cargo aircraft and the other involving the purchase of a Boeing 747 Jumbo jet to replace the ill-fated *Kanishka*, have raised eyebrows in international aviation circles because of the questionable manner in which they were processed.

The leasing arrangement has already been questioned by several influential members of Parliament who have written letters to the prime minister as well as to the Ministry of Transport pointing out that in signing the contract, Air-India ignored offers which would have saved about Rs 10 crore per year in foreign exchange for the country.

The story began when Air-India put out a global advertisement for the lease of three cargo aircraft last year. It received several offers. But the one from London-based Connector Ltd was attractive because it provided for an "Indianisation package". It agreed to accept 40 per cent of the remittances in rupees, provide an Indian crew based in India, and to form a taxable Indian corporation to conduct the entire operation.

The advantages were obvious. In addition to corporation taxes that would accrue to the Government on the profits of the new company, and the creation of new job opportunities for pilots and engineers, India would save about Rs 10 crore in foreign exchange per year.

Bose (left) and Sidhu: odd choice

Connector's offer, however, was turned down on the plea that it was received after the closing date for bids, a condition which was waived in case of Evergreen International, the company which was finally selected. While Connector was offering a deal involving no payment, another firm, Cargolux, offered a dry lease for a Boeing-747 for $ 170 per hour and a DC-8-63 at $ 600 per hour with a minimum guarantee of three years and an escalation clause of 7 per cent per year.

But to everyone's surprise, Air-India ignored the Connector and Cargolux offers and signed the deal, instead, with another US-based company, Evergreen International, which offered none of the benefits and was costlier in the long run—the operating rates worked out to $ 4,[illegible] per hour for a Boeing, $ 2,[illegible] for a DC-8-63 and $ 2,48[illegible] for a DC-8-73.

Even more surprising is the fact that Evergreen was nowhere in the negotiation picture till the last moment. When Air-India's already existing two-year cargo lease contract with National Airways of America terminated in June 1984, a letter went out from headquarters to all its regional directors asking them to locate potential companies willing to offer freighter planes on wet lease in which the company would provide the crew and other support staff. Air-India, inexplicably, did not consider a dry lease whereby it could have used its own pilots thus saving huge amounts of foreign exchange. In response to its inquiries, six companies offered various aircraft for lease. Evergreen's rate was US $ 2,058 per hour which was later reduced to $ 2040. Air-India failed

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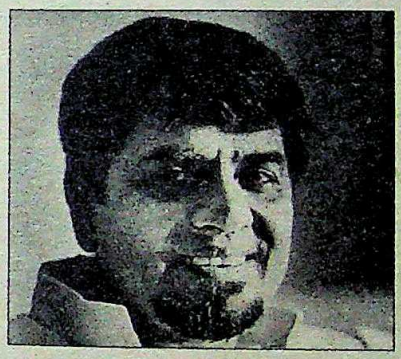
...final decision and chose, instead, to ...the life of the existing contract for ...few months. The regional offices ...then asked to secure revised bids. ...Once again seven companies made ...offers. A committee scrutinised these ...recommended acceptance of an offer ...by National Airways of a DC-8-63 ...Boeing 747. In September 1984, Bose ...a letter to the ministry seeking its ...for signing a contract with Na... Airways and also recommended ...extension of its contract till December ...According to the letter, Air-India ...to sign the contract with National ...at the rate of $ 4,798 per hour for ...Boeing and $ 2,334 for a DC-8-63. ...was not mentioned in the ...list of three parties.

THEN aviation secretary, M.M. Kohli, turned down the request on the ground that the offers were not ...and broadbased enough and ...Air-India to once again invite ...bids. In January 1985, Air-India ...issued advertisements inviting of... ...for cargo planes on wet lease. The ...companies repeated their offers, ...of which were naturally higher, ...Air-India to spend more than they ...originally have. In the revised ...Cargolux also offered dry lease ...but it was not even considered by ...management. In February, Connector ...in its offer which was rejected on ...grounds that it was received after the ...of the last date for bids.

The five-member committee recom... ...in March 1985 that the airline ...DC-8-63 from National and a ...from Cargolux. But Bose did not ...the committee's recommenda... ...to the Government. Instead, in April ...wrote a letter enclosing a chart of ...figures of offers made by ...one of the six parties to Aviation ...S.S.Sidhu, seeking approval to ...a contract with Evergreen for hiring a ...a DC-8-73 and Boeing 747 for ...years. The comparative statement ...offers which, significantly, was not ...by any of the parties, contained ...which were incorrect. For in... ...the rates mentioned for Cargolux ...the chart were higher than their actual ...Bose was not willing to explain how ...discrepancy had crept in, a discrep... ...that finally tilted the balance in ...favour of Evergreen. According to Bose, ...Evergreen's terms were the cheapest. ...Sidhu cleared the proposal after secur... ...the aviation minister's approval. But ...Jitender Singh, joint secretary in the ministry, while conveying the Government's approval recorded that:

- Air-India had not properly assessed the financial viability of Evergreen.
- The other offers were not properly assessed or examined.
- The period for terminating the earlier cargo lease agreement was unduly long.
- Air-India had not considered the possibility of a dry lease.

MP's who have got details of the deal have now begun to raise serious objections. In a letter to the Transport Ministry, Jaideep Singh Baria, Lok Sabha member from Gujarat, pointed out: "I find that the price offered (by Connector Ltd) is most competitive and perhaps the cheapest. In spite of these advantages, this offer was not considered." Andhra Pradesh MP K.L.N. Prasad, dashed off a similar letter requesting "a re-examination" of the entire deal. And S.B.Singh, MP from Doongargarh, wrote a confidential letter to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi asking for an examination "of the antecedents" of the company which had received the contract.



"I have received representations from various MP's and am looking into it. If there is something wrong, none will be spared."

JAGDISH TYTLER
Minister of State for Civil Aviation

Admits Jagdish Tytler, the minister of state for civil aviation: "I have received various representations from MP's and am looking into it. I can assure you that if it is found that there is something wrong, none will be spared."

According to Air-India officials, Connector's offer was not considered because it came in after the last date for the receipt of offers. Also, its "effective lease rate works out to be higher than the lease rate finalised." They based this calculation on the premise that while Evergreen is charging $ 4,673 per hour with a guarantee of 260 flying hours per month, Connector was demanding $ 4,450 per hour with a guarantee of 300 hours per month.

But a close scrutiny of the contract reveals that the Evergreen deal includes a 5 per cent escalation clause which effectively raises the hourly charge to $ 4,800. Baria has asked the ministry to examine the Evergreen contract for possible loopholes in the termination clauses and performance guarantees.

Air-India may have been less than candid about the closing date of the contract. Says a senior Connector official: "The deal was finalised with Evergreen on June 15. Even if Air-India does not acknowledge that our proposal was sent to them a month earlier, they cannot deny that I met their top officials on June 11. I met the minister for civil aviation on June 12, and on June 14, I met Finance Minister V.P. Singh and informed him about our pending offer. We gave Air-India benefits which no other company gave them. But it's obvious now that these considerations don't matter a damn."

Similar charges are being aired about the other major deal involving Air-India's proposed purchase of a Boeing to replace the *Kanishka*. The deal should have been worked out last fortnight with Trans World Airlines but has been delayed because of allegations, again levelled by Connector, that the deal was struck behind closed doors between Air-India officials and the sellers on the basis of confidential information provided by Connector to Air-India. Connector is now threatening to go to court.

"We have been taken for a ride," fumed Connector Chairman David M. Morrell in a telephone interview with INDIA TODAY: "We have become the victims of subterfuge. We were in the midst of negotiating the deal with Air-India and had provided them detailed information about the availability of the aircraft. But as soon as they got this information they leaked it to somebody else and cut us out of the picture. We will have no option but to recover our losses."

But if the reaction from government sources is any indication, Air-India is unlikely to reverse its decisions on either the cargo lease or the Boeing purchase, however questionable the manner in which it was done or the obvious financial disadvantages involved. Maharajas, after all, are a law unto themselves.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR and PRABHU CHAWLA

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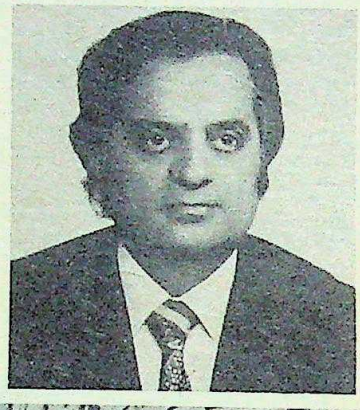

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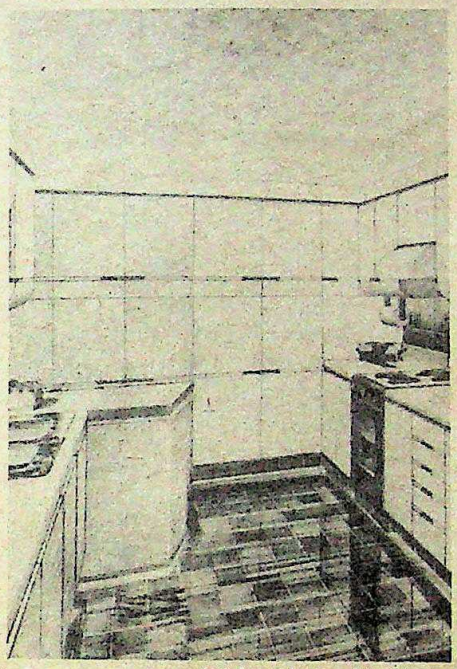

Artist's rendering of the kitchen

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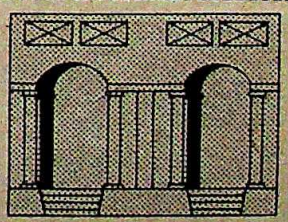

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IOA

Olympian Fiasco

TILL THE last minute, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) was confident that the Government's permission for its bid for the 1992 Olympics was only a formality. Its dapper president, Vidya Charan Shukla, even caught an early morning flight to Japan on February 27, the same day that the Union Cabinet was expected to formally back the bid. Even as the Cabinet met at 7 p.m. to deliberate the matter, two officials had reported for an Air France flight to Geneva enroute to Lausanne, the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), where the bid, duly endorsed by the Government, had to be submitted the next day. They were only waiting for the affirmative documents.

Instead, they got the copy of a telex message which the Sports Ministry had sent to the Indian Embassy at Berne saying that, contrary to earlier instructions, the IOA representatives were not to be handed $ 1000 (to be given along with the bid) should they land up. That was how the IOA learnt that its five-year-old dream of bringing the Olympics to India had gone up in smoke.

"Till now that copy of the telex message is the only intimation we have had from the Government. There has been no explanation, not even a letter," said a dispirited C.L. Mehta, secretary-general of the IOA. On his return from Japan, where he had gone for the Winter Asian Games, Shukla sounded just as despondent. "I am very disappointed. Not only did we have a good financial case for our bid, we were sure we would have been allotted the Games. The Olympics would have given a big spur to sports in the country. Now I am left to wonder why the Government decided the bid was unworthy of its endorsement." Asked a bitter IOA functionary: "If the Government had to say no, why didn't it say so in 1981 when we first broached the suggestion? Or why not last year when we put in an informal bid? Or why not in January when we took members of an IOC commission to meet Union ministers? Why encourage us all along and then say no at the last minute?"

The answers came just as firmly from the Government. Said Union Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh: "We felt that the commitments would be more than what the country could afford at the moment." Added Minister of State for Sports and Youth Affairs Margaret Alva: "The Cabinet felt that we couldn't afford to take the risk that we would have to divert the nation's resources and energy to what we felt was a non-priority event. Though the IOA had submitted a no-cost-to-government bid we felt, on the basis of the report of a team of officials we had sent to Seoul last month, that the IOA's proposals were somewhat optimistic."

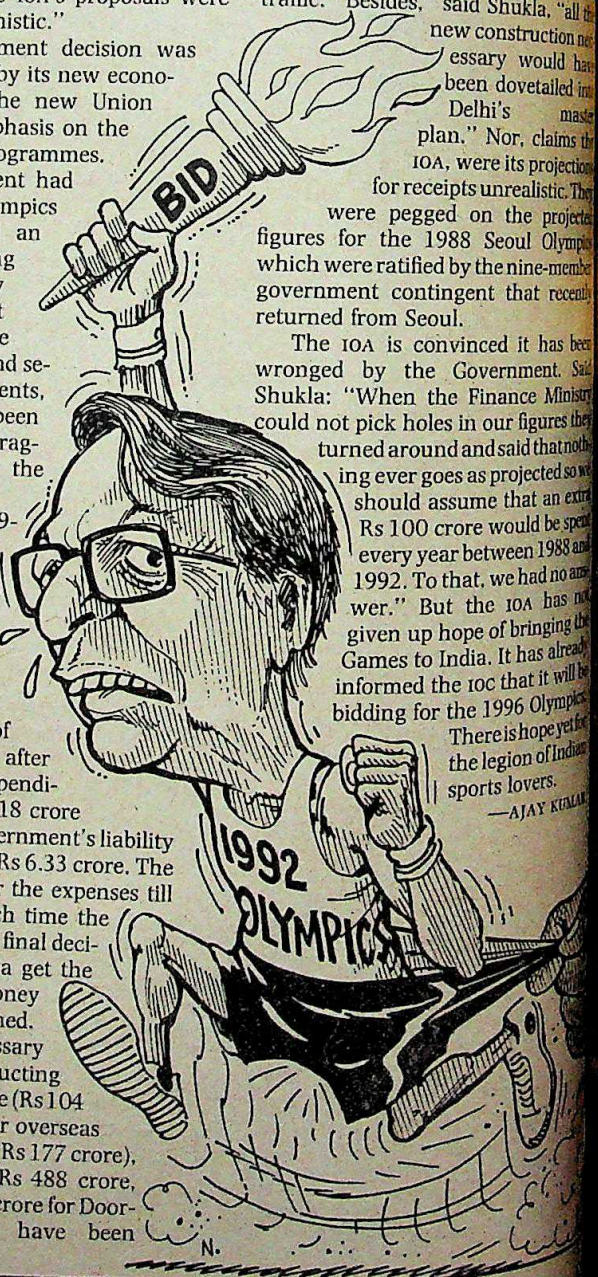
The government decision was also influenced by its new economic policies. The new Union Budget laid emphasis on the anti-poverty programmes. If the government had cleared the Olympics which involved an indirect spending of Rs 200 crore by the Government in improving the infrastructure and security arrangements, it would have been accused of encouraging elitism in the name of sports.

The IOA's 19-page proposal, submitted to the Government last November, had shown that the Games would leave a surplus of Rs 246.07 crore, after incurring an expenditure of Rs 1,016.18 crore in which the Government's liability would be a mere Rs 6.33 crore. The sum would cover the expenses till October, by which time the IOC would take its final decision. Should India get the Games, the money would be returned. All the necessary expenses—constructing the Olympic village (Rs 104 crore), facilities for overseas communications (Rs 177 crore), media coverage (Rs 488 crore, including Rs 300 crore for Doordarshan)—would have been borne by the IOA.

The Government would also have... meet the expenditure on security, ... ening of roads for the new structures ... civil aviation facilities but these, argue... Shukla, would have been minimal. Of... five additional stadia would have had ... be constructed but they would be sma... capacity ones (7,000 against ... 25,000-seat Indira Gandhi Stadium ... and would be located on Delhi's ou... skirts; the existing hospital facilit... would have been enough with only ... Central dope-testing centre to be set u... the Indira Gandhi airport would ha... been enough to handle the Olympi... traffic. "Besides," said Shukla, "all th... new construction ne... essary would have ... been dovetailed int... Delhi's master ... plan." Nor, claims th... IOA, were its projection... for receipts unrealistic. The... were pegged on the projecte... figures for the 1988 Seoul Olympi... which were ratified by the nine-member ... government contingent that recently ... returned from Seoul.

The IOA is convinced it has been ... wronged by the Government. Said ... Shukla: "When the Finance Ministry ... could not pick holes in our figures they ... turned around and said that nothing ever goes as projected so we should assume that an extra Rs 100 crore would be spent every year between 1988 and 1992. To that, we had no answer." But the IOA has not given up hope of bringing the Games to India. It has already informed the IOC that it will be bidding for the 1996 Olympics. There is hope yet for the legion of Indian sports lovers.

—AJAY KUMAR



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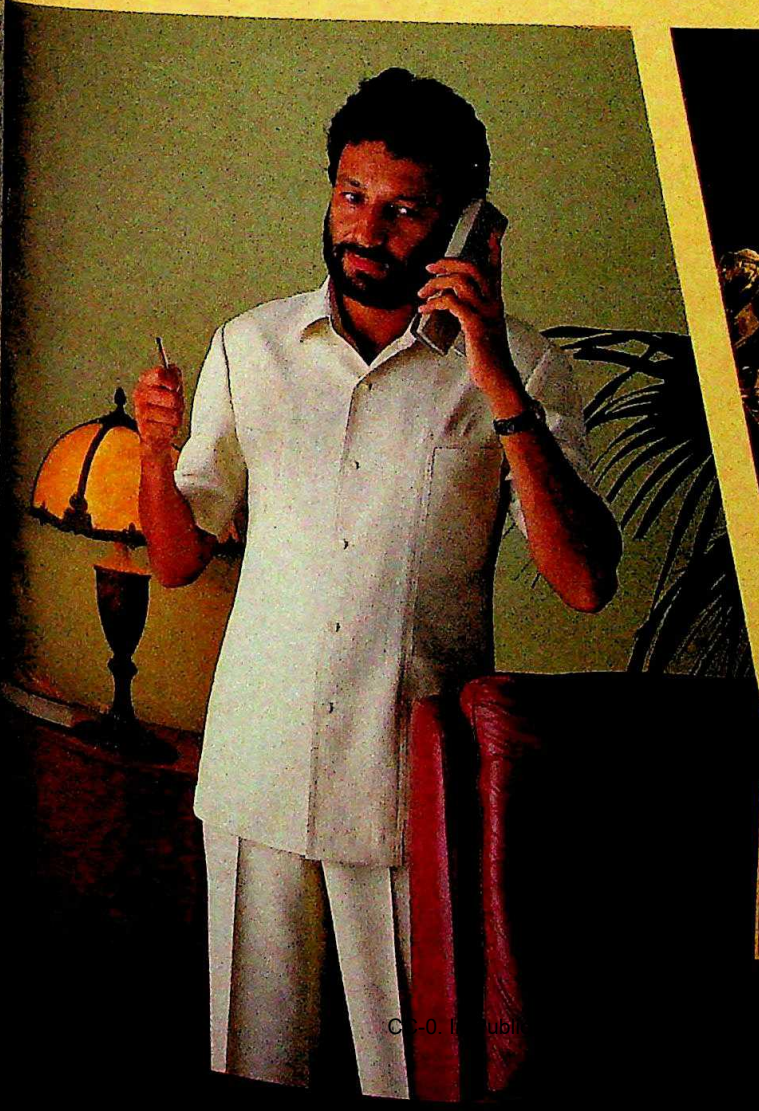

Unmistakably...

DIGJAM

GOLD CREST, SNOW FLAKE,
FLAMING GRACE, PALM BEACH,
MONARCH, ELEGANCE

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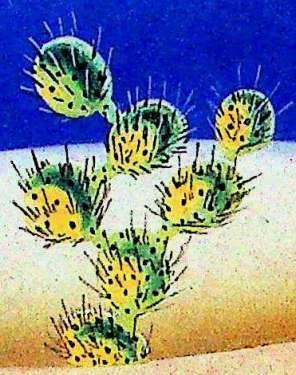
On the eve of the 21st century
why make such a fuss about sand



THE SCL UNICORN

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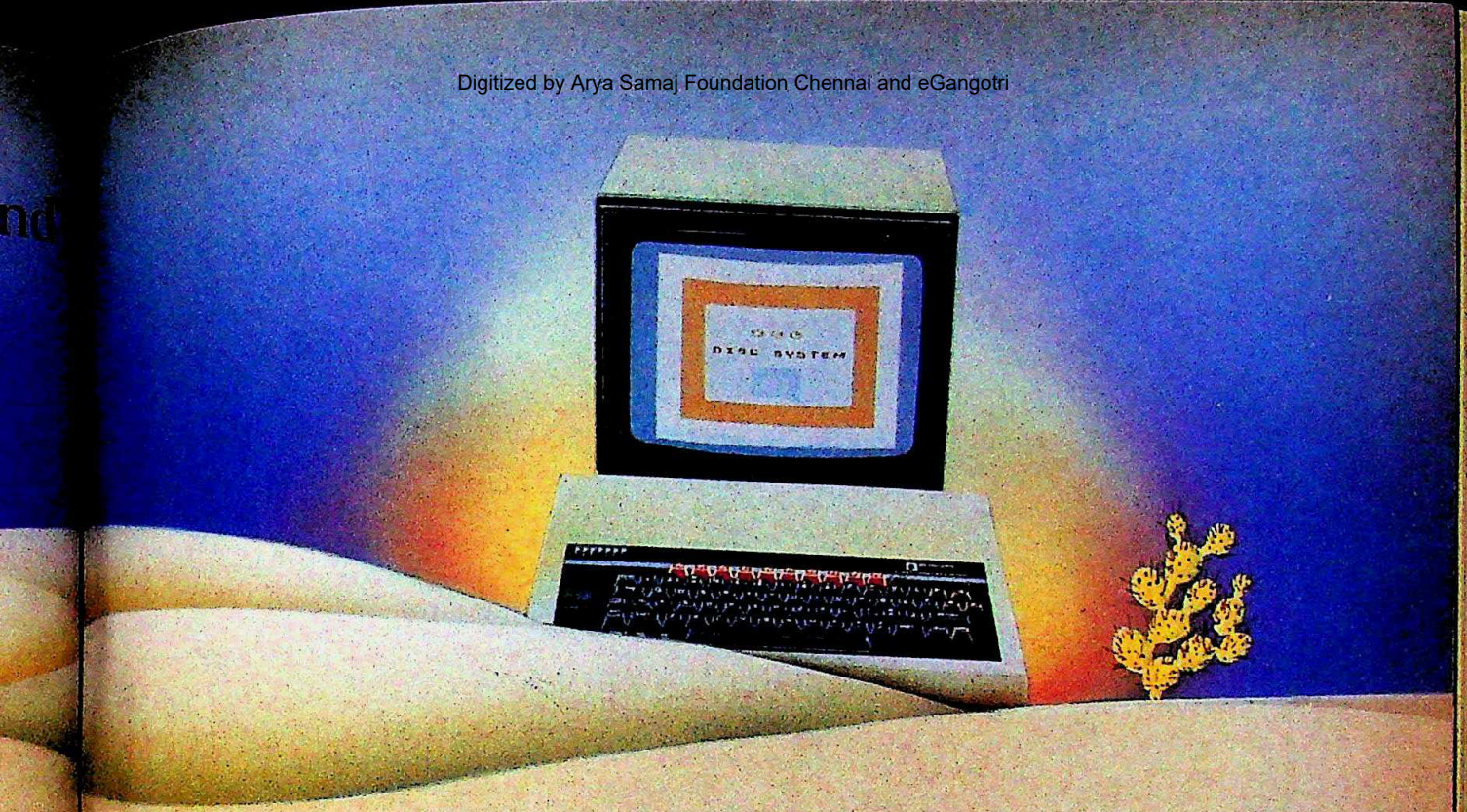

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VIKAS VATS

Dimple: true to life

◆ She bundled her hair into two ear-flanking buns, squeezed into a bikini and danced her way into the hearts of a generation. Now the heart-throb of the '70s has got the role of her lifetime: **Dimple Kapadia** in and as *Dimple*. The latest venture of **Mahesh Bhatt**, the life-story specialist (*Arth, Saraansh* and *Janam*), the film will chart the erratic and exciting course of the actress' life—from the breathless euphoria of *Bobby* to the famous midnight seaside proposal by the then superstar, to her stormy marriage and her sudden decision to throw it all away and the regret and second stardom that followed. Naturally Dimple is excited about her tailor-made part. And guess who plays Rajesh Khanna? **Vinod Khanna**—the film will also mark the swami's comeback.

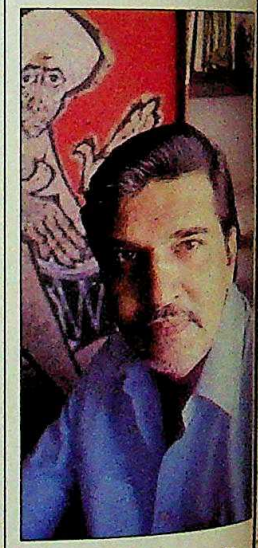
◆ What does it take to be a beauty? A pair of hazel eyes, a 34-24-35 figure and a bubbly giggle that will bring a smile to the grumpiest of faces. So when **Poonam Gidwani**, 21, soft-spoken and winsome, undulated down the catwalk in New Delhi last fortnight, the judges knew that this was it. The Bombay girl scored over an assortment of Indian beauties to bag the crown of Miss India 1986. "Oh, I can't believe it!" she gushed the next morning. "I couldn't sleep the whole night and I'm still trying to get over it." Get over it she certainly will, when she reaches Tokyo for the Miss International later this year. For the time being, she's concentrating on her modelling. "I've been modelling for two-three years. I love my profession and plan to continue with it." And, pre-empting the inevitable question, she adds: "No, I'm certainly not interested in films."

RANJAN BASU

Gidwani: crowning glory

◆ He began as a dot on Delhi's morning horizon. Silhouetted against the red expanse of North Block-South Block, the dot grew and took on a familiar shape. Spectators at the Sunday Otto Peltzer races did a double-take and rubbed their eyes. It was...no, it couldn't be...but yes it was...**Kip Keino**, the legend of middle-distance running in person. A sprightly 46, the former Olympic gold-medallist from Kenya streaked across the 6.5 km course in 23 minutes 3.4 seconds. Said the retired runner, who is in India to coach the Indian team for the World Cross Country Championship: "It was good competition, very enjoyable, very neat." Of his trainees, the coach said: "We are like a friendly family. I wish they break all records and come back with a bunch of medals." Which is not unlikely with a coach like Keino.

◆ Mario Joao Carlos Rosario de Brito Miranda may be an unfamiliar name. But *Mario Miranda* isn't. So when the irrepressible cartoonist opened an exhibition of his drawings and sketches on New York in New Delhi last fortnight, crowds thronged to the American Center to find him in his element—with a difference: the artist had also dabbled in colour, for the first time. Otherwise, there was the same sharp wit and the same boyish mischievousness. There were

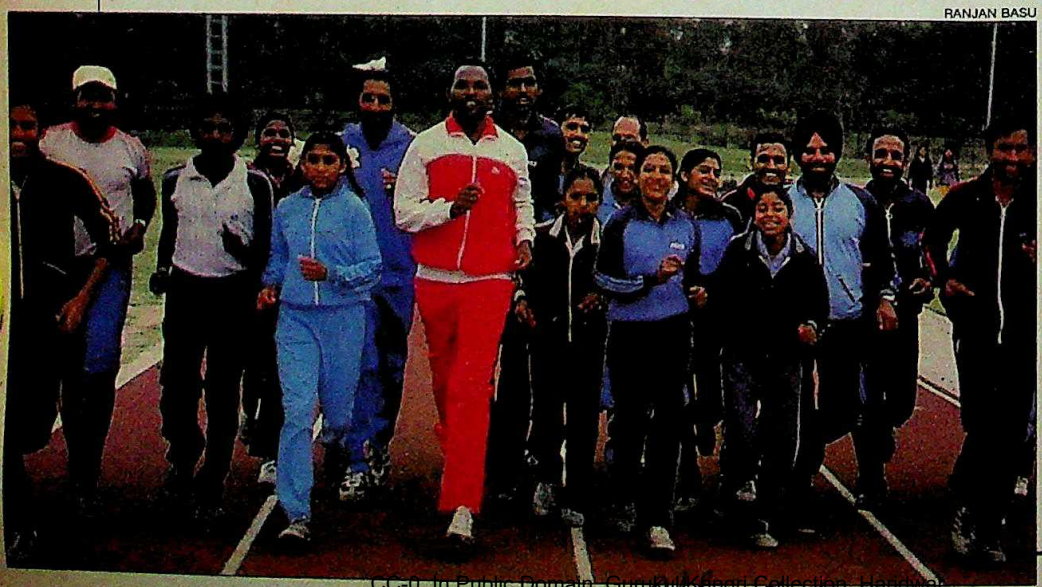


Miranda: New York!

the dogs and cats with their tails up, the busty women with trailing brats and bent and bow-legged figures in crowded street corners.

Only, the street corners belonged to seedy alleys in Manhattan, and the crowded pathways in Central Park. And towering all over the cityscape were the ubiquitous skyscrapers. But what took the cake was *Little India*, with a shop selling good ole *dhaniya-mirchi* bang in the middle of Big Apple, and the signboard requesting: "Please to step inside.

—Compiled by MOHAMMED ASLAM



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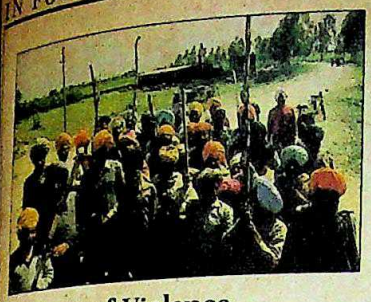

Upsurge of Violence

As the toll of terrorist killings in Punjab mounted daily, communal friction between Hindus and Sikhs added a dangerous new element. Coupled with the rising defiance of the militants, the state was suddenly under savage siege.

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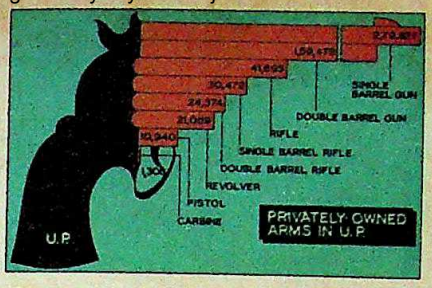

Operation Disarm

Faced with the alarming discovery that Uttar Pradesh has the largest stockpile of privately-owned arms in the country, senior officials under Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh have launched a massive operation to curb the menace.

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Dressing Up for the Future

Mohan Murjani has revolutionised the fashion industry with his Gloria Vanderbilt jeans and his Coca Cola clothes. Now, Murjani is all set to launch his new line of top-of-the-market designer jeans and a new electronic shopping project.

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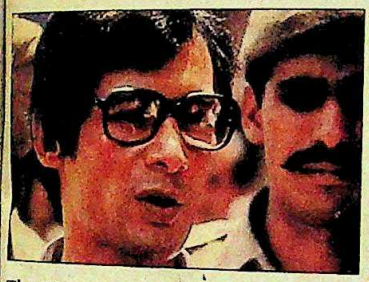

The Escape Scandal

The dramatic escape of Charles Sobhraj from the top-security Tihar jail last fortnight set off one of the biggest manhunts in Indian history. While the escape exposed the rotten core of Tihar, police believe that Sobhraj is still hiding in India.

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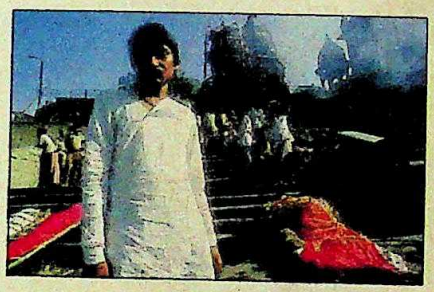

The Dues of Death

Varanasi's Shamshaan Ghat, the fabled cremation ground where Hindus traditionally burn their dead, is also the kingdom of the Dom Raja, the wealthy traditional owner of the ghat and keeper of the holy flame. A pictorial essay.

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Reliving the Legend

The fascinating life of Jim Corbett, the famous conservationist, author and hunter of maneaters, is now being brought to celluloid life. A British television crew is currently filming Corbett's life in Naini Tal, resurrecting the legend.

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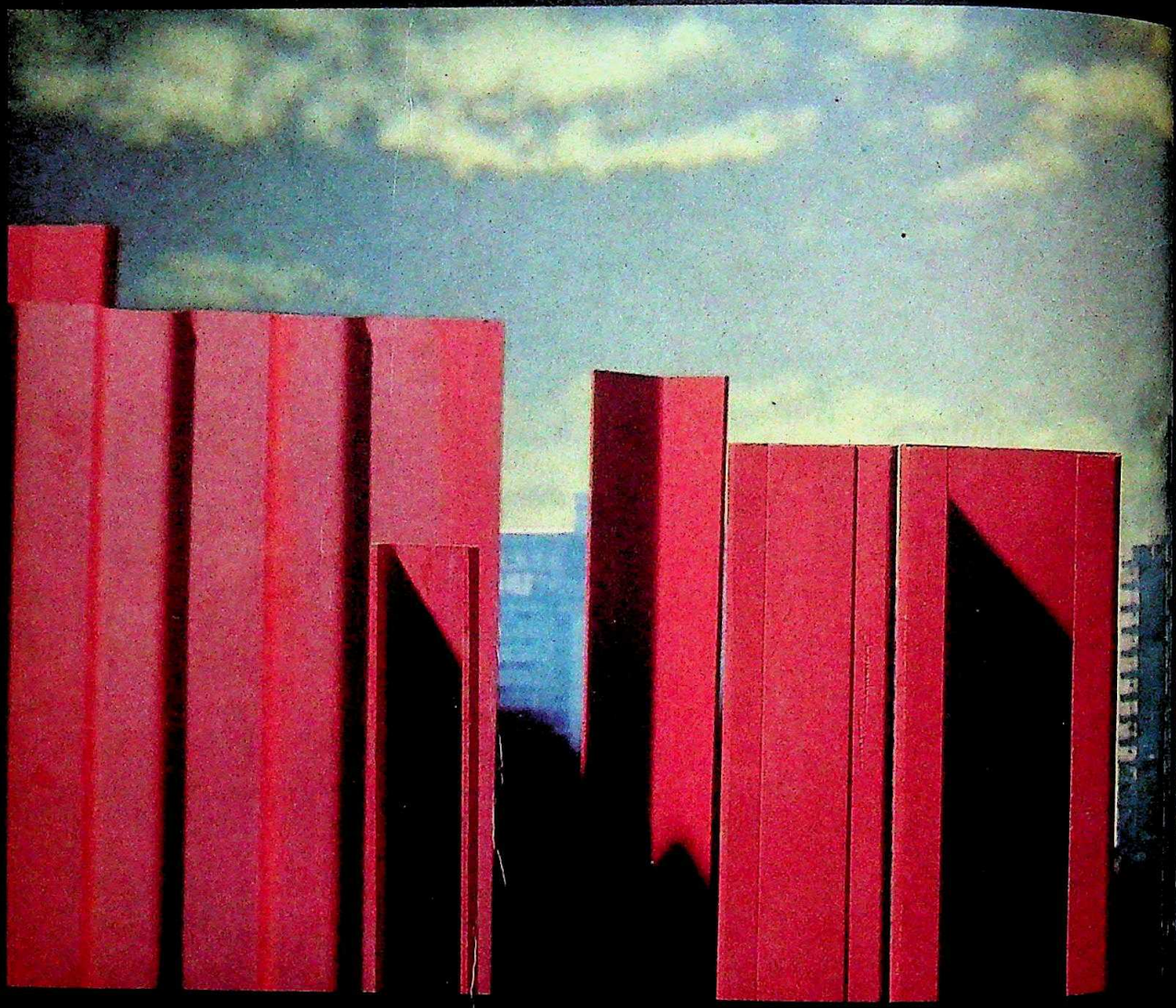
WHEN DOES TECHNOLOGY ENTER THE REALM OF FANTASY?



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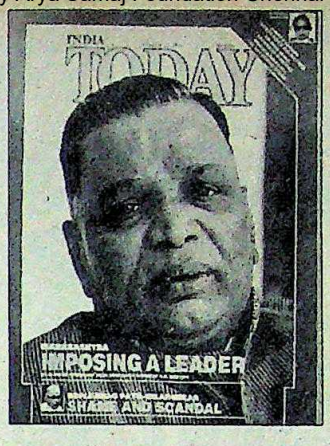

BLACK POLITICIANS

Shame, scandal and Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar ("Imposing a Leader" March 31) thankfully made a combined exit on March 7. But not before he had virtually hammered the last nail into Bombay University's much maligned coffin. One hopes Chavan will last out the full term for a change.
Bombay — MUSTAFA ATTAR

■ Chavan's return to Maharashtra clearly shows that the Congress(I) culture of imposing leaders from above has prevailed at the cost of internal democracy. Such a pity.
Korattur, Madras — A. SESHAGIRI RAO

■ After reading about the families of chief ministers and governors moving the earth in their pursuit of degrees, can we remind such public men, that while performing their political and state duties they are not supposed to be indulging in personal political barter trade.
Bombay — SARYU

■ I am disappointed that Naval Kishore Sharma, the Congress(I) observer, should, inspite of the scandal surrounding the ouster, say that Nilangekar can, if he wants, fight the elections to Nilanga. Rajiv Gandhi is going back on the promise of providing a clean administration that he made after the general elections.
Gwalior — KAMLESH PRASAD

■ Nilangekar's indictment in the marks scandal that rocked the state should serve as an eye-opener to the Congress(I) leadership. It is ironic that the scandal should take place in the city that hosted the party's centenary celebrations. Obviously, Nilangekar did not take Rajiv Gandhi's admonitory speech on the corruption in the party seriously.
Ahmedabad — M.V. RAVINDRAN

■ The astounding facts unearthed by the high court have made the public more suspicious of the quality of the doctors churned out by medical colleges. However, this should serve as a lesson to universities against stooping so low as to allow political interference. Politicians have only self-interest in mind.
Madras — FRANKLYN STANLEY

■ The headlines and stories in your March 31 issue move me to tears. School for Scandal, The Gathering Storm, The Crisis State, Suspect Role, Affiliated Colleges... What is our future?
Madhya Pradesh — V.B.K. SATNA

■ Last month's happenings in Maharashtra have all the ingredients of a filmi drama. If Chavan had the required qualities why the farce of 'electing' a leadcer?
New Delhi — VIDYA SAGAR

■ The political process in India is not only rotten to the core but also rotten from the core. A small point perhaps, but nontheless worth making.
Meerut — RASHMEE ROSHAN LALL

PROS AND CONS

Reference to the ongoing debate on the Muslim Women's Bill ("Gathering Storm" March 31). No secular minded person would like to praise or support a bill that not only undoes the Supreme Court's decision but also hurts the feelings of Muslim women. Rajiv Gandhi seems to be thinking of going it alone in the 21st century.
Jaipur — RAVINDRA MISRA

■ The country is not going to become secular overnight by modifying Muslim personal law. The point is India never was and is not a secular country. In schools, especially government ones, why do children have to recite the prayers of a particular religion and why does Doordarshan telecast the teachings of one religion only? Secularism is not manufactured, it is only realised.
Guwahati — A. HAZARIKA

■ The Muslim community is supporting the bill because Section 125 interferes in personal law. Not even the prophet had sanctioned maintenance beyond the *iddat* period—that is 3 months and 10 days. Hence to support the bill is a religious duty. Also, the *mehr* factor was ignored by the Shah Bano judgement, which the bill suitably corrects. If the bill is not passed, the

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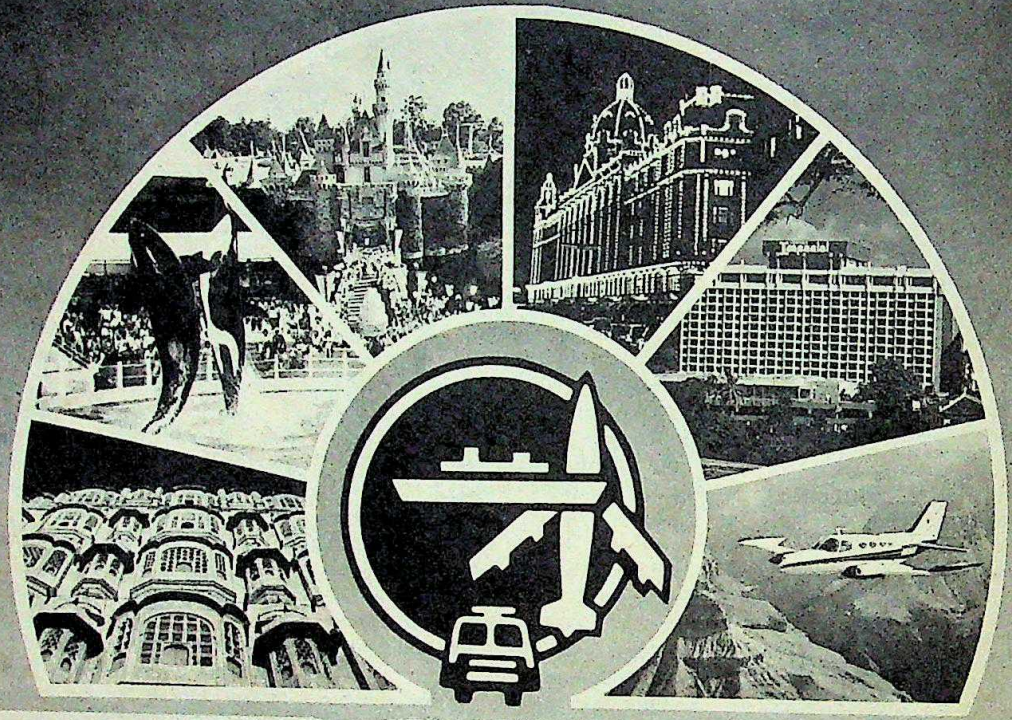
RAJ HOLIDAYS 1986



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- KASHMIR ECONOMY TOUR
- KASHMIR DELUXE TOUR

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- ATHENS/MADRID WITH EUROPEAN CONNECTION
- TRANS WORLD AMERICA WITH ATHENS OR WITH CAIRO

WEDNESDAY DEPARTURES :
- GRAND EUROPE
- U. S. EXPERIENCE

THURSDAY DEPARTURES :
- KASHMIR WITH KATHMANDU

FRIDAY DEPARTURES :
- FAR EAST ADVENTURE
- MINI EUROPE
- MOSCOW WITH EUROPEAN CONNECTION
- KULU-MANALI-SIMLA
- KASHMIR WITH DELHI, AGRA AND JAIPUR

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- SHOPPING PARADISE
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country's Muslims will lose all faith in the system of governance.

NAVEED YAR KHAN
Delhi

■ Why is there such a hue and cry about the plight of divorced Muslim women? Muslim ladies are allowed supreme position as laid down in the Quran. The community is not divided on this issue as seen from the mammoth protest rallies all over the country. The legislation before Parliament is not retrograde but progressive.

PARAYIL MOHAMED
Tirur, Kerala

■ Rajiv must learn to take even unpleasant decisions in the public interest rather than trying to appease fanatic elements in a particular community and indulge in cheap gimmickry to win favour.

B. RAMMURTY
Lucknow

■ A referendum exclusively for the Muslims might decide if they want or don't want to accept the jurisdiction of Indian courts in matters of divorce and alimony. Perhaps there is an overwhelming majority of women fearful of raising their voices, who could use the referendum without endangering their position.

JOHN M. JACOB
Hyderabad

■ I wonder what Gandhiji would have to say on secularism if he were alive today. He had often been blamed for being unswayed by generally populist measures and sticking to what he believed was the right. Our leaders seem to have buckled down completely under populist pressure.

NEERAJ THAKUR
Patna

■ Bowing down to a policy of appeasement will destroy the basic structure of secularism and human justice and dig the graveyard for the Government.

C.L. AGGARWAL
Sonepur, Orissa

■ Those advocating a change in Muslim personal law say they want Muslim women to enjoy the fundamental rights granted to every Indian. Following our own religion and our own personal law is our fundamental right and hence no one should stop us.

T.M. ABDUL JABBAR
Alkhobar, Saudi Arabia

■ Will the Government reintroduce sati, untouchability, child marriage, and the caste system in the spirit of its Muslim Women's Bill in the next session?

S.K. JAIN
New Delhi

■ Secularism and nationalism have increasingly come to mean being anti-Muslim. People's energies should be channelised into trying to improve the country instead of hounding a community.

IRFAN A. SIDDIQUI
Faizabad

■ The bill serves to heal the hurt feelings of the Muslim minority, in a country which is manoeuvring to make them a mass of identity-less people, deprived of their own culture, traditions and way of life.

NAZIR HUSSAIN PATEL
Saudi Arabia

■ The Government should have also simultaneously introduced a constitutional amendment bill for the deletion of the word secular from the preamble to the Constitution.

RAJNEESH BERDIA
Bhopal

■ The bill suggests that a divorced woman's parents or relatives must maintain her because blood relationship is stronger than a marital relationship. Can I ask the framers of the bill what is to happen to the children in these cases. Is their relationship with their own father also considered dissolved by the application of the same inescapable and cold logic?

S. BHATTACHARYA
56 APO

CORRECTION

In your article ("Gathering Storm" March 31), the caption given below a photograph of a symposium organised by the Aligarh Muslim University Old Boys Association, is misleading. The symposium was not a "pro-bill seminar" as you said but an impartial discussion on the constitutional and social aspects of Muslim Personal Law with specific reference to the Shah Bano case. The symposium was neither in favour of nor against the bill.

KHWAJA M. SHAHID
New Delhi

SECTARIAN FALLOUT

What happened in J&K ("Tragic Tale" March 31) was the result of the tension around Babari Masjid and the happenings in Jammu. Though police officers in Anantnag were suspended immediately after the violence, no action was taken when Muslims were the target. Such a policy must change or this will prove prejudicial to the interests of our nation.

BASHIR AHMAD
Kashmir

■ Your special report has ignored the fact that communal passions were aroused in Anantnag after the minority community in Jammu was subjected to harassment and shops next to a police station were burnt. While the ugly incidents in the valley must be condemned, the part played by the Jammu communalists in triggering off the disturbances need to be equally condemned.

ISMAT
Srinagar

BENIGHTED SECTOR

The Comment ("Public Issue" March 31) neatly sums up the plight of the public sector institutions. There is an urgent need to streamline the present system in order to achieve the goals of the five year plans.

T. S. SHANKARAN
Bangalore

■ Your article is timely and an eye-opener. Unfortunately, the public sector has become excessively bureaucratised and recruitment to top positions has been largely dictated by political considerations. Barring a few, most public sector enterprises are incurring heavy losses and are a drain on the nation. Corrective measures are urgently required.

JAYATHIRTHA. K. PUJAR
Bangalore

■ The failure of the public sector idea makes it now appear that socialism was a pleasant daydream.

MRITUNJAY P. SINGH
Ratlam

SCAPEGOAT

Reference to "Log Jam" (March 31). To err is human but to blame it on others is politics. Finding a scapegoat is the easiest thing in the world and Kewal Ram Chauhan did just that without a qualm.

VIVEK MOHAN
Shimla

FOR THE RECORD

Your report on Maruti ("Rewarding Links" February 28) has missed these facts. I qualified in automobile engineering from the UK and have also specialised in shipping and transport systems. The dealership was awarded to our company only after Maruti Udyog was satisfied with the facilities available at our end. Our workshops in Calcutta, Siliguri and Durgapur are perhaps the best in eastern India.

M.D. JINDAL
managing director
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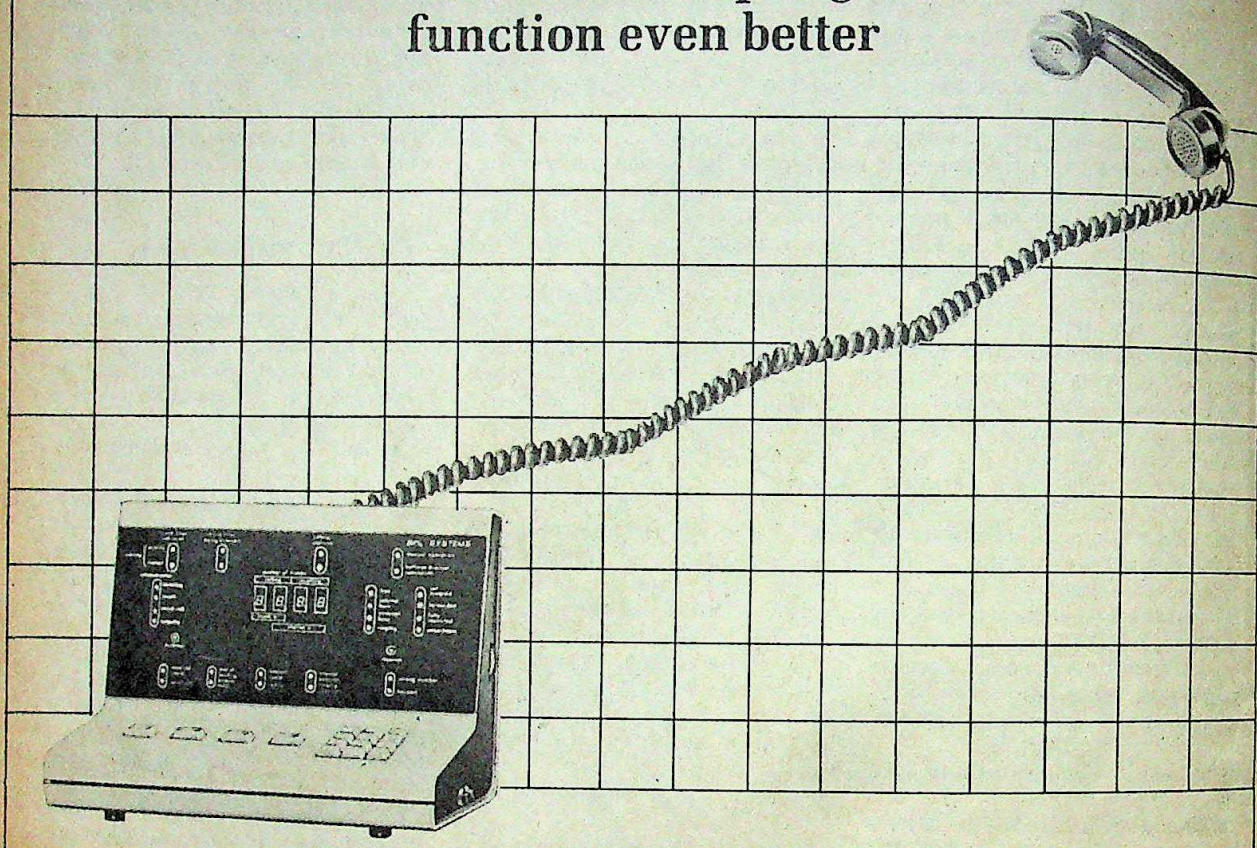

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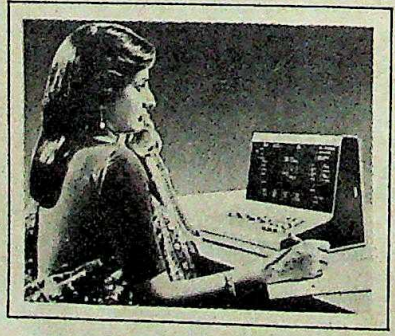

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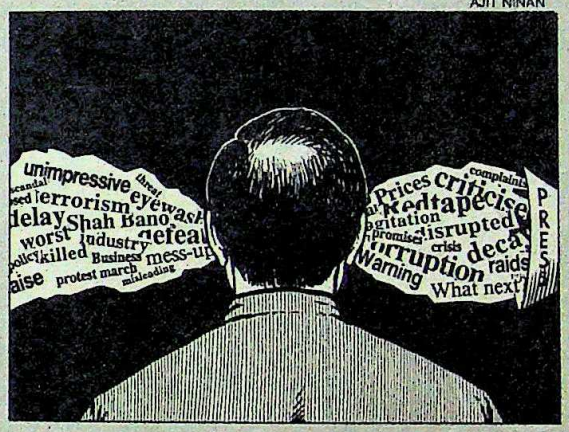
Critical Facts

IT IS hallowed tradition in politics to blame bad news on the messenger who brings it and Rajiv Gandhi seems to have fallen prey to the temptation. At a press conference in Ahmedabad last fortnight, the prime minister called the national press "unpredictable and irresponsible", and said it was behaving in a "very fickle manner". Shortly before this, he told a Calcutta newspaper in an interview that the raids against businessmen "had marked the turning point in the attitude of the press". Rajiv also said in Ahmedabad that while the press had turned critical of his Government, his "love affair was with the people of India and that still continued". Clearly, he believes that the press does not reflect public opinion, and seems to be making the unworthy suggestion that journalistic criticism is motivated by newspaper proprietors who may be annoyed by the raids on businessmen.

AJIT NINAN



When things start going wrong, as they must during any government's term in office, the easy way out is to attack the press. Richard Nixon did this in the United States, and the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi did it in India before virtually shutting herself off from Indian journalists. But this fortress mentality gets a politician nowhere, and over time shuts him or her off from reality.

Rajiv Gandhi started out differently. He was open to the press, he even seemed to welcome criticism. This was easy enough when the press was falling over itself praising him for his undisputed achievements during his first year in office. If the country had been short of heroes, he appeared to be one. But now that the ride isn't quite as smooth, Rajiv's comments hark back unpleasantly to the tone that his mother used to employ in her more embattled days.

It is nobody's case that the press is correct in everything it says, or that it is free from defects. Indeed, sections of the press did not cover themselves with glory in reporting on several recent flashpoints, be it Kashmir, Gujarat or Punjab. But a moment's reflection should convince the prime minister that the new tone of press comments on his Government cannot have been orchestrated by anyone. The press in India speaks in a multitude of voices, ownership patterns vary quite sharply, and the leftist press has in fact been more critical of his Government's record than the mainline publications. So if there is any kind of consensus of opinion reflected in the criticism, it must be based on commonly perceived facts that are observable on the ground.

He is also over-reacting. Despite the increase in critical comments in recent weeks, he has not yet run into an unfriendly press, barring perhaps a couple of publications (and these will always exist in a free, unorchestrated media). Even on the contentious question of the raids, no one has questioned the motive behind the raids (as has been done in the case of earlier governments), or indeed questioned the integrity of the men ordering them. And the record will show that more print has been given to government statements and accounts of raids than to those who have been raided. The only change occurred when newspapers started reporting the comments of the raided as well. Editorially, the criticism has essentially been not against the raids but over the question of whether the Government was adhering to the due process of law. The finance minister himself admitted in an interview that some of the raids had been excessively publicised, and the prime minister in turn said that there was a problem with the "manner of the raids" and "the people whom they were raiding". Since the case for the prosecution has been conceded by the defence, what is Rajiv Gandhi complaining about?

There is more substance to the criticism than just the question of raids. He must recognise the changed political mood in the country, and accept that he has succeeded in upsetting several sections of the population in quick succession: the rich and the middle class, Harijans and Muslims, politicians and civil servants, and so on down the line. Punjab—Rajiv's greatest triumph in 1985—is heading back to the brink. If the Assam accord in August was a triumph, it ended in electoral defeat for the Congress(I). The Muslims were unhappy with the Government; and in trying to appease the community Rajiv has quickly run foul of liberal opinion in the country, which was earlier aligned with him. Politically, the Opposition is rejuvenated, while dissidence in the Congress(I) appears to be spreading. One former chief minister has openly talked of starting a new party. All these are visible trends and developments, and not fiction created by a fickle media.

Some of the criticism today reflects Rajiv's refusal to be an old-style political manoeuverer, and some of it is a result of frustration because he refuses to accept a pork-barrel definition of democracy and a distribution of the spoils of office. It is also possible that the new political mood does not do justice to his record in office. He has brought a breath of fresh air into the country's jaded politics, set himself goals that would not even have occurred to most other politicians, and turned in a better record during his first year than any of his predecessors. Although there is a good deal of criticism of his economic policies, most of the reforms introduced were overdue and will benefit the economy.

But there is little escape from the fact that the Government has bungled and lost ground in recent weeks. If the press reflects this, the prime minister would be well advised to ponder over the reasons for his popularity rating having come down a few pegs, and to resist the temptation to dismiss the bad news as a creation of the newspapers.

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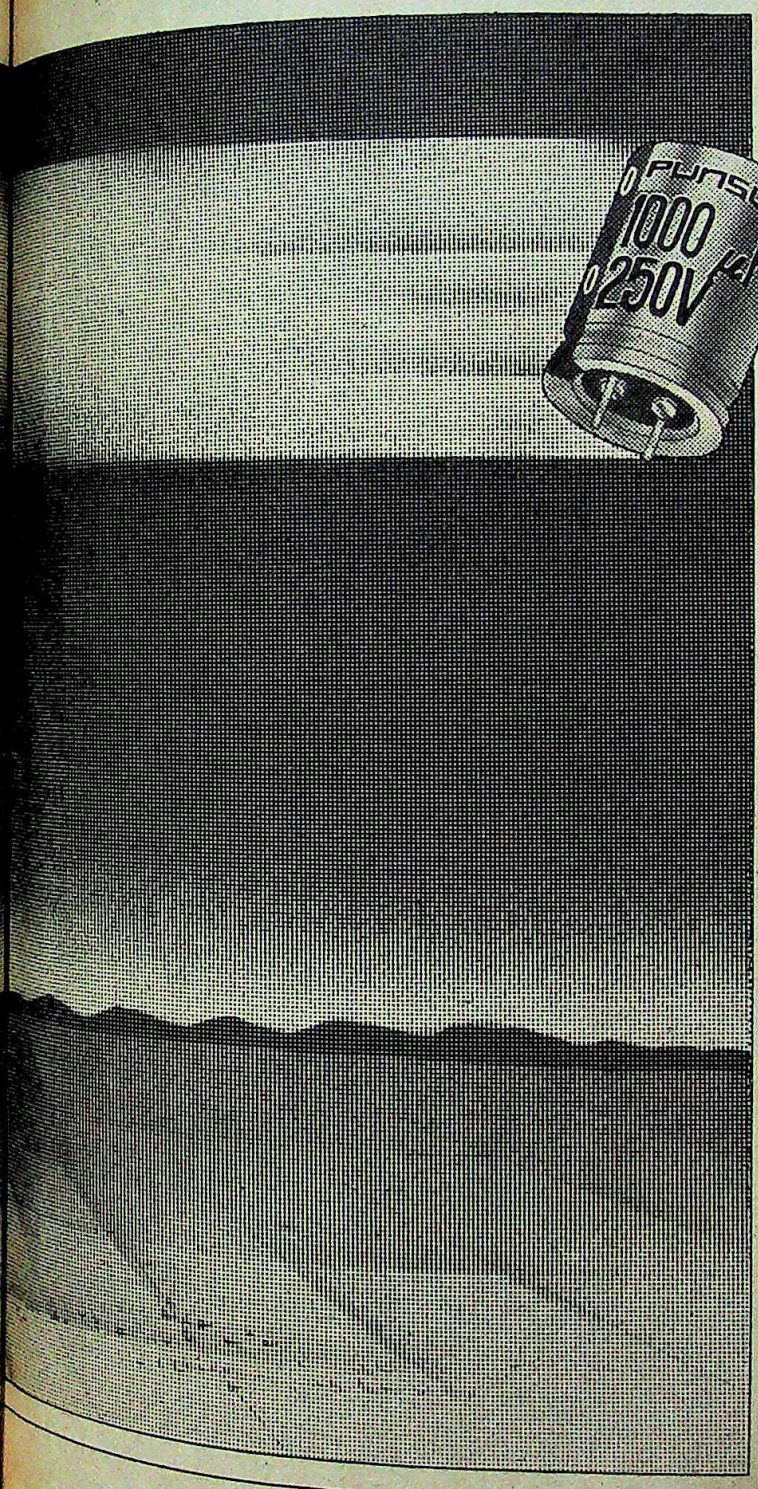

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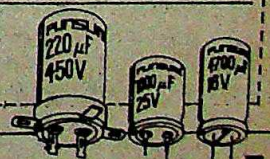

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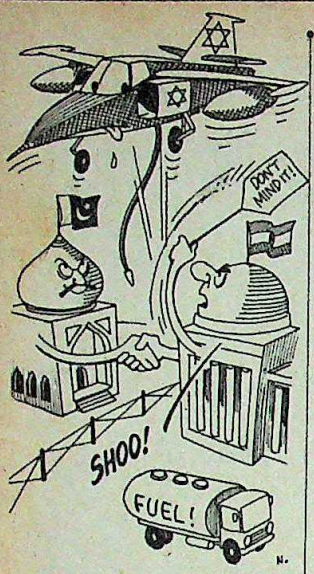


Trump Card

● India made effective use of its 'Israeli card' while coming to an agreement recently with Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq on not bombing each other's nuclear installations. For the real danger to Pakistan came not from India but from Israel, which has in the past bombed a nuclear installation in Iraq. Recently, Israel approached the Indian Government for secret refuelling facilities in Jamnagar as a stopover for Israeli attack planes, should that country decide to bomb the Kahuta nuclear installation. The Government did not hesitate in very firmly turning down the request, but also made sure that Pakistan knew about the Israeli request and India's own response to it.

While India and Israel do not have diplomatic ties, India occasionally uses the 'Israeli card' for its own ends through unofficial contacts. After the blast that destroyed Air-India's Kanishka in mid-1985, Israeli experts were contacted to help the airline revamp and tighten its security procedures with a view to preventing the recurrence of such incidents in future. And in 1982, when the Reagan administration was vigorously pushing its $3.2 billion arms and economic assistance package to Pakistan, America's Jewish lobby worked furiously on the Indian side in an attempt to prevent the aid bill from going through the US Congress, and came pretty close to scuttling the measure.

Cocooned Giani

● President Zail Singh would like to be a travelling man, but his tour plans seem perennially jinxed. Often in the past, the Government has not cleared his proposals to visit various parts of the country, or delayed clearance till it was too late in the day. But the President's planned visit to Chandigarh last fortnight was

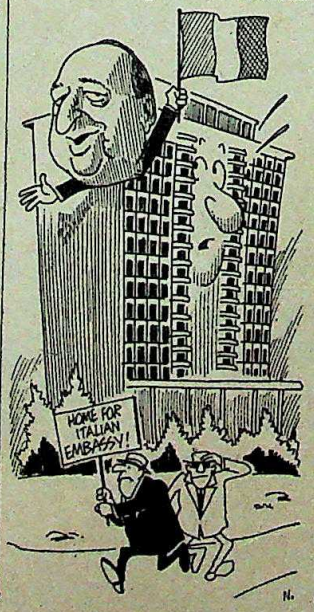
not expected to meet with any hitch although this was the first time that he would be visiting the town after Operation Bluestar. Indeed, Punjab Governor Shankar Dayal Sharma had even arranged a sumptuous banquet in Zail Singh's honour, with the list of invitees being the chief ministers of both Punjab and Haryana. The occasion would almost certainly have provided opportunity for Zail Singh to meet Punjab Chief Minister S.S.Barnala, who has not called on the President since he was sworn in six months ago.

But once again, there was the inevitable hitch. Intelligence officials warned that the President's visit to Chandigarh might entail unmanageable security risks, an official from the Chandigarh administration conveyed this to the President in Rashtrapati Bhavan, and for the umpteenth time, Zail Singh remained enclosed in his security cocoon.

Suited Envoy

● Guess who is the most harassed Italian in the capital today? No, it is not Ottavio Quattrocchi, Snamprogetti's New Delhi representative, who is waging a furious battle for the Rs 700-crore HBJ pipeline contract. Far more harassed than Quattrocchi is the new Italian ambassador to India who has had to operate out of a suite in the Taj Mahal Hotel ever since he came in a couple of months ago. The reason: around the time the ambassador's predecessor left India, the embassy handed back his formal residence—a palatial building in the heart of the city—to its owner even before new premises could be found.

So the new ambassador has the twin mortification of staying and working in the hotel while eyeing the magnificent house right next to the hotel that might have been his



home. He has to entertain his guests in the hotel's restaurants while his staff make desperate—and so far futile—efforts to find suitable accommodation befitting an ambassador. But one thing is clear: when it comes to housing problems, the cruel capital recognises no diplomatic immunity.

Press Master

● The rumours doing the rounds that H.Y. Sharada Prasad, press adviser to the prime minister, was being put out to pasture and replaced by

his current deputy, Mani Shankar Aiyar, now turn out to have been baseless. Prasad was shortly due to retire—after a long and distinguished innings—at the end of his present tenure. But according to sources in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, the battle-scarred veteran has been asked by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to continue on his present assignment for an indefinite period till a suitable replacement is found. Clearly, that means Aiyar is no longer in the running—as it was earlier believed—for perhaps the most prized slot in the Government's information apparatus.

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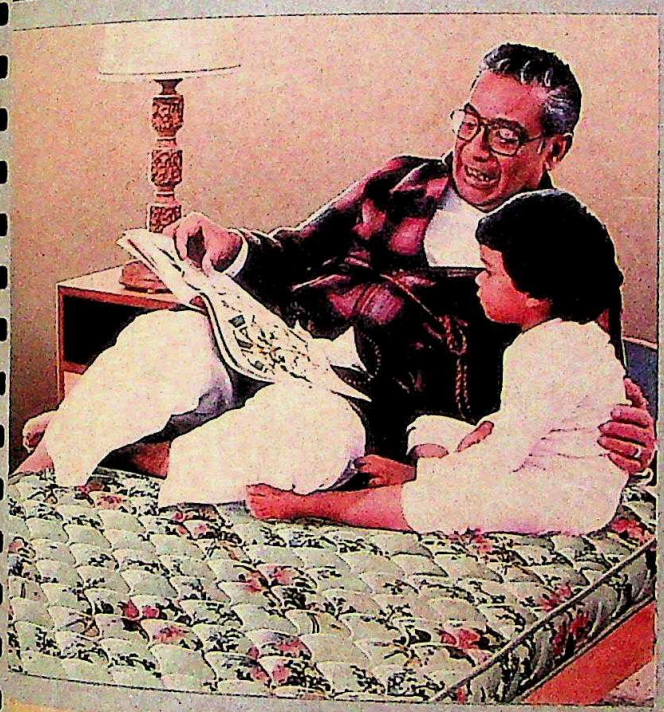

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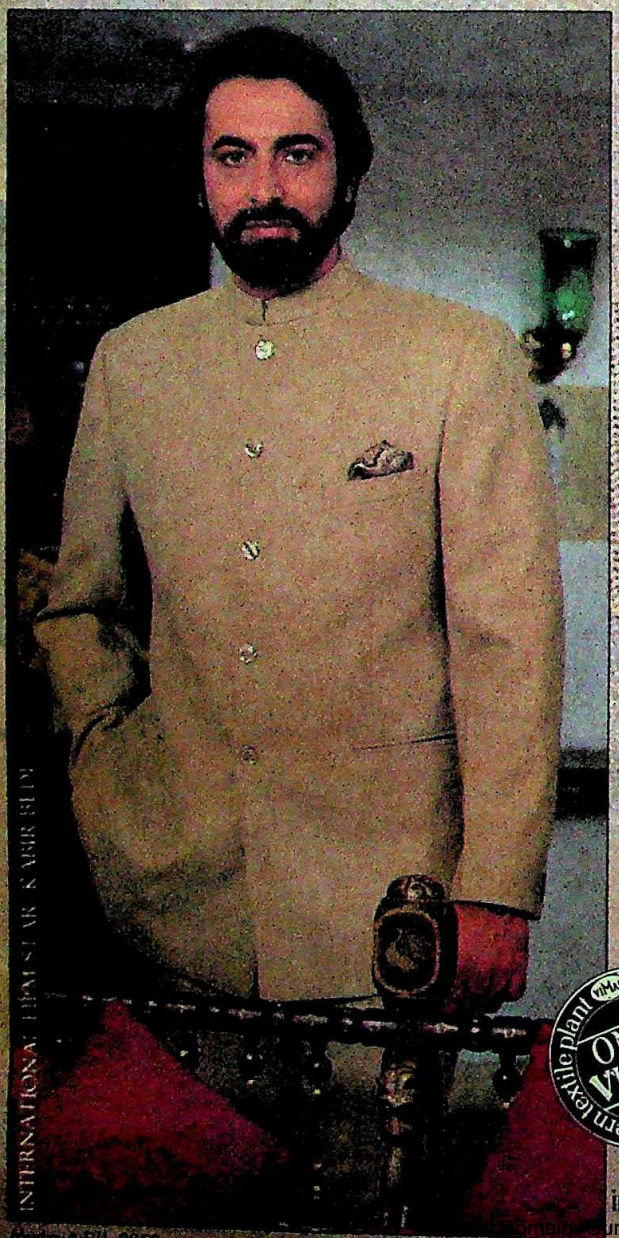

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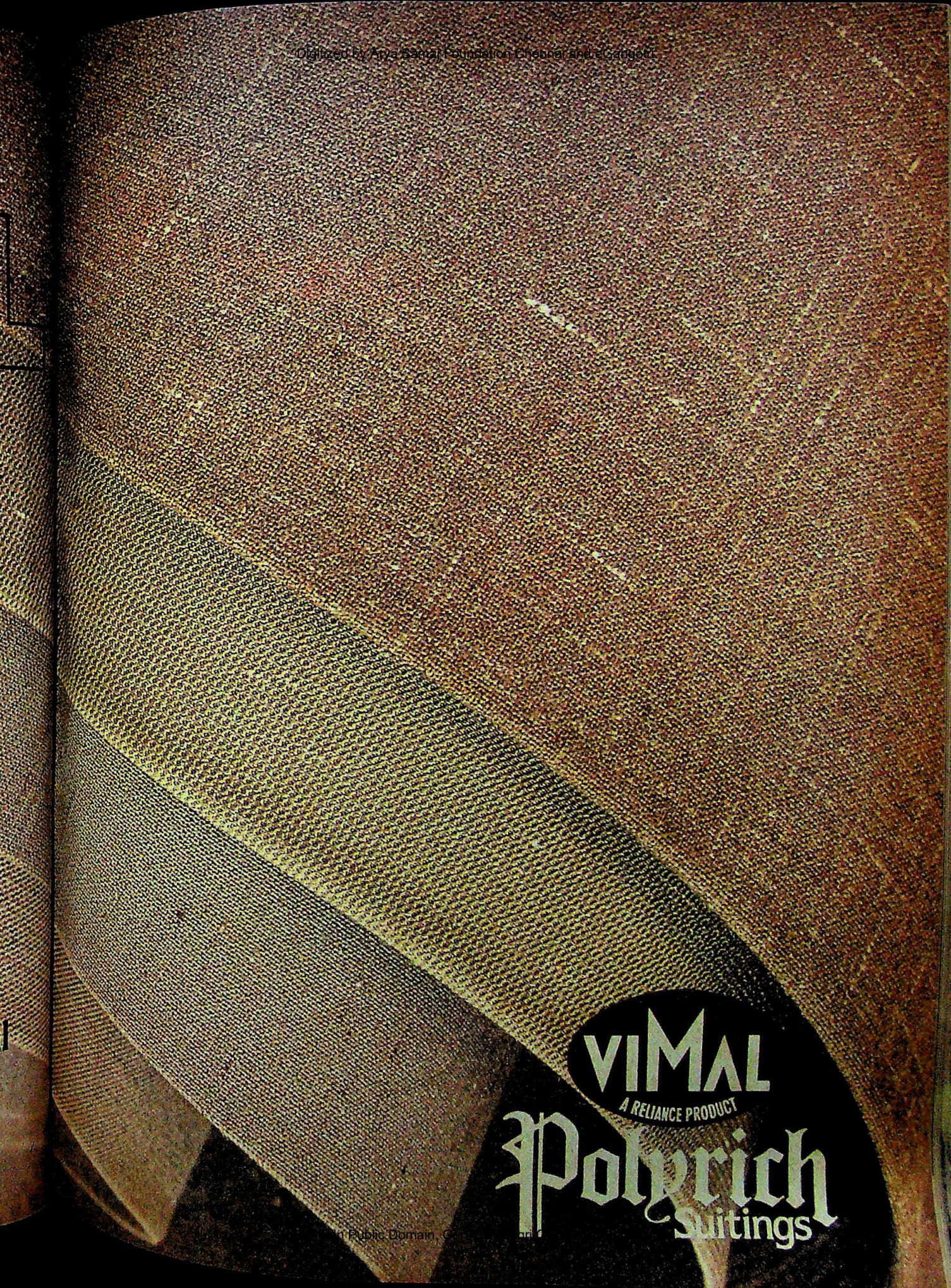

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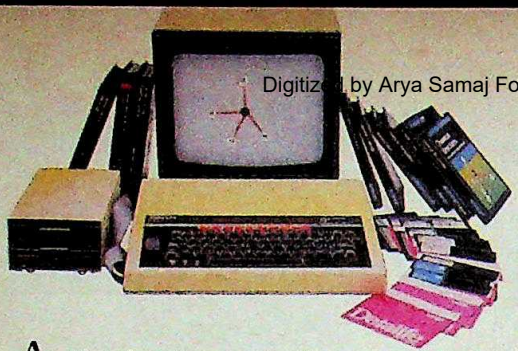

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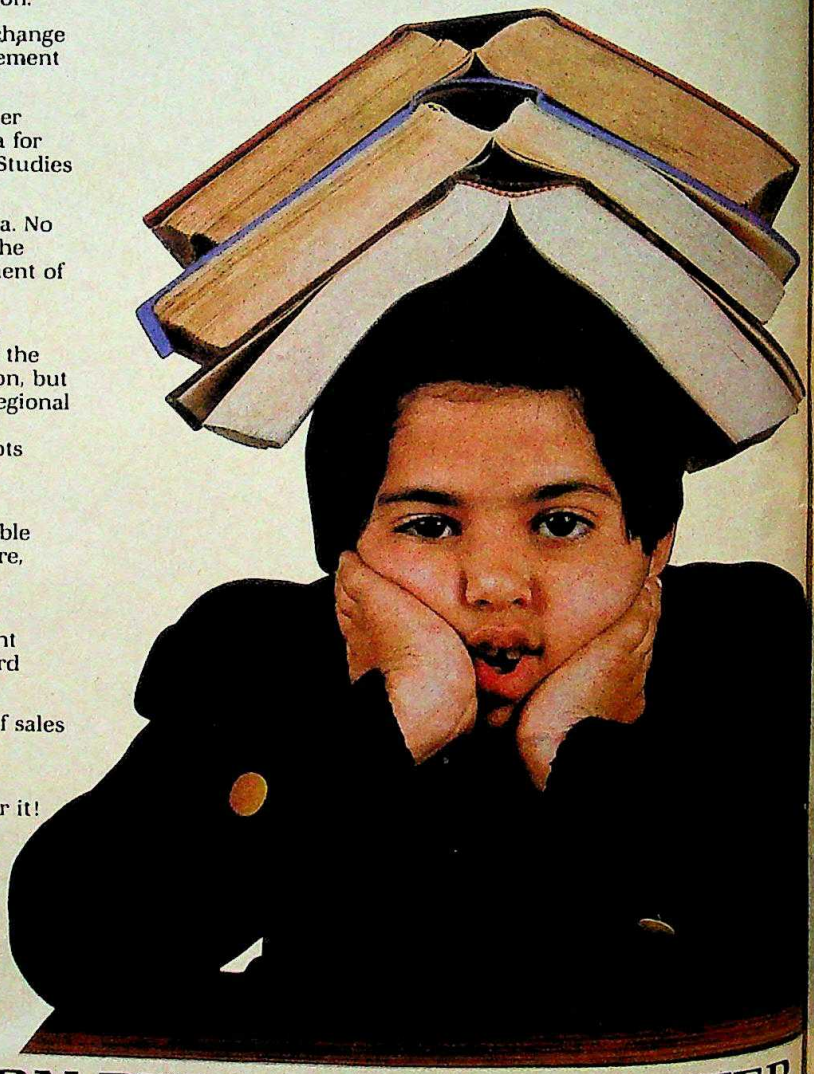

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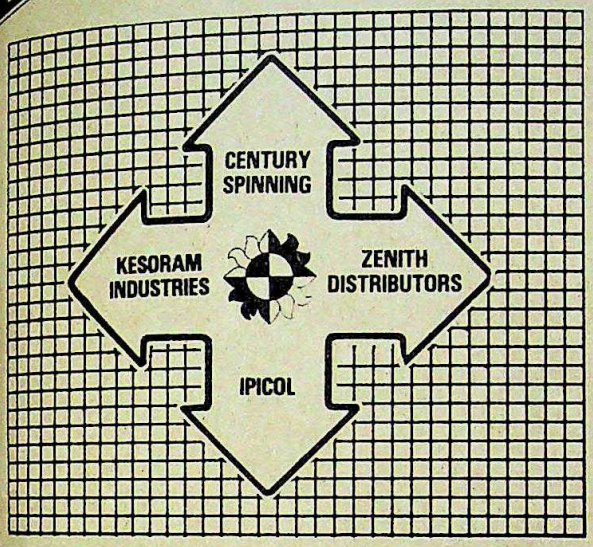

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- ☐ **Promoted by Zenith Distributors, Century Spinning, Kesoram and IPICOL.**
- ☐ **A break-through in the wood panel industry — MDF manufactured first time in India.**
- ☐ **Sophisticated equipments from West Germany with latest technology from USA and West Germany.**
- ☐ **Fully automatic, computerised production line.**
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- ☐ **80CC and other Tax Benefits.**
- ☐ **Listing on Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay Stock Exchanges.**

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State Bank of India
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Issue opens on 16th April, 1986

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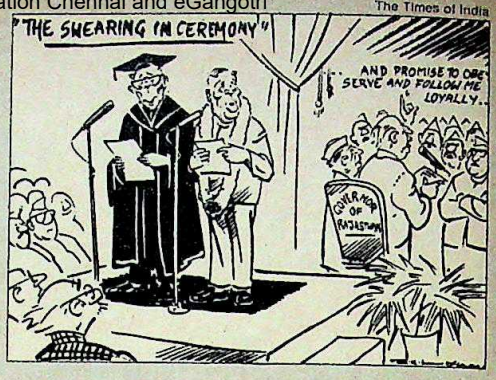

● *I don't think I am weak. I am very open when I am not very clear about a particular subject. But after I am convinced that this is what needs to be done, then I think I may be a little too rigid, sometimes.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI in *The Telegraph*

● *Actually, it (the budget) pulsates with the desire to placate the groups the Government has annoyed over the past year. The Government seems embarrassed at being identified with the private sector, consumption and the rich.*

■ Editorial comment in *The Economist*

● *I can play the referee but I cannot kick the football for them (big industrialists) and score the goal.*

■ V.P. SINGH in *Sunday*

● *Images and luck can only carry Rajiv Gandhi so far. Already, his earlier public relations exercises—foreign trips and press conferences—have lost their appeal.*

■ SUBRAMANIAM SWAMY in *Imprint*

● *It took us one and a half years to get governor's rule. But I hope it does not take us that long to get the elections.*

■ DR FAROOQ ABDULLAH in *The Week*

● *No Muslim woman would like to sign her death warrant by stamping her approval to this bill.*

■ ARIF MOHAMMED KHAN in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *The twenty-first century is a summons to move forward progressively, not to retreat regressively, frightened by sixth century primitivism.*

■ V.R. KRISHNA IYER, former Supreme Court judge, commenting on the Muslim Women's Bill in *Time*

● *Had Marx been never there the world would never have cared for the poor. As a saint I revere him. But as a political prophet he was defeated by technology.*

■ BABA AMTE in *Society*

● *Though I am sure the Congress (I) would invite me with open arms if I wanted to join them, I haven't as yet because I don't have the herd mentality.*

■ SHATRUGHAN SINHA in *Stardust*

● *I may not be making films with a message, but I do make them with a conviction....If it is only a message you are seeking to portray, then why use a film ? You may as well print and distribute pamphlets. They will be more effective.*

■ G. ARAVINDAM, film-maker, in *Frontline*

● *I don't read the newspapers at all. The headlines give me an upset stomach every morning.*

■ SAIRA BANU in *Bombay*

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Finally, I had to confess to my wife. She gave me a cynical look and marched off to examine the Dornfab range. And returned with a bagful of fabrics, raving over Dornfab's super weaves, soft colours and latest designs. I was so thrilled with her approval that I immediately endorsed the Dornfab range.'

M. A. K. PATAUDI

GWALIOR SUITING

IN A CLASS OF ITS OWN

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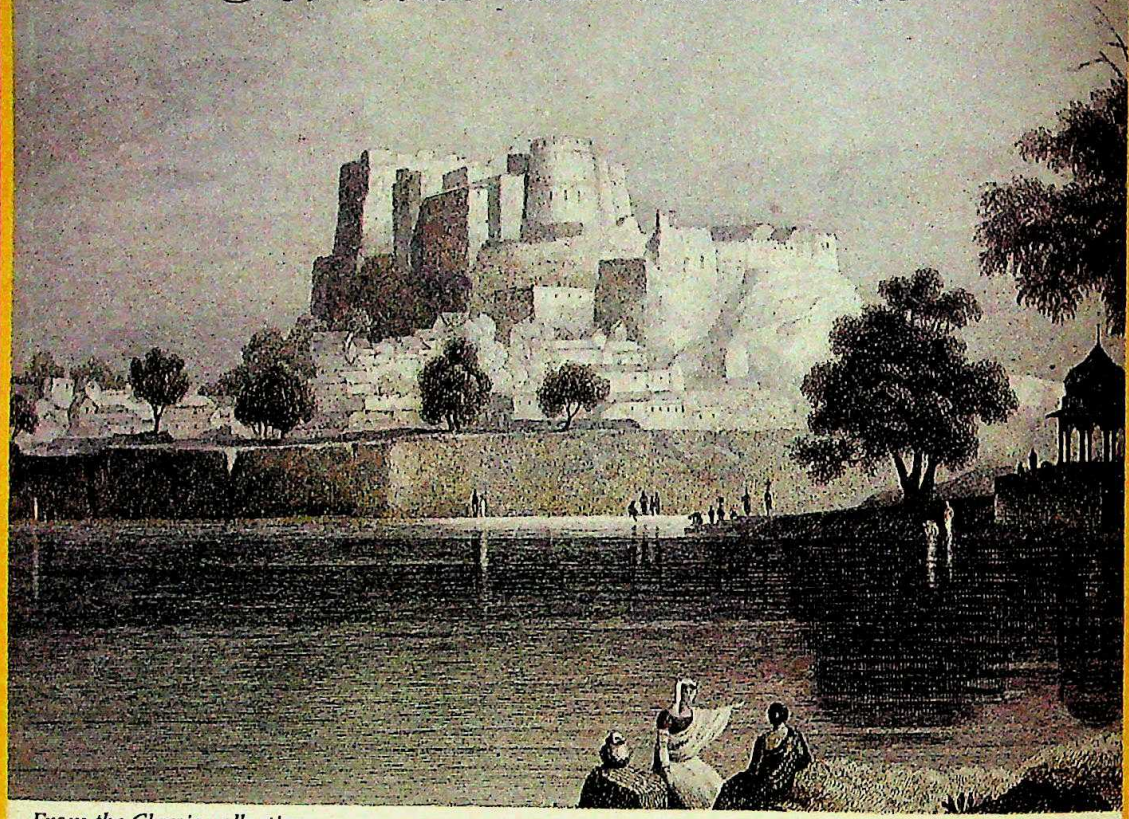
For those who value taste



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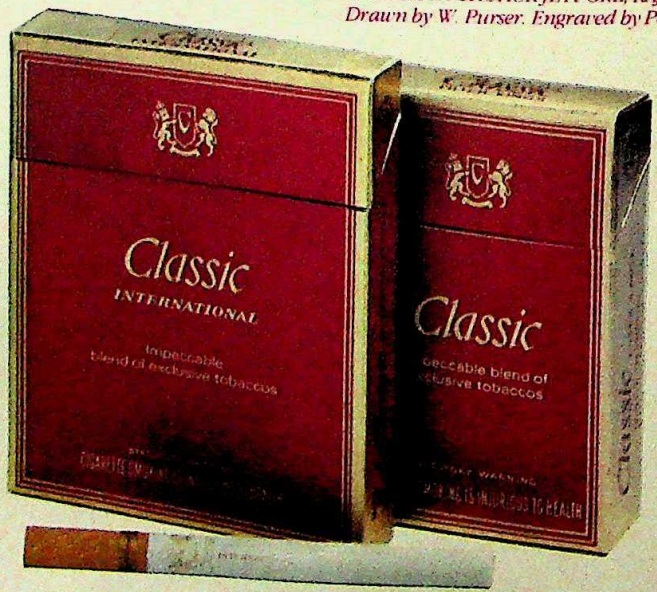

Contemporary Classics from ITC

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TOILET EXPRESS

■ Passengers on the New Delhi-Howrah Rajdhani Express are receiving more than their usual share of attention these days. Along with dinner and breakfast they are given a form which they are requested to fill in. It is an opinion poll and the subject: Is the configuration of one Indian-style toilet—squatting—to three western-style toilets—sitting—in each compartment the perfect one or would the passengers like some changes in the ratio?

The person who asked for this unusual exercise is none other than Union Transport Minister Bansi Lal. He was travelling in the Rajdhani in February when it turned out that he—a minister is but a weak mortal with urgent needs—needed to go round the corner. He went to the corner and discovered a sizeable crowd hanging around near the doors to the public conveniences. He had to take his place in the queue like everybody else, and, to top it all, the one public convenience he used was not available. Short of asking the conductor to haul the occupant out so Bansi Lal could be accommodated, there was nothing to be done. It is not recorded how he survived the ordeal, but survive he did, and sufficiently disturbed to order the opinion poll.

KALI'S CALL

■ Rathnam is not a character out of Indian mythology—she is in fact a flesh and blood spouse from Jothampetti near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu—but her recent action should bring her blessings from the gods.

Rathnam's husband Kalimuthu reached the acme of existence when the AIADMK chose him to be their candidate for the post of panchayat president in a certain village. An overjoyed Rathnam prayed and later did the round of astrologers and asked them if her Kali would succeed. They replied yes, but the signs were such that he would win only if he had two opponents.

Rathnam looked around and saw only the DMK candidate and fear gripped her heart. But God spoke to her at night and the next morning, she set off on a mysterious errand. When Kalimuthu saw the final list of candidates, his heart went thumpety-thump: His nearest and dearest was contesting the election independently. He raged and stormed but Rathnam told him about the prophecy and he clutched her to his heart. Oh yes, Kali won. Behind every successful man is a wife.

HOME AFFAIR

■ Not as dutiful is a certain lady in Jammu. She is a young woman, in her late 20s, married to a certain politician who was a minister in a certain government—recently deceased—led by a certain Gul Shah. What is even more certain is that the minister and his helpmate are not on talking terms.

On a certain morning, people passing by the house of the minister were astonished to see a gaggle of servants come rushing out of the building stuttering incoherently. The passers-by took it upon themselves to look inside and what they saw led them to suspect that marital harmony was not the in-thing here. For the young woman had got hold of her husband by the scruff of his neck—she is a strapping young woman by the way—with one hand and with the other was administering a correction.

It transpired that he had been entertaining, if that is the correct word, another young lady in the house when the lawfully-wedded wife came in unexpectedly and found them, well....The guest artiste managed to escape, the minister didn't and the locality is still talking about the manful way in which his wife told him what she thought of it and him.

PAPER FIDDLE

■ The world of journalism is described as cutthroat and with reason. Two newspapers, for instance, battling for circulation in a single city, might resort to unqueensbury tactics in order to come first past the post. Just how ungentlemanly these tactics might get was revealed in Baroda recently. For some time, the daily *Sandesh* had been blowing its own trumpet claiming that it sold many more copies than the rival *Loksatta*. The latter would, in the normal course of events, have pooh-poohed this suggestion but for a disturbing set of statistics which showed that this was indeed so. Why?

This is what one of its intrepid investigative reporters found out. He followed the *Sandesh* van one morning as it went on its rounds. And what he saw left him stunned. The van would pull up near a vendor and the person inside would jump out, handing over a parcel of *Sandesh*. But he didn't stop there—he also took the bunch of *Loksatta* and put them inside the van. And when the police finally caught up with the van it was stuffed to the ceiling with *Loksatta*. Well, that's one way of keeping in circulation.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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PUNJAB Upsurge

SPRING is Punjab's season of hope, a brief interlude between Holi, marking the end of winter, and Baisakhi, heralding the new harvest. This year there is little cheer as the state convulses in the worst-ever violence since the traumatic days leading to Operation Bluestar.

Defying explanation, the toll of violence mounted last fortnight as the Akali Dal Government, long accused of being soft on the terrorists and of being unwilling to take them on, finally began to crack down. After vacillating for weeks, the Government finally arrested Damdami Taksal leader Mohkam Singh, and in a dramatic turnaround, countenanced harsh police action against militants.

The upsurge of violence by terrorists, emboldened by the Akali Government's hitherto soft and clumsy handling of the state, brought into play a new, ominous reaction from Hindu organisations such as the Shiv Sena, which began to find new militancy. Angered by this, the terrorists went on a killing spree, choosing their victims with meticulous care.

Consider the headlines of this period:

March 28: Thirteen persons including eight Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) workers shot dead and several injured by five terrorists in police uniform and riding a motor-cycle and scooter at Ludhiana. This was the first terrorist attack on RSS workers in several years.

March 27: Former Communist Party of India legislator Arjan Singh Mastana and his bodyguard gunned down in his village Ghariala in Amritsar district, in the first such attack on leftists.

March 26: Nine people killed and many more injured as police open fire to thwart a menacing crowd advancing on Akali Dal leaders in Anandpur Sahib.

March 25: Four killed in separate incidents, and Hajipur town in Hoshiarpur district put under curfew.

March 24: Ten lives lost, among them two Shiv Sena activists slain in Jalandhar; two terrorists and two paramilitary jawans killed in an encounter near Amritsar.

March 23: Three men shot dead on the

United Akali Dal and AISSF protestors crash through police barricades in Chandigarh

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ge of Violence

outskirts of Batala.

March 21: Two killed in police firing on a violent United Akali Dal (UAD) procession setting out to storm the Assembly.

March 20: One rail passenger shot dead at Manawala station.

March 19: One police officer shot dead in Tarn Taran, two in Batala. Curfew imposed on Nakodar and Muktsar after violent Shiv Sena and All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) mobs clash and confront police.

March 18: One villager shot dead in Khadyal, an attempt on the life of a senior Amritsar police officer, and a gun shop in Batala looted; several thousand farmers besiege Batala town, preventing traffic and food from going in.

March 16: Violent clashes in Batala between AISSF and Shiv Sena activists, curfew after four killed in police firing.

The tally of dead in 13 days: 53. In the previous five months of Akali rule, the death toll had been 82, a figure that now seemed small only because of the suddenly escalating violence that had reached a level not seen even in Bhindranwale's days. And no fewer than seven towns in the state were under curfew, covering fully a tenth of the state's population. Towards the end of the fortnight a BJP-sponsored one-day bandh evoked a dismayingly large response in the big cities. As if all this weren't enough, there were the signs of a straight communal divide because of the rising militancy among both Sikhs and Hindus, and the coming Baisakhi festival promised more trouble because of the demand that Chandigarh be handed over to Punjab before the festival.

There were other signs of trouble. In Haryana, Opposition leader Devi Lal managed to collect an unprecedented crowd in Jind, where he demanded that Haryana should get its full due in terms of river water. The crowd repeatedly shouted "down with the Punjab accord", and Chief Minister Bhajan Lal cancelled his own rally at the same spot and rushed to New Delhi for consultations. If the solution to the Punjab problem lay in implementing the accord as quickly as possible, the Jind meeting served notice that Hary-

JOG JOY/The Tribune

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ana was getting militant too.

One of the worst incidents occurred on Holi. The birth anniversary of Bhagat Singh, March 23, is an occasion for pilgrimage by Hindus and Sikhs alike to his birthplace Khatkar Kalan on the Jalandhar-Chandigarh road.

If a few thousands congregate at Khatkar Kalan, the scene is multiplied many times over on Holi at Anandpur Sahib, which is, after Amritsar, the holiest of Sikh shrines situated 80 km north-west of Chandigarh. Last fortnight, the *Hola Mohalla*, as it is known, had attracted the usual tens of thousands of villagers and townsfolk from all over the state. The Akali Dal gathering was attended by Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala and several cabinet colleagues. The AISSF gathering nearby was organised by its convenor Harinder Singh Kahlon, a man sought by the police but never quite apprehended, and featured, among others, Bimal Khalsa, widow of the late prime minister Indira Gandhi's assassin, Beant Singh.

It was obviously to disrupt the Akali meeting that a militant crowd of some

INTERVIEW

"We are doing quite well"

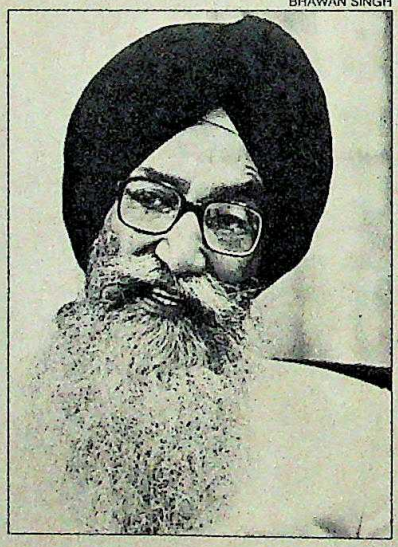
FOR A man in what is undoubtedly the country's hottest chief minister's gaddi, Surjit Singh Barnala exudes a surprising air of calm. While outside Punjab the feeling is mounting that the state is teetering on the brink of new chaos, Barnala coolly trots out statistics to show that the state is ravaged by far less violence than, say, Bihar or Uttar Pradesh. Barnala shows little signs of wear and tear though he speaks with anguish about the violence in his state. He has of late begun to meet Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi rather than intermediaries, and finds him well-meaning and sincere but surrounded by others who give him conflicting advice and information. Last fortnight he took time off to talk to Managing Editor SUMAN DUBEY *and Principal Correspondent* GOBIND THUKRAL *on two separate occasions, once over 90 minutes starting at midnight and a second time during a break in the Assembly session when the opposition parties had taken control of the chamber. Excerpts.*

Q. *There is a feeling that you are not acting firmly enough against the terrorists for fear of alienating the Sikhs...?*

A. That is the feeling because they don't understand my problems properly. The problems that we are facing in the state are tremendous. This is not a normal situation and in the situation (that exists) I think we are doing quite well. For example, recently, in the last month and a half we have arrested 160 extremists, 42 of them in hot pursuit just after the crime. These are not publicised, unfortunately, by the press. The Waltoha incident, for example, was not correctly reported by the press which said: 'Six killed in Punjab', but of those, two were terrorists and it appeared that six people had been killed in Punjab! The credit that was due to the administration that they had bagged two notorious culprits, that was missed. This is not honest reporting, giving a big headline and putting together a lot of little, little items which make it appear that Punjab is on fire.

Q. *But the quality of the crime is very different here, is it not?*

BHAWAN SINGH



Barnala: under pressure

A. Not entirely. What happens is that if there are two real cases of terrorist action and 10 more crimes, somebody loots a shop, snatches a scooter, they add them and then it becomes 12.

Q. *You spoke of special problems?*

A. I have not inherited a government in normal times. People have been agitated for the last three-four years, for the last two years particularly, after Operation Bluestar and the November carnage in Delhi, and these situations create difficulties. For example, the problem of the youth, who feel that they're not being looked after or being listened to: that is their grievance. The incidents in Batala, the new rise of the Shiv Sena, this has created problems.

Q. *The reason for the Shiv Sena is that they feel they (the Hindus) are not being protected properly....*

A. This is what is happening, one (community) fearing from the other. This kind of thing has not happened before.

Q. *There seems to be no attempt to bring the two together?*

A. This is what I was going to try and do today, to form a committee of legislators from all parties to go to the affected areas to talk to the people.

Q. *Are you getting enough support from the Congress(I) and other parties?*

A. They are not doing what they should do for example, in Batala. They should have formed a joint committee of all the parties and started something. They don't do it. I am now trying to involve them in a committee so that we can send them wherever there's any problem.

Q. *What is your long-term strategy?*

A. We had started sector schemes which have proved successful. We are intensifying these sector schemes in which a large number of paramilitary forces are employed. Four districts have been taken up initially, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Ferozepur and Kapurthala, and we might later on add four more. We have provided 136 vehicles to these people to make them more mobile so that they can keep a round-the-clock vigil in the area. We have 186 companies of the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and we have requested the Centre for better weapons.

Q. *Have these brought results?*

A. Well, one of the results is these two boys who were killed after snatching money from someone. We have recovered a large number of weapons, including Sten guns, carbines and rifles, 450 to be precise. Though extremist crime has decreased from 256 to 142, the number of murders has gone up from 27 to 52 in the five months since the Akalis came to

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2,000 AISSF workers, wielding swords and lathis, advanced on the Akali dais when Barnala was speaking. When attempts to stop the mob with tear gas and rubber bullets failed, the police opened fire. Nine people died and 17 were injured.

While the AISSF later claimed that their protest was peaceful, the police maintain that firing was ordered only after the crowd threatened to attack the Akali meeting. "We had no choice but to take this hard decision," said Ropar district police chief Anil Kaushik. "We don't know what might have happened had the crowd marched into the Akali meeting. We think their targets were the chief minister and his colleagues."

The Anandpur Sahib incident came close on the heels of another bout of violence in Chandigarh on March 21 in which UAD militants ran riot outside the Punjab Assembly after breaking through police barricades in one of the most heavily-guarded parts of the Union territory. The resulting police firing took two lives and injured several others. And, in the process, it seems to have rehabilitated

power compared with the same period a year earlier.

Q. What exactly is the political strategy to isolate the terrorists?

A. More and more people are now beginning to recognise that these people are not acting in the interest of the state, in the interest of the Sikhs even. That is why we have been stating this in every congregation. Are these people, who do all this (violence), are they true Sikhs? Can they be treated as good Sikhs, people who can kill a Sikh, kill a Hindu, anybody who comes in their way?

Q. Do you think the terrorist is getting isolated?

A. I think they are getting weaker.

Q. But there is an upsurge in their activity?

A. That is why the terrorists have changed their methods. They are now giving advertisements, adopting slightly democratic methods.

Q. You've talked quite a lot about the Pakistan factor in the Punjab problem. What evidence do you have?

A. We have with us interrogation reports of eight known terrorists: Upkar Singh Sandhu, Avtar Singh from Amritsar, Narinder Singh, Sarabjit Singh, Faqir Singh, Devinder Singh, Balwinder Singh and Tejinderpal Singh that reveal the modus operandi of Pakistan's intelligence agencies in fuelling the Punjab fires. In jails and safe houses they are motivated through taped speeches and video films of Bhindranwale. These raw boys who fled to Pakistan fearing army operations are now being trained in subversive activities. There is the International Sikh Youth Federation, the Akal Federation and Babbar Khalsa functioning in Pakistan. The weapons show Pakistani and Chinese markings.

Q. What is your understanding of the Shiv Sena phenomenon?

A. The only wrong thing about them is that they create situations when they should not. For example, Batala was a peaceful town until they started doing some mischief there. They started collecting, pulling down shop shutters, and manhandling passers-by, shouting slogans.

Q. Are there any political parties pulling the wires from behind them?

A. They are all people from other political parties.

Q. Would you care to name them?

A. No, I would not.

Q. Do you think the situation is under your control?

A. I think it is.

> **"I have not inherited a government in normal times. People have been agitated for the last three-four years, for the last two years particularly, after Operation Bluestar and the November carnage in Delhi, and these situations create difficulties."**

Q. Coming to the accord, do you feel Delhi has let you down?

A. I feel they are slightly dragging their feet. On Chandigarh the problem should have been solved by now. Alright, you couldn't do it by 26th January, but they should immediately have taken some steps to do the needful. May be they will do something tomorrow.

Q. Do you find the prime minister sincere on this issue?

A. Whenever I've talked to him, I found him sincere. My feeling was he wanted to do it.

Q. But what stopped him?

A. This is what we have not been able to find out. This is our misfortune.

Q. Will it still help if Chandigarh is handed over to Punjab?

A. It will help a good deal. This is one of the things our opponents are saying. What did you get?

Q. What about the other issues, like the people still imprisoned from Operation Bluestar and the army deserters?

A. These are issues for the Centre. I have been telling them that most of the people (in Jodhpur jail) are innocent, even Santji (Longowal) used to say it. They were not waging war against the state or anything like that, they are innocent people who have never handled a gun, who don't know how to pull a trigger. They are not releasing them on bail. Normally even in murder cases bail is not denied after so long.

Q. And the army deserters...?

A. They should have been dealt with more leniently. They have been sentenced and sent to jail, many of them, they are suffering long terms of imprisonment.

Q. What would you like the Centre to do for the state?

A. I would like the Centre to hand over Chandigarh. Other clauses of the accord also have to be implemented, for instance, a second commission on other disputed areas between the two states.

Q. Are you prepared for any package deal with Haryana, everything, water and territory, in one go?

A. What can there be in the package? We can't go back on the accord.

Q. What steps will you take to stop the kar seva of the AISSF and the Damdami Taksal to fill up the Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal?

A. We will see how they start doing it and devise our steps.

Q. But you are committed to the completion of the canal?

A. We are committed to the accord, and this is one of the provisions of the accord. Everything has to be implemented, our effort is that the accord is implemented.

Q. You seem to be still optimistic even though the situation on the ground is scary?

A. I have always been.

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the ageing Baba Jogindar Singh, father of the late Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, and leader of the discredited UAD.

The Baba's party, which failed miserably to organise a boycott of the September Assembly election, had receded further into obscurity after the AISSF and Damdami Taksal moved centre-stage by seizing control of the Akal Takht *kar seva* in January. Now the Chandigarh flare-up emboldened the wizened Baba sufficiently to declare that the five-member *panthic* committee set up by the AISSF and Taksal to oversee Sikh affairs had no *locus standi* other than the *kar seva*.

What put some life into the UAD was the utter mismanagement, first by the Punjab Police and then by the Chandigarh Administration, of Joginder Singh's march on the Union territory. The UAD announced the march a month ago and intelligence reports suggested that the Baba was making a last ditch effort to revitalise his nondescript party. Barnala sent clear instructions to make preventive arrests and foil their attempt to *gherao* the Assembly, but admitted later that "both Punjab Police and Chandigarh Administration faltered a bit".

So indeed did the Akali political leadership, which didn't seem to take the challenge seriously. The death of Bhindranwale's brother, Jagjit Singh Rode *(see box)*, assured the presence of large numbers of mourners, many of whom were instantly drafted into the

SHIV SENA

Fighting Back

TIME was when Hindu interests in Punjab were synonymous with the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and its associated political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). No longer. Today it is the Shiv Sena—no kin of Bal Thackarey's organisation of the same name in Maharashtra—which is militantly gearing itself to protect, as it claims, Hinduism and Hindu interests.

Ramakant Jalota, a goldsmith-turned-political organiser who heads one faction of the Shiv Sena (the rival faction is headed by Ludhiana-based businessman Jagdish Tangri), says: "We do not know our total membership, but it runs into lakhs. Every Hindu in Punjab is a member and all Hindus outside are sympathisers." Jalandhar-based income tax lawyer S.K. Sarwal, who is general secretary of the Jalota faction, is more modest in his claim, estimating the membership at around 80,000. But judging from the crowds it manages to collect and its other visible manifestations, these are probably exaggerations. Still, there's no denying that in the atmosphere of uncertainty and fear which grips the Hindus, any outfit claiming to act on their behalf would attract substantial sympathy. "The Hindus are getting organised because they feel the state is not protecting them," says a police officer in Chandigarh.

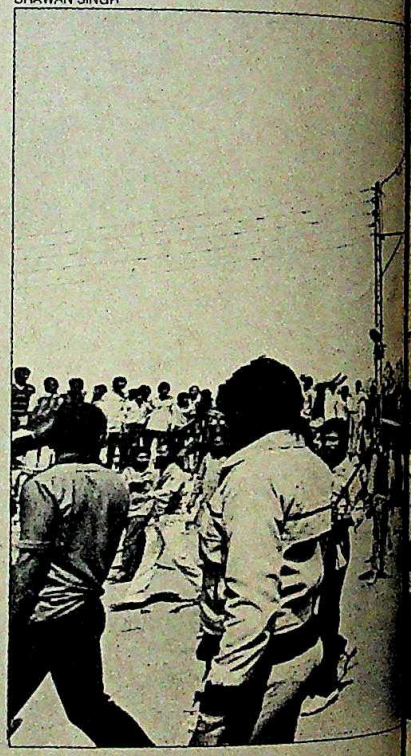
But what it lacks in solid membership, the Shiv Sena more than makes up in militancy and vicious invective. "We lack no funds to equip ourselves to teach them a lesson," thunders Jalota. Sarwal also makes no bones about his views: "We have been at the receiving end far too long. We cannot tolerate it any more. Communal clashes will surely take place and we shall definitely gain from them. We want to tell these fellows that we will brook no nonsense. We are preparing our youth and if need be we will strike." To this end, the Shiv Sena is collecting arms and money, and officials say that the organisation does not lack funds and weapons which, intelligence sources confirm, are being stockpiled.

Set up in 1981, the Shiv Sena draws its inspiration from Lord Shiva. And even as it heaps abuses on Sikhs, it apes many of their mannerisms and traditions quite unmindful of the fact that whereas the Sikh customs have some religious sanction, there is nothing in Hinduism which tells the Shiv Sena to do what it does. Where the Sikhs carry kirpans, the Shiv Senanis have taken to sporting miniature *trishuls*, encased in plastic sheaths, tied to their waistbands. Where the Sikhs carry swords, the members of the Shiv Sena carry swords and tall metal *trishuls* rather self-consciously. Public speakers tend to preface their diatribes with the cry *'Jai kara, bir Bajrangi'* to which the audience replies with both hands raised, *'Har Har Mahadev'*, exactly as the Sikhs say *'Jo bole so nihal...Sat Sri Akal'*.

More significantly, Shiv Sena patron, Pandit Kishor Chand, points out that the young Shiv Sena activist is initiated in a ritual in which he is sworn to the service of the religion—not unlike the manner in which a Sikh becomes an *amritdhari*. Chand, a retired police sub-inspector who lives in Amritsar, is seldom separated from his rifle and bandolier and like so many militant Hindus, believes that Sikhs are actually Hindus who have to be brought to heel.

"When we initiate a youth," says

BHAWAN SINGH



Shiv Sena volunteers taking food to Batala: garnering support

Chand, "we do it with a *puja* of Shankar Bhagwan. *Amrit* is taken from the idol, mixed with *tulsi* and honey and fed to the young man who is also anointed with a red *tilak* on his forehead. Finally he is given a *trishul*. We tell him that this is an inseparable part of you. And we make him take an oath that he will sacrifice himself for the nation's unity and for the Hindu religion."

Chand, who doesn't sound any different from Sikh leaders in his militancy, argues that they want no quarrel with them but if any violence is done to the Hindus they must retaliate. The police have failed to protect the Hindus, he feels, so they must do it themselves, and if

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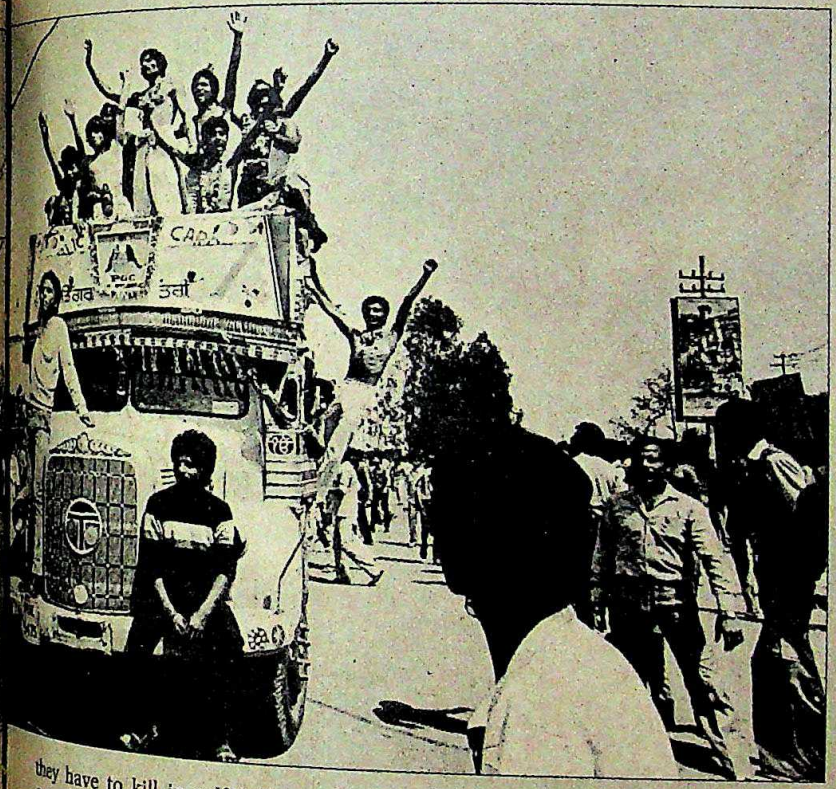
march. The procession started out from near Moga in 34 trucks and was repeatedly stopped by the police who radioed Chandigarh for instructions.

The instructions, according to official sources, were confused and the police failed to act with sufficient firmness. At Ludhiana, the UAD even managed to get two of their imprisoned leaders released for the duration of the procession in return for promising to keep the peace. And all this even as two police companies were inducted from Punjab and 11 companies were airlifted from Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi on the morning the marchers reached Chandigarh.

What followed was confusion worse confounded. "Our understanding was that the procession would stop at the first barricade and a deputation led by Joginder Singh would hand over a memorandum to the Punjab chief minister," said Chandigarh police chief R.K.Ohri. But the moment the crowd reached the first barricade, less than a kilometre from the Assembly, it stormed through and the barricade collapsed like a house of cards. In a scene straight out of some historical film, hundreds of slogan-shouting, sword and lathi-wielding hordes charged out of the teargas and the defenders turned on their heels and fled.

The next barricade of double rows of barbed wire looked somewhat more invincible, with a stronger contingent of local police and paramilitary forces. It was



they have to kill in self-defence, they commit no crime.

Such sentiments are no longer expressed in the privacy of people's homes. Two public meetings organised in Jalandhar last fortnight to drum up support for a threatened 1,000-strong march to liberate Batala town, which had been gheraoed by militant farmers, showed up the manner of functioning of the Shiv Sena. The meetings were held within the precincts of the city's renovated Devi Talab temple, on the lawns in front of the dharamshala, a part of which is occupied by the camping paramilitary forces.

As cash collection boxes do the rounds, speaker after speaker fulminates against the Government and the Sikhs, making no distinction between extremists and others. There is emotional talk of shedding blood and one swami dramatically bares his chest and declares that when bullets fly, the first chest to be hit will be his. Most of the invective is unprintable, some of it relatively mild. A Kapurthala lawyer declares that if Barnala wants peace, he and his father will have to come and bow before them. A schoolgirl exhorts her brothers in the Shiv Sena not to let their anger cool over what has happened in Batala. Jalota declares that their struggle is a matter of life and death.

The crowd isn't particularly disciplined and Sarwal has to keep asking the young men to sit down and observe the discipline of the Shiv Sena. When the Jalandhar district commissioner and Senior superintendent of police arrive, there is a sudden commotion and a delegation flanked by young men bare to the waist, garlands around their necks and *trishuls* in hand, marches up for a conference. At some distance from the temple, a conference is held to discuss the Shiv Sena's proposed march.

In spite of the hours of instigation at the public meetings, there is really no question of sending 1,000 volunteers—such a venture would require no fewer than 20 trucks and the Shiv Sena has only one. There is some talk of whether 11 or 21 volunteers should make the 90-minute drive. More important, the very people who talked only minutes earlier of facing police bullets fearlessly, now ask the officials for police escort to Batala and back.

The police at first say that the road to Batala is a national highway and anyone is free to come and go, but after a few minutes agree to escort one truck and a handful of volunteers to make a symbolic gesture of reaching supplies to Batala even though the siege was lifted that very morning. The expedition sets off along the national highway and returns, having handed over the foodstuffs to the Batala authorities, without actually getting to enter the curfew-bound town.

But the Shiv Sena is capable of doing much more, and its retaliatory mob actions in Batala and elsewhere have been largely responsible for the curfews that were in force in so many Punjab towns last fortnight. It is whispered in political circles that it also enjoys the patronage of frustrated politicians from diverse political parties, all seeking personal advantage in its activity. The BJP eyes the rise of the Shiv Sena with distaste. Says BJP leader Hit Abhilashi: "We have a difficult choice. We cannot champion only the Hindus as violence has hit both the communities. We have to keep the national interest in mind."

—SUMAN DUBEY

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here that Education Minister Sukhjinder Singh awaited the Baba's deputation. But when teargas, rubber bullets and lathis failed to halt the onslaught, the police—and Sukhjinder—ran for their lives. And the barricade would indeed have been run over by the mob had it not been for a magistrate who, after some hesitation, gave a Border Security Force (BSF) platoon commander the order to open fire.

Barnala explains away the Government's vacillation by saying that a "fairly important member of their party" had sent word to him that the procession would halt in Mohali on the outskirts of Chandigarh and send in a small delegation with a memorandum. "Perhaps the Baba himself didn't want all this to happen," said Barnala, "they were probably overpowered by the youth who were following them. They couldn't keep a check on the youth."

After the firing, it was the turn of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to run riot. Even as the crowd dispersed in disarray after two people lay dead and several injured, the CRPF chased them and beat them up mercilessly. Even the old were not spared forcing, ironically enough, the Punjab police to intervene.

But it isn't merely rising Sikh militancy which is threatening the fragile peace in Punjab. The battle has taken a sharply communal turn with Shiv Sena units consolidating themselves in scores of largely Hindu-dominated towns. "It has become communal now, the Hindus are retaliating," said a senior police officer in Amritsar. "But because they are not properly trained and guided, they are actually worsening the situation rather than helping it."

New tactics were unveiled at Batala—a growing industrial town with an investment of more than Rs 100 crore in foundries alone—when several thousand Sikh villagers, instigated by the AISSF, parked themselves on the eight roads leading into the city after rumours spread that Sikh youth had been killed and a gurudwara set alight in the city. The siege, during which the villagers refused to allow any food to enter the town, lasted almost a whole week, and kept the region tense and violence-bound: at least five people were killed by extremists on the outskirts of the town.

THE INCIDENT had its roots in an earlier event in February following the killing of a Shiv Sena activist in Jandiala near Amritsar on February 16. The Batala unit of the Shiv Sena gave a call for a *bandh* on February 19 in protest and forcibly began to shut shops. The police say that some Sikh boys from the surrounding countryside, in town to attend college, were roughed up and there was large-scale arson and clashes which were controlled only when the police opened fire, killing four young men.

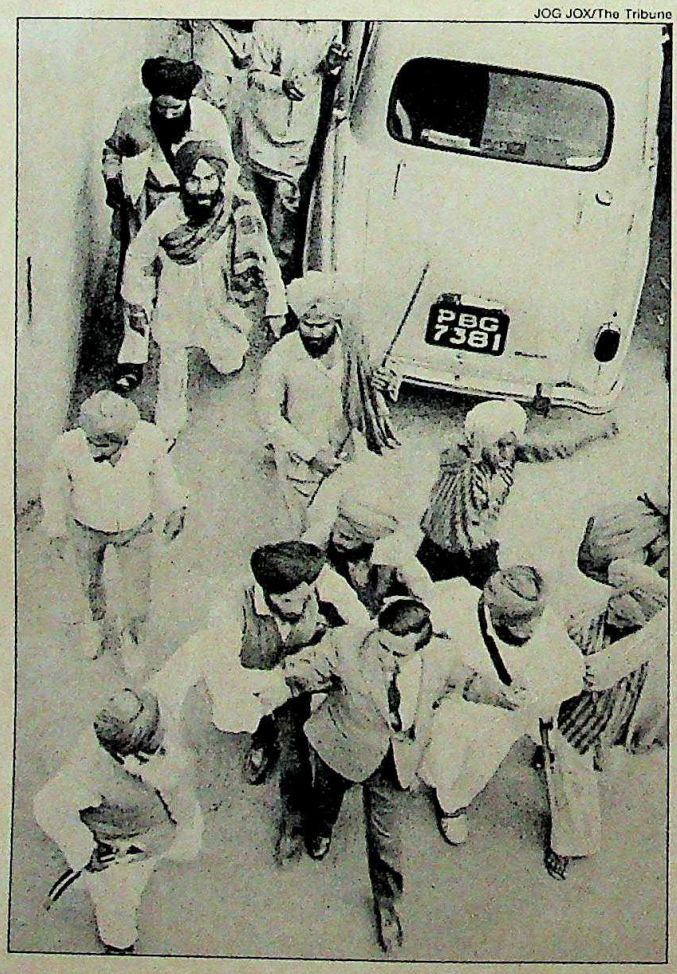
The town was under curfew for six days. Then, as is often the case, a trivial incident two weeks later punctured the uneasy peace that had come to prevail. On March 15, three inebriated young Sikh villagers got on a cycle-rickshaw to return home. Their rickshaw collided with another and the passengers of the two quarreled. The CRPF intervened and took away the three Sikh youths.

That, the authorities say, was provocation enough. Sikh youth began to gather in the gurudwara and Hindu boys in the town. There was some firing from the Shiv Sena crowd and two crude bombs went off, one hitting the gurudwara. The next day the AISSF sent word that they wanted to present a memorandum of protest, which the authorities duly accepted, but as the young men dispersed they looted a couple of shops, forcing the police to intervene yet again.

In the prevailing tension, some Shiv Sena activists allegedly attacked the city police station, set fire to two jeeps, damaged a mini-bus and a jeep, fired weapons and threw seven crude bombs one of which hit district SSP J.S. Birdi on the leg. The police again fired to disperse the crowd, killing one young man.

Police official being manhandled by AISSF men in Chandigarh

JOG JOX/The Tribune



On March 17, some AISSF activists allegedly raided the Lahore Gun House, ransacking it of 41 weapons (only about 10 were recovered in house to house searches) and some young men fired at a Sikh household, injuring five persons. Said Deputy Commissioner R.P.S. Pawar: "Both the sides are getting militant, that is why the trouble is not subsiding. No group wants to slow down."

Provocative though they were, these incidents had been brought under control with the clamping of curfew, but rumours of the killing of a granthi—when he had only been roughed up—led to entirely unexpected results. In an unprecedented move, villagers began to collect on the roads leading up to Batala and refused to allow milk and vegetables into the town. A tractor and office fit-

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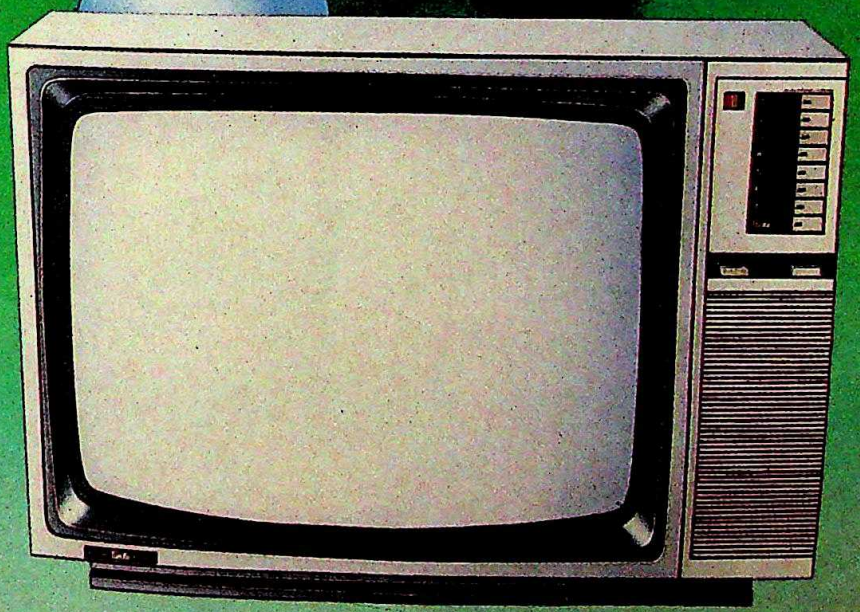

You do not have a better choice

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"It's a pity they can't share my Rasna!"

India's

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You may of course argue, your neighbours are the nicest lot. Hardly the type to stoop to violence no matter how much they envy your ONIDA TV. Well... thank heavens!

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tings in some factories were also burnt in sporadic incidents. "We know we will suffer," declared villager Bhan Singh, when asked if the boycott wouldn't hurt the farmers themselves, "but when there's a fight people do suffer." In fact, no fewer than 45,000 workers come to Batala from the countryside to work in the foundries and its other industries—all of which lay inactive for the better part of March. Sukhwinder Singh Khalsa, of a nearby village, agitatedly explained that they would continue their siege for one week because, as he put it, the Shiv Sena had attacked the gurudwara and the CRPF had slain Sikh youth, and this kind of thing couldn't be allowed to happen.

In fact, the authorities escorted a group of Sikh villagers to the gurudwara to show that it was intact and even beamed pictures on Doordarshan. Several truckloads of supplies were officially escorted into the town and distributed during the relaxation of curfew. Deputy Inspector General of Police A.A.Siddiqui affirmed that the administration would take harsher action if the siege continued. In fact, after two days of discussions, the siege was lifted, partially at first and then wholly, but not before a new dimension—*gherao* or *nakabandi*—had made its appearance on the Punjab scene.

THE ANXIETY is that this new tactic will become part of the accepted strategy of Sikh militants. The more the Shiv Sena acts up, the harsher will be this kind of retaliation from the AISSF and vice versa. Though conflict is still confined to activists of the two sides, there is little doubt that violence could easily trip over to threaten the innocent. The fragility of the situation is demonstrated by the incident in Nakodar near Jalandhar in February when an accidental fire in a granthi's gurudwara room was rumoured to have been started by members of the Shiv Sena and gave birth to an agitation in which four AISSF activists were killed in police firing. Said Siddiqui: "The situation is so explosive that any incident occurs and people give it a communal colour, and it gets aggravated."

The Government complains that its efforts at bringing the state under control are not appreciated. Barnala cites figures which show a decline in all forms of terrorist crime in Punjab between October 1, 1985, and March 9, 1986—the first five months of the Akali regime—compared with the same period in 1984-85. The only exception to this trend: murders rose to 52 from 27.

J.S. RODE

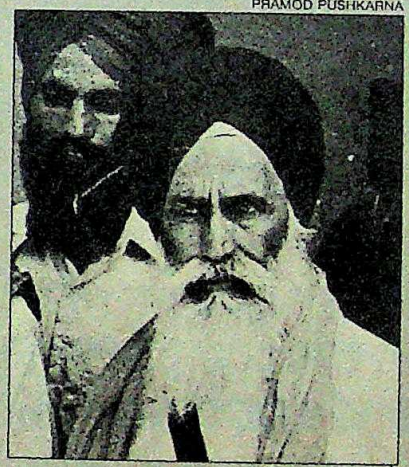
Post Mortem

THE DEATH of Jagjit Singh Rode, 56, general secretary of the United Akali Dal (UAD), in Faridkot last fortnight in suspicious circumstances has remained a mystery. Rode, the elder son of octogenarian UAD President Joginder Singh and brother of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, shot to limelight after Operation Bluestar. Joginder Singh declared: "It is the Government which has conspired to kill him." And the state Government, fearing that it would exacerbate the tension, instructed the police to ascertain the cause of death and announced a judicial inquiry into the incident. Said Chief Minister S.S. Barnala: "He was a known Akali leader and, apprehending mischief, I instructed the police to make every effort to find out the truth."

The only available facts were that Rode was supposed to be in Faridkot to attend a UAD meeting. And, at 7.30 a.m. Nishan Singh, the driver of the Ferozepore-Bhatinda train, reported that he saw one person striking the train and being crushed, 1 km before Bhatinda station. The police, who reached after some time, took two hours to identify the body and send it for post-mortem.

Joginder Singh recalled his own version. "At 4.30 a.m., when Jagjit was leaving for his farm, two men came to meet him on a motorcycle. He took them to his room, asking his daughter-in-law to make tea for three people. When she returned with the tea she did not find anyone in the room. But she thought they might have gone to the farm or to the house of his younger brother about half a kilometre away. Later, I was informed by the police around 11 a.m. that Jagjit had been run over by the train." Joginder Singh said he firmly believed that Rode had been taken to Kotkapura via Mudki and from there to Faridkot and that the accident had been stage-managed.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Rode: mysterious death

The post-mortem report strongly suggests that there was no foul play. The team of five senior professors of the Faridkot Medical College under Dr J.S. Dalal, did not spell out the cause of the death as they wanted the viscera and histo-pathology reports before confirming the cause. But they came to some other conclusions:

- there were no marks of any external injury of any type on the body indicating a struggle;
- the stomach wash showed that there was no sign of poisoning;
- there were no marks on the body indicating that the body had been dragged; and,
- the body had been cut into two pieces from about two inches below the navel, the upper part was found lying between the tracks and the lower part on the left of the track.

The police first thought it was a case of suicide and nearly announced it as so, but later termed it as an accident subject to the result of the post-mortem report. It is now apparent that Rode left his village early in the morning and was taken to the Moga-Baghapurana Road on a cycle by someone in his house. And from this point he boarded a bus or tempo to Faridkot. Rode possibly miscalculated the speed of the train and tried to cross the tracks. "His foot might have got entangled in the signal cables causing his fall on the track," a police official in Faridkot said. But the atmosphere in the state is so tense and tempers so frayed that even an accident can be painted in ominous colours.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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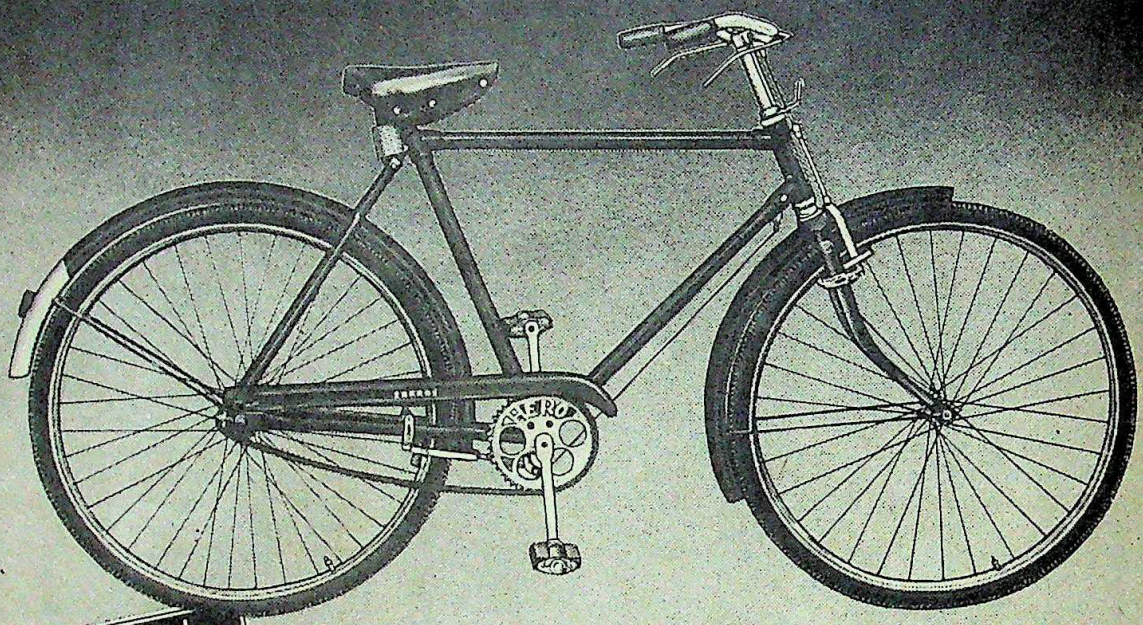

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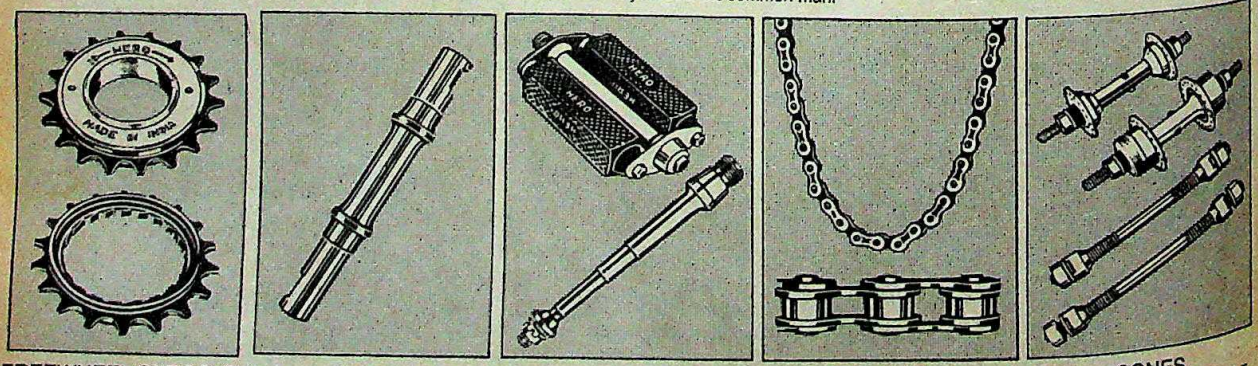

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compared with a decline of all cases of violence (including murders) registered to 151 from 271.

An added problem is that it isn't possible to make out the difference between terrorist action and normal criminal activity. Newspaper reports, which tend to aggregate the statistics regardless of whether it is a terrorist crime, tend to paint the situation in worse colours than it is. To be sure, there is fear and apprehension, and the streets of most towns are deserted after dark. Shopkeepers, who are by and large Hindu, in particular tend to be anxious that their goods will be looted, their property damaged. But in the midst of all this, there are signs that Hindus and Sikhs continue to interact, to resist the divisions sought to be created, whether it is children or young men playing cricket in deserted streets, or adults transacting business, taking evening strolls together, simply sitting at tea-stalls chatting or thronging sports stadiums.

What has changed in Punjab is the growing militancy of the Sikh extremists and the stirrings of a reaction from militant Hindu youth. What has also changed is the nature of the Akali Government which, after giving the impression of vacillating, is beginning to act, to order the police into taking firm action in the face of provocation, not afraid to be firm if the occasion demands. The Centre's failure to implement the Punjab Accord, or meet the first of its many deadlines—the transfer of Chandigarh and the simultaneous handing over of Hindi-speaking areas to Haryana—weakened the hands of the Akali Government and strengthened the voice of those who argued that the accord was futile, and that the Centre would never yield.

THERE has, consequently, been an upsurge of sympathy for the anti-accord forces. Kahlon says that their movement is running away ahead of them and that they are not able to keep pace. Talking to INDIA TODAY at Khatkar Kalan, he declared: "The way it is going, the Barnala Government will fall of its own accord, there is no need for us to do anything." Barnala's other problem is the challenges he faces from within the Akali Dal. His efforts to win Prakash Singh Badal's support have not yet met with any success. Badal wants the number two position in the Cabinet, presently occupied by Finance Minister Balwant Singh; but Barnala, while offering him key portfolios, isn't quite prepared for that. The failure to implement the accord has sustained Badal since he was against trusting the Centre. Even so, Badal has been cultivating some Central leaders during his frequent visits to New Delhi. Says he: "The leaders in Delhi, as in the past, are not sincere. What is needed is a bold move to save Punjab and the country."

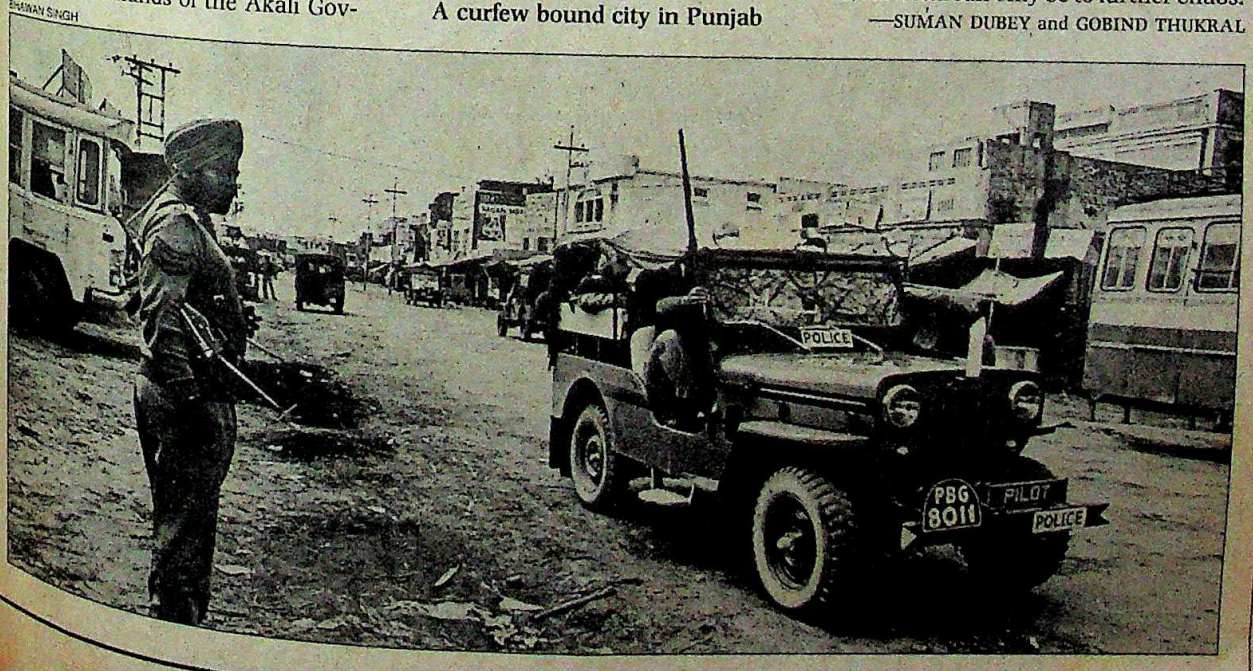
The real challenge, however, doesn't come from Badal as much as the ousted Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) president Gurcharan Singh Tohra who now wears a saffron turban in place of the Akali blue. Tohra understands politics better than anyone else in the Akali camp and, apart from having a hold on the SGPC, commands the loyalty of some 18 MLA's. It is quite possible that he may be able to cause a major upset for the moderates in the coming SGPC elections, and if he is lying low at the moment it is only because Punjab is in a critical condition and he has yet to assess the Centre's stance.

In spite of the turmoil around him, Barnala gives the impression of being calm and believes he is in control. Of late, he has established a direct link with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the two have been discussing Punjab without intermediaries carrying messages to and fro. And although he doesn't elaborate, he gives the impression of a man who expects some action sooner rather than later on the implementation of the accord.

Action, if it comes, won't be a moment too soon. For too long now there has been vacillation on the outstanding problems in Punjab and it helps no one to keep the Akali regime on a tight leash. If Barnala, whose government came to office with a convincing majority last September, continues to show that he means business, he deserves the unstinted backing of the Centre. For at the moment there is no alternative to him and there is no scope for the kind of political games that created so much turmoil in Jammu and Kashmir. With a determined and well-supported Barnala regime, Punjab has a fighting chance of emerging from its current bout of violence without lasting damage. Without it, the road can only be to further chaos.

—SUMAN DUBEY and GOBIND THUKRAL

BHAWAN SINGH



A curfew bound city in Punjab

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MAHARASHTRA

A Cautious Beginning

AS SOON as Shankarrao Bhaurao Chavan was sworn in as the chief minister of Maharashtra under a hastily-erected, flower-bedecked shamiana on the lawns of Bombay's Raj Bhavan, he made it clear that even if he had returned from New Delhi reluctantly he was determined to confront the expected challenge to his rule from the state's former political strongman, Vasantrao Patil. Nineteen ministers were sworn in along with Chavan in a two-tier ministry, but not one of them belonged to the four prosperous sugar belt districts of western Maharashtra, which has been the heartland of Maratha political domination.

Not even A.R. Antulay, who was chief minister in the early '80s, had sought to break the Maratha domination of the state's politics with such complete disregard for the political interests of the sugar lobby. So the composition of Chavan's Ministry immediately raised the question of what Vasantrao's 60-strong group of MLA's, who control a majority of the state's 82 cooperative sugar factories, would do in response. Inevitably, rumours began circulating that the leaders of the group were meeting to chalk out a strategy at the residence of former revenue and industry minister Sudhakarrao Naik, whom Patil had wanted as successor to Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar. But another discarded minister from the group dismissed the reports by saying that "the only place where we are meeting is in the Assembly".

On the first day of a truncated, seven-day assembly session, Chavan made it clear to his MLA's that he would not recognise the existence of factions within the Congress Legislature Party (CLP). In any case, by keeping five vacancies in his cabinet, the new chief minister has shrewdly kept alive the hope among Patil's followers that some of them would be included in the ministry. Prospective dissidents thus remained cautious and tightlipped even in off-the-record conversations with journalists, content for the moment with echoing Patil's statement from Jaipur after Chavan's installation: "There is no question of any Congress(I) legislator in Maharashtra not extending his cooperation to the new chief minister."

Chavan being sworn in: disciplinarian

Nevertheless, the Rajasthan governor hinted in a newspaper interview of his concern about the threat to his long-

KONA PRABHAKAR RAO

Belated Exit

MAHARASHTRA Governor Kona Prabhakar Rao last fortnight became the second major victim of the marks scandal involving former chief minister Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar's daughter Chandrakala. The Bombay Raj Bhavan confirmed reports that he had finally tendered his much clamoured for resignation. But like Nilangekar, the governor, who was also the Bombay University chancellor, kept denying till the end that he had played any role in the exam scandal. The resignation was officially stated to be on 'health grounds', as the 70-year-old Rao suffers from a heart ailment and emphysema.

The former governor first hit the headlines when he summoned the Bombay University registrar to Raj Bhavan, and in the presence of the state advocate-general, instructed him to change the university's advocate in the exam fraud case before the high court. Vice-Chancellor M.S. Gore resigned in protest against the chancellor's interference, and in the subsequent outcry, Rao charged the registrar with telling a lie. But his defence of his dubious role in protecting Nilangekar hardly carried any conviction and after S.B. Chavan was sworn in as the new chief minister, Rao became a virtual recluse in Raj Bhavan, with both opposition parties and students' unions demanding his resignation. Opposition leaders led by Sharad Pawar staged a walk-out in the state Assembly on the first day of the session after failing to force a discussion on the chancellor's role in the scandal, and organised a huge protest morcha in Bombay three days later. Rao had to also virtually abdicate his position as the chancellor of all the universities in the state by staying away from the convocations of the Pune and Marathwada agricultural universities on March 22 and 23 for fear of protests by students.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Prabhakar Rao: inglorious chapter

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NAMAS BHOJANI

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distance stake in Maharashtra politics. While maintaining that he was "not bothered" about who was included in the ministry, he said that what was "more important" for him was Chavan's "attitude" towards his followers.

As the truncated assembly session drew to a close, it became clear that Patil's group was adopting a wait and watch policy towards the new Government. Any possibility of mobilising an immediate challenge to Chavan from within the Congress (I) CLP was undermined, interestingly enough, by the Congress(S) leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Sharad Pawar. He and his 54 MLA's quickly expressed support for Chavan and ridiculed the idea that any of Patil's men would have the courage to leave the ruling party. Ultimately, the latest political crisis in Maharashtra may benefit Pawar the most, since his support becomes crucial for both the ruling and the dissident groups within the Congress(I) in the event of a showdown.

BUT MOST political observers agreed that Chavan faces no immediate threat from Patil's group. "S.B. Chavan's Government will definitely last at least one year," *Loksatta* editor Madhav Gadkari said. "Beyond that a lot will depend on how Chavan handles the party." But six years in New Delhi have brought about a change in Chavan—he is more careful in his approach and has realised the disadvantages of being rude to partymen. "It is true that Shankarrao is a more practical man now after his stint in Delhi," one of his senior ministers quietly acknowledged. Uncharacteristically Chavan, whose reputation as an excellent administrator is rivalled only by stories of his impatience with politicians, when questioned, on a felicitation trip to his home district Nanded during the weekend break of the Assembly session, about the journalists' tour of Mantralaya, quipped: " if I don't go then you will say that I behave like a headmaster."

However, Chavan has triggered off considerable resentment among Congress(I) MLA's by inducting two young ministers of state who are not members of either house. Minister of State for Finance, Srikant Jichkar, was defeated in the March 1985 assembly poll from a Nagpur constituency, while Minister of State for Revenue, Rohidas Patil of Dhule, could not even contest the elections. "If Delhi wants it we can accept a chief minister who is neither an MLA nor an MLC", an obviously disgruntled Congress legislator said, "but why should Shankarrao take two ministers who have also not been elected?" In fact, Chavan used his discretion to include many new faces in his ministry—of the 12 ministers of state, as many as eight have become ministers for the first time.

The new ministers could not be tested in the legislature as question hour was disallowed, and no major decisions could be taken by the new Government because of the Assembly session. However, Chavan's sanctioning of the prosecution of a government hospital doctor in Bombay charged with accepting a bribe of Rs 40,000 was seen by bureaucrats in Mantralaya as the first indication of the chief minister's promise of a clean administration for the state.

The more difficult decisions—like better management of the state's water resources, of which the sugarcane areas at present get an unduly large share—still await the new chief minister. But before that, Chavan must decide on whom to include from the sugar belt districts when he expands the Cabinet after the session. One of the names being mentioned frequently was that of Yeswantrao Mohite, who controls the state's second biggest cooperative sugar factory in Satara and is an implacable opponent of Vasantrao Patil. "If Mohite is taken into the Cabinet it will mean Shankarrao has declared war," said a close associate of Patil's. There is thus little doubt that though Chavan's return to the state as the fifth chief minister in six years has generated hopes of a clean and efficient administration, Patil's shadow over state politics still keeps alive doubts about the Government's long-term stability.

—M. RAHMAN

His continued presence in office also led to two unprecedented resolutions at the senate meetings of the Pune and Bombay universities. Both senates censured the chancellor for interfering in university affairs and eroding the autonomy and credibility of the institutions. It was also charged at the Pune University senate meeting that he had pressurised the vice-chancellor into getting his grandson admitted to a Master of Business Administration (MBA) course "through the back door".

The brief tenure of Kona Prabhakar Rao as governor of Maharashtra (he took over on May 30 last year) is seen by politicians and bureaucrats as an inglorious chapter in the history of Bombay's Raj Bhavan, which has seen a succession of distinguished governors since the time of Vijaylakshmi Pandit and Sri Prakasa. "He was the worst governor the state has ever had," said a senior Congress(I) leader. "He and his large family—some say they number as many as 36—really brought down the high standards set in the past in Raj Bhavan."

Had he not resigned from office, Rao was faced with the prospect of many more skeletons being dragged out of his cupboard. On the day his resignation was announced, a Marathi newspaper reported that Chief Minister S.B. Chavan had sent a report to the Centre on the governor's functioning. Among other things, he was said to have interfered in the award of a contract for digging canals and bore wells in drought-stricken Maharashtra, promoting a contractor from his home state (Andhra Pradesh) against the bid by a Maharashtra company. Rumours were afloat in political circles of other deals in which government decisions were influenced by Rao, and it was being suggested that his role in the university scandal was a *quid pro quo* for all the benefits he had got for his family members from the Nilangekar government. If Rao protested his innocence as vehemently as Nilangekar, in the end he had as little choice as the former chief minister in retaining his credibility and staying on in office.

—M. RAHMAN

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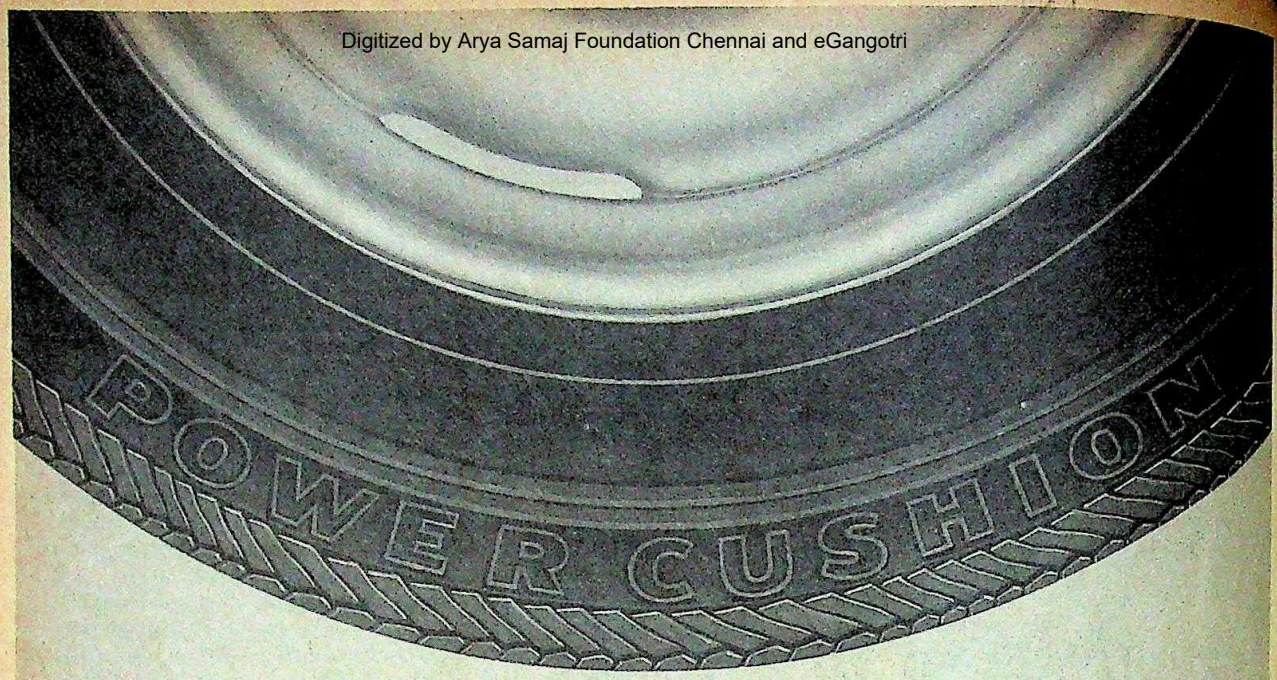

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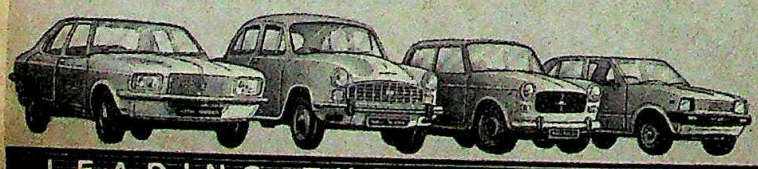

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NAGALAND

Showdown

NAGALAND Chief Minister S.C. Jamir is used to trouble in various forms. But his latest problems are his most serious yet. Eight of his 22 ministerial colleagues resigned last fortnight as a sequel to police firing in Kohima on March 20 in which two teenaged students were killed.

Jamir dashed down to Delhi and after two rounds of meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, told reporters that he had the party high command's "total support". A.K. Anthony, general secretary of the Congress(I) who looks after Nagaland affairs, also said that he was hopeful about sorting out matters. The formula for reconciliation that Delhi had in mind apparently involved persuading the ministers who had resigned to continue. But the dissidents, whose strength is close to half in the 40-member legislature party, are in a belligerent mood and there were indications last week that they would settle for nothing less than Jamir's resignation.

The ministers who resigned (top); and Jamir: uncertain future

Jamir's opponents certainly cannot be faulted for their timing—the firing on students seems to have generated considerable heat in the state (population: 800,000). Members of the Naga Students' Federation (NSF) had called a bandh on March 20 on two counts. In the first place, they were protesting against the expansion of the width of the disturbed areas from 5 km to 20 km from the international border. In the second, they opposed the induction of IPS officers in the state police. Ironically, the president of NSF, A. Aonak, is a ruling party member. According to the dissidents, the authorities severely mishandled the demonstrations and the police opened fire on the crowd without carefully considering their move.

If today the anger within the party has come out into the open, it is only to be expected in a government that was formed on the basis of defections after the November 1982 elections. Jamir himself crossed over to the Congress(I) only just before, but won the chief minister's chair when, following a tie with the opposition Naga National Democratic Party (NNDP)—each secured 24 seats in the 60-member house—he succeeded in engineering defections from the dozen independents to form the Government. At that time he had admitted: "Before the independents agreed to side with us they wanted to be assured that they would be made ministers." Indeed, today, in his ministry only half a dozen can claim to have been with the Congress(I) for any length of time.

It is part of the nature of Nagaland's unpredictable politics that T.A. Angami, president of the state unit until his death last month, had formerly been president of the NNDP and had joined the ruling party less than two years ago. Similarly, two of the three general secretaries of the Nagaland Congress(I) are newcomers to the party and so are both the joint secretaries.

And one of the persons most disgruntled was T. Ngullie, a veteran Congressman and finance minister until his recent resignation, who lost out in the race for chief ministership to Jamir in 1982. Ngullie told INDIA TODAY in a telephonic interview from Kohima: "Almost all the office-bearers are newcomers and most old-timers have been shunted out over the past year or so. The money of government programmes has not been reaching the people due to rampant corruption. If the present Government continues, the possibilities of our party winning the next elections are very remote."

Ngullie had given ample evidence of his resentment before finally resigning. In a letter to a friend, after meeting Rajiv, an anguished Ngullie wrote that he was "fed up of coming to Delhi". Angry at the inaccessibility of even the prime minister's aides, he wrote that "they will not even tell us whether we would be getting an appointment." So great was his resentment that he proposed to form a coalition government with the NNDP along with 17 Congress(I) MLA's who supported him. At that time he was persuaded to avoid taking this extreme step but under the current situation he may well finally decide to break with the party and carry out his plan.

The dissidents have levelled allegations of corruption against Jamir, his family members and supporters, and in particular against B. Panikar, his press secretary who has emerged as an extra-constitutional authority in the state. With seven legislators and the ministers who resigned arriving in Delhi by fortnight's end, the scene was precariously poised for the final showdown.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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KERALA

Arabian Affair

KERALA's so-called 'Kuwaiti scandal' has bored yet another hole in the leaky boat of the state's coalition government. Two Kuwaiti nationals, blacklisted by the Union Government for financing sectarian organisations, landed in Kerala without valid visas and toured Muslim-dominated districts in the company of two Muslim League MLA's. Carefully calculated leaks last fortnight soon brought the matter to public notice. But the state home minister's vehement denial of all knowledge of the black list and the suspension of four police officers—who had plainly admitted the Arabs under political pressure—only succeeded in making matters worse.

The Kuwaitis in question, Sheikh al-Sayeed Yusuf Syed Hashim al-Rifai and Anwar Yakub al-Rifai, were among five members of an Arab delegation which visited the Muslim majority district of Malappuram and other parts of north Kerala between January 31 and February 7. This, when their names had been listed in the prior reference category of the Union Government—which meant they held no visas—since they were found to have been involved in converting people to the Muslim faith and funding sectarian and communal organisations. They were met at Trivandrum International Airport, on their arrival from Dubai, by Muslim League MLA's P. K. Kakunjalikutty and A.Soopy and Food Minister U.A. Beeran's private secretary. They were put up at state guest-houses, travelled in vehicles provided by the Tourism Department and were lavishly entertained, also at state expense.

It was a major scandal since the Union Home Ministry had issued two circulars last year explicitly dubbing both "undesirable persons", not to be given entry visas without prior permission. Orders to this effect were issued to all police stations. But, strangely enough, the port registration officer (PRO) at Trivandrum Airport claimed to know nothing of the orders even though the records prove that his office received them. He granted them a resident permit valid for 72 hours, which was extended for another 72 hours. Obviously, influential politicians had a hand in it.

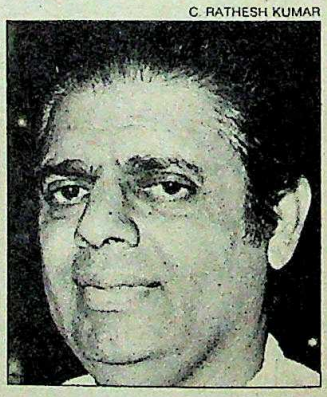
The motivating factor was the fact that Hashim al-Rifai is the chairman of the powerful World Muslim Minority Committee. According to a Muslim League MLA, he has been financing the religious, social and educational activities of various Muslim bodies in Kerala for some time, and therefore, the Malappuram District Sunni Association had invited him to visit the state.

The predictable fall-out was the loudly-voiced demand for the resignation of Industry Minister E.Ahamed, Home Minister Vayalar Ravi and Beeran. Opposition leader E.K.Nayanar vowed to "submit a memorandum to the prime minister" and also threatened a mass agitation on the issue after the current session of the Assembly. But the Government lost no time in producing scapegoats. Four police officers, including the PRO, were suspended and Chief Minister K. Karunakaran made the specious argument in the Assembly that the ministers could not be blamed since the warning circulars were only sent to officials! And Ravi made the even more incredible admission that "secret circulars issued by the Union Home Ministry are sent to the chief secretary who forwards it to the officials concerned. I came to know of the visit only through the newspapers".

KAMAL STUDIO

C. RATHESH KUMAR

C. RATHESH KUMAR



The controversial Kuwaitis in Kerala (top); Beeran (left); and Ahamed: scandal

Ahamed feigned ignorance about the doubtful status of the Kuwaitis. Said Ahamed: "We were not aware of any warning circulars. I will retire from public life if it is proved that my behaviour was anti-national." Said Beeran: "I would like to make it very clear that I did not know these people were in the prior reference category." And Kakunjalikutty self-righteously blamed the police for not having informed them: "We were never told about the ban on these two Kuwaitis. If they had told us about it we would have kept clear."

The chief minister has promised an inquiry to bring out the full facts of the case. But it is Ravi who is making political capital out of the affair. He has lobbied to remove DIG (Intelligence) A.V.Venkitachalam, said to be close to the chief minister, and has also promised a reshuffle of the police brass. And, in keeping with the time-honoured Kerala tradition, a petition for the dismissal of the ministry has been filed by an indignant T.V.Sasikumar of Cochin. But if the public reaction is any guide, Kerala's "Kuwait affair" is hardly likely to stir it's jaded political palate, accustomed as it is to scandal of one sort or another.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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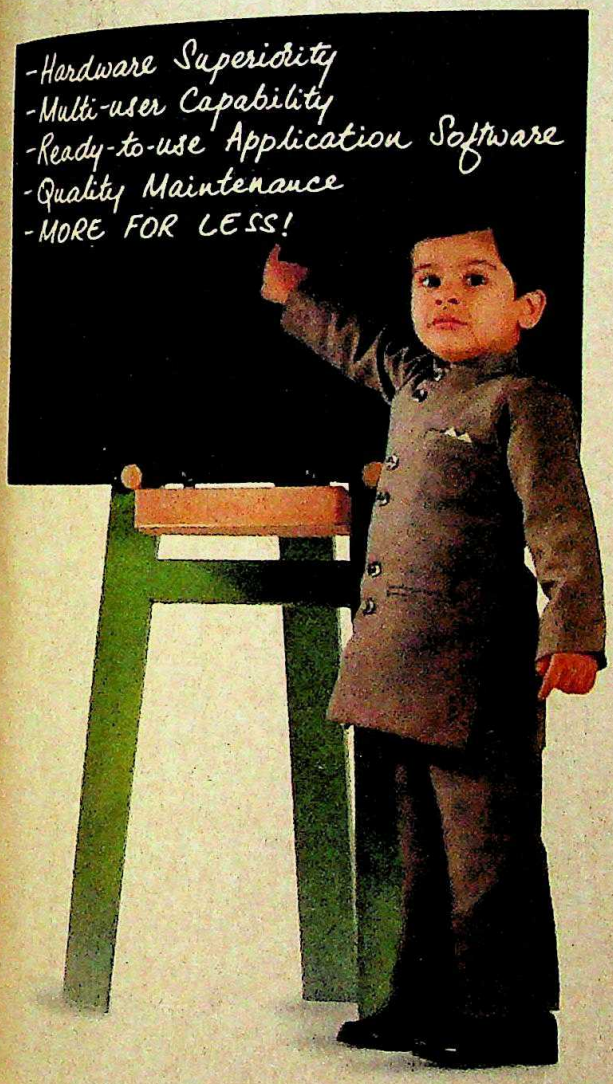

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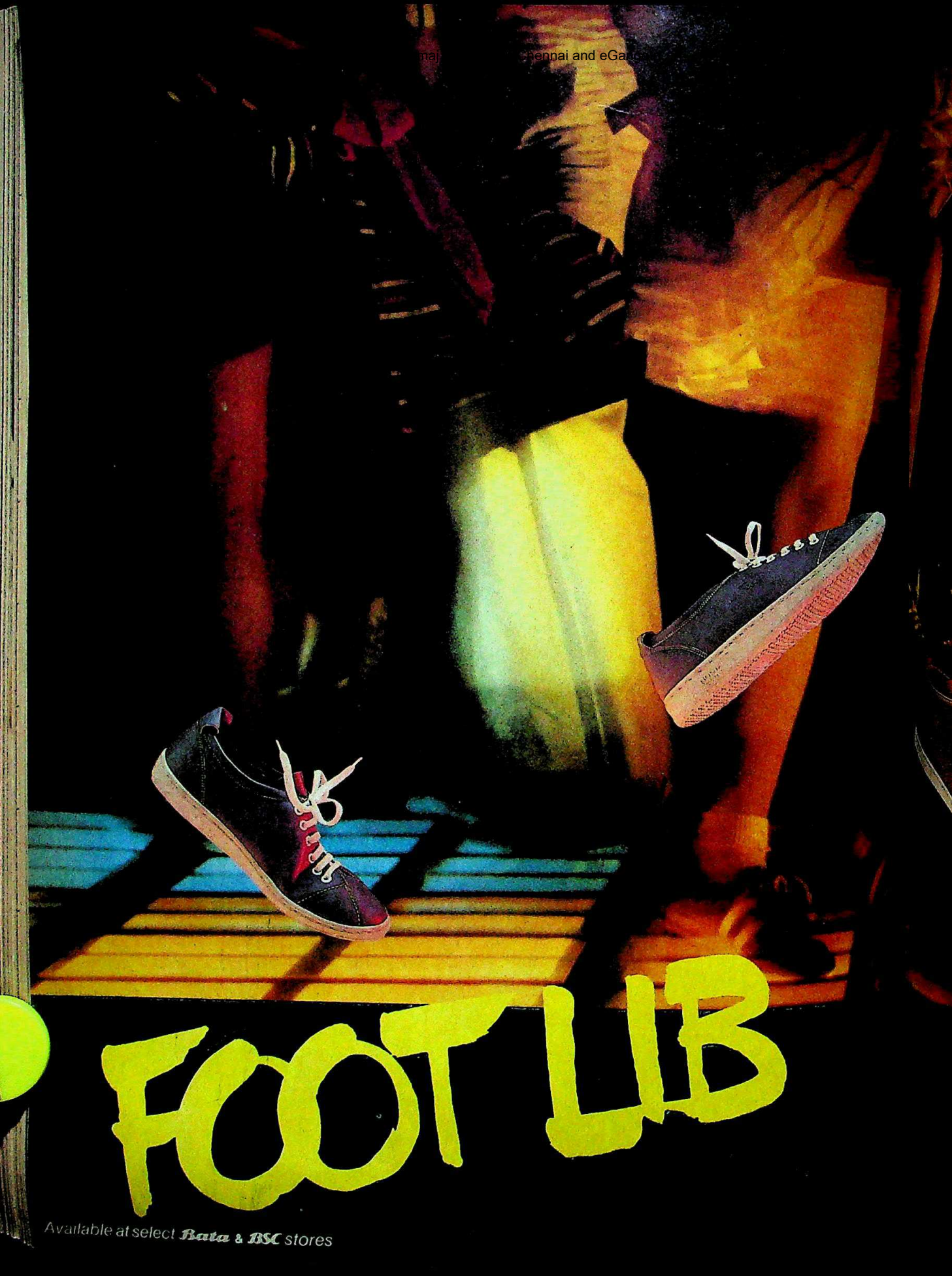
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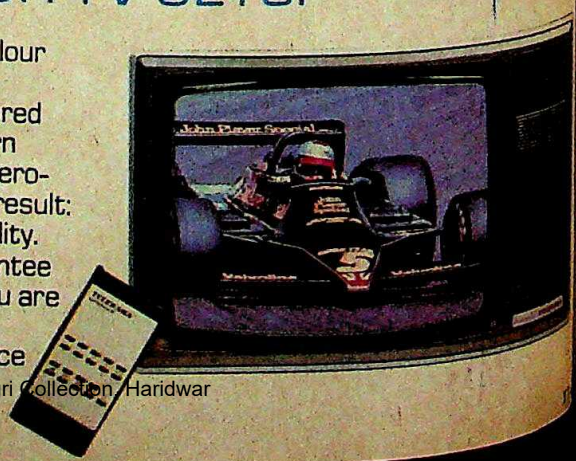

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PRANAB MUKHERJEE

Under Attack

FORMER finance minister Pranab Mukherjee is a battle-scarred veteran, accustomed to the slings and arrows of the political arena. But of late, Mukherjee and his family have been plagued with a bizarre series of incidents that has caught the pipe-smoking politician considerably off balance. Round-the-clock police security now surrounds his modest south Delhi residence, following the latest incident, an explosion on March 20 which partly damaged an outhouse. The CBI has instituted an inquiry to determine whether the blast was connected to the series of incidents which have had the Mukherjee family as its target since January.

"Strange things have been happening to us during the last few months," Shuvra Mukherjee, the former minister's wife confessed. "But until this explosion, I did not think there was a pattern to any of it. I thought they were all unrelated incidents but now I'm beginning to get frightened." She said that she and her family—rather than Pranab Mukherjee directly—had been the targets of most of the harassment. "Someone is trying to get to Mr Mukherjee by frightening his family. I don't know who these enemies are or what they want."

Said Mukherjee: "I am a political man and sometimes these things happen in politics. I am not scared for myself but my family is naturally worried. I do not know who is really responsible. All I can say is that the matter is now with the police and it is for the police to find out who is doing what."

The former minister was not at home when the blast occurred at around 9.45 p.m. "We were sitting in the living-room, my children, and some friends, and chatting when we heard this loud noise," said his wife. "We thought it had come from outside the house. We went out in the front and realised that it was in our own backyard, in the servant's bathroom. There was a lot of smoke coming out. And the roof had been blown out. We had no police guard until this happened."

Shuvra says that she now sees a possible connection between this incident and others that had happened previously. On January 21, she says, she had gone to visit an old friend in Ramakrishnapuram and parked her Maruti outside the house. When she came out of the house she saw a fire burning underneath her car. After she raised an alarm, and the fire was doused, it turned out that the blaze had been caused by a cloth which had been soaked in kerosene and set afire underneath the car's petrol tank.

"I thought this must have been an accident or the work of some crazy people," she said. "But what was really strange was that within 20 minutes of this, about 20 close friends of mine in Delhi and Calcutta, including my brother and sister, received anonymous telephone calls saying my car had been blasted. How do they know my friends' names and telephone numbers?"

One friend who received such a call is P. Dutta who lives in the Rajendra Nagar area of New Delhi. She said: "I received this call from a man who would not say who he was. All he would say was that Mrs Mukherjee's car has been blasted."

On March 3, Shuvra gave her Maruti to the Sadiq Nagar petrol pump for servicing and was to send her driver to pick it up at 3 p.m. But when the driver turned up to take the car, it was gone. Shuvra learnt that two men posing as her employees had gone to the station two hours earlier and driven off with the car. The car was found by the police in Mehrauli, the inside was doused with kerosene and portions of the seat-covers had been burnt.

Shuvra revealed that she has also been receiving anonymous letters. "Most of these letters sound the same. They say things like, 'your husband knows too much. He has been talking too much. He is visiting West Bengal too much and should stay only in Delhi. We are going to make you a widow.' We have been harassed before but never like this."

Whether the incidents are related or they are the result of the current infighting in the Congress(I) leadership in West Bengal, one thing is certain: the Government has surely taken them seriously. Soon after the incident, Mukherjee got a phone call from President Zail Singh. M.L. Fotedar also rang on behalf of the prime minister. Home Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao called on the Mukherjees and assured them that the inquiry would receive his personal attention. But till the culprits are caught, Mukherjee will be left guessing as to the identity of his enemies—and just how serious they are.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

HARI OM GULATI

Pranab (inset) his wife and daughter; and (below) the spot where the blast took place: bizarre events

HARI OM GULATI

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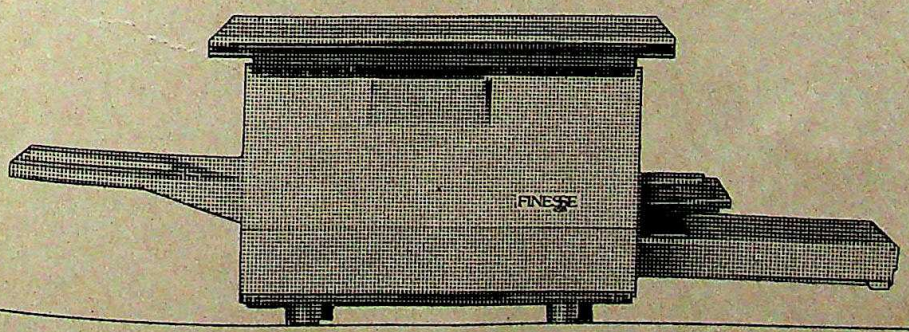

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TAMIL NADU

The Fading Star

THE WHITE fur cap, the dark glasses and the shawl have for long been the most charismatic personal effects in Tamil Nadu. But suddenly, they have become fading symbols of another age. In the two years since Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran's debilitating illness began, his health has at last begun to take its toll—in the political sense. That the former matinee idol's once-indestructible image has taken a serious battering was evident in the AIADMK's humiliating defeat, along with its electoral ally, the Congress (I), to its arch rival, the DMK, in last month's panchayat elections.

It provided proof, if any were needed, that for the first time, MGR's nine-year stranglehold over the state was starting to rapidly unravel. But that has not been the only tell-tale sign of his eroding popularity. The fact that he has been unable to speak either in public or in the Assembly over the last 16 months has raised serious questions about his ability to govern the state. Former state chief minister C.N.Annadurai's once stated that MGR only had to show his face in public and votes would automatically pour in. But that was well before the kidney transplant MGR underwent in a New York hospital that has literally left him speechless.

His performance in the state Assembly has presented a sorry spectacle. Says A.Rahman Khan, DMK MLA: "The chief minister was present in the Assembly only on a very few occasions during the last 16 months. And whenever he had anything important to convey, he appeared to stutter and mutter a few inaudible words to V.Nedunchezian (the leader of the house) who used to sit next to him. MGR would even gesticulate wildly at times to get his message across. And Nedunchezian would then tell the house what the chief minister wanted to say." There have also been occasions when he has failed to make himself understood. An assembly reporter recalled MGR struggling to convey something to the finance minister during an important discussion. After 15 agonising minutes, he gave up.

But speech is not the only impairment. Medical sources reveal that the chief minister had been complaining of chest pain, and his haemoglobin level had fallen alarmingly thanks to the drug, Cyclosporin, he has been taking to prevent rejection of his transplanted kidney. In fact, on the night of February 20, MGR had to be admitted to a private hospital in the city after his haemoglobin count fell to six when the normal count should have been between 12 and 14. A blood transfusion of packed cells was immediately administered and cardiologists advised a coronary angiogram to check if there were any blocks in the supply of blood to the myocardial muscles of the heart.

MGR's failing health has had its inevitable effect on the administration. On an average, around 50 files come to the chief minister's office every day for his perusal and signature but most of them never get attended to. There are 8,000-odd files still pending in the chief minister's office despite the relegation of the information and general administration portfolios to Veerappan. Admitted a state minister close to Veerappan: "The chief minister is not able to strain at all because of his health and therefore the state administration is practically paralysed."

As important a file as that relating to the agreement between the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board and the Neyveli Lignite Corporation, on power tariffs and computation of arrears, had been pending his approval for the last couple of months. Informed sources said the file was be retrieved and the chief minister's approval secured only after high-level intervention. There was another case of a minister who announced a public welfare scheme even before he got the chief minister's approval—the fact is the relevant file had been put up to MGR over a month earlier. Since there was no action, the minister took the risk of announcing the scheme and, fortunately, got his nod.

The worst sufferers of this delay have been departmental heads. None of them

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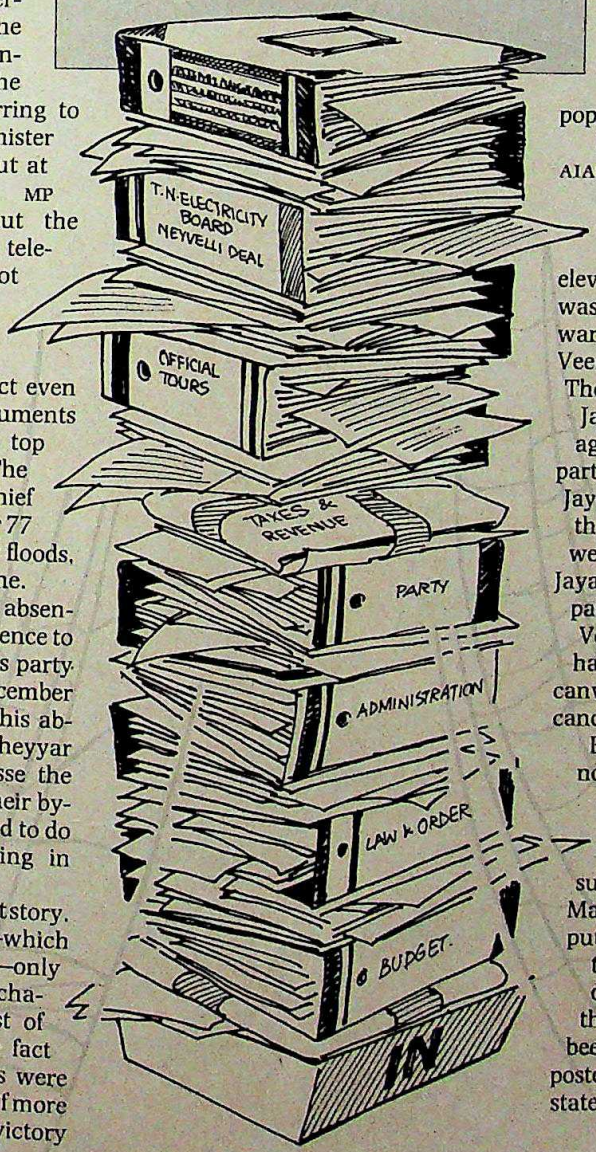
are permitted to leave the headquarters without MGR's permission. But the problem is that files pertaining to official tour programmes come back too late or never at all. And officers cannot dare take his permission for granted. There are stories doing the rounds of an officer who took that liberty and flew to Delhi to attend a crucial meeting. MGR saw the file on the morning the officer caught his flight and promptly wired him to return forthwith and also to pay the air fare both ways from his pocket!

PERHAPS the most embarrassing incident for the state Government was when the Union Minister of State for Agriculture, Yogendra Makwana, told Parliament last fortnight that he could not get in touch with the chief minister at 9 p.m.—when floods were devastating the state—since MGR's personal assistant had told him that the chief minister was asleep and "cannot be disturbed". Much later he clarified that he had been referring to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao and not MGR, but at that moment, AIADMK MP P.Kolandaivelu sought to rebut the charge by claiming that both telephones at MGR's residence were not working in November last and were reconnected only in early January. But investigations reveal that both phones were intact even during the floods, only the instruments had been disconnected. Said a top official of Madras Telephones: "The lines were okay upto the chief minister's residence." In short, for 77 days when the state reeled under floods, MGR 'functioned' without a phone.

MGR's magic presence—or absence—has, till now, made little difference to his popularity at the hustings. His party had overwhelmingly won the December 1984 state assembly elections in his absentia. Last december, voters in Cheyyar in North Arcot stamped en masse the party's symbol of two leaves on their by-election ballot papers. All MGR had to do was show up at a local wedding in Cheyyar and the votes poured in.

But last month, it was a different story. The stunning win of the DMK—which swept 64 of 97 municipal seats—only served to confirm MGR's fading charisma. That it was a crucial test of popularity was evident from the fact that the municipal body elections were held for the first time in 16 years. Of more serious portent was that the DMK victory came about inspite of the overall success of the AIADMK's populist programmes like the noon meal scheme, pre-election promises of a massive project to house the weaker sections and much-ballyhooed announcements of re-introduction of prohibition next year—a sop for women of the weaker sections where alcoholism is a widespread problem. Adding salt to the party's wounds were the inroads made by the DMK into the backward southern districts of the state, now in the grip of severe drought.

MGR's failing health has had it's inevitable effect on the administration. At a conservative estimate, there are 8,000-odd files still pending in the chief minister's office.



The pa s ally in the state, the Congress(I), has not been slow in realising the import of this disturbing trend—it has already started to disengage itself from MGR by backing independents in two constituencies in last month's polls to the state legislative council although there were AIADMK candidates aplenty in the fray.

But excuses were not in short supply. Theorised state Agriculture Minister K. Kalimuthu: "These local body elections were not considered by the people to be a fight between MGR and Karunanidhi." And Food Minister S.Thirnavukarasu explained: "In this election, MGR did not even issue a statement appealing to the voters to vote for his party. Neither did our party's star campaigner, Jayalalitha, hit the hustings. Our revolutionary leader's popularity hasn't gone down a whit."

But the facts speak for themselves. AIADMK ministers were put in charge of the election campaign in specific districts and the haggling with the Congress(I) over tickets till the eleventh hour indicated that the party was serious enough. The vicious tug-of-war between the Jayalalitha and Veerappan factions has taken its own toll. The venom that the Veerappan and Jayalalitha factions are now spouting against each other also shows that the party has been stung by the defeat. The Jayalalitha camp attributes it entirely to the fact that 80 per cent of the tickets were cornered by Veerappan and Jayalalitha's absence from the poll campaign also added to the poor showing. Veerappan's followers, on the other hand, blame the defeat on the open canvassing Jayalalitha did for rebel candidates.

But these political manoevurings offer no answers to what is a painful political dilemma confronting Tamil Nadu. Can sympathy for an ailing chief minister be any longer a substitute for lack of performance? As Madras auto-rickshaw driver Murugan put it: "When the head itself is not thinking, what can all the followers do?" He did not elaborate further but the message was as clear as if it had been written in bold letters on the giant posters and cutouts that dominate the state's sprawling capital.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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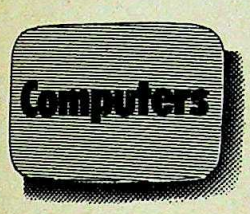

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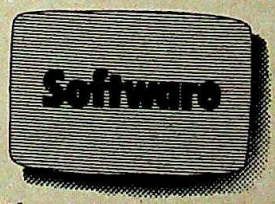

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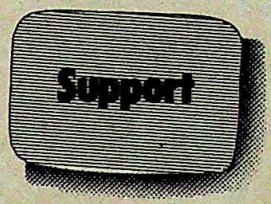

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CPI

Hour of Reckoning

QUITE BELATEDLY, the Communist Party of India (CPI) seems to have realised that it has been steering the wrong course. After more than 60 years of rhetorical thundering and political posturing, the party has suddenly realised that its programmes and policies are outmoded and irrelevant. But the realisation seems to have come a bit too late in the day—at the party's 13th congress in Patna last fortnight.

Between deliberating on the state of the world and affairs of the party and blaming the CPI(M) for all the ills that plague the two, the party did a sharp about-turn to announce on the last day of the congress that it intended revamping its programmes and policies. To match the new mood, it decided to abandon the past and woo its CPI(M) rival in order to launch a joint action programme.

Though maturity seemed to have come to CPI with age, it also showed signs of increasing weakness and debilitation. In this moment of reckoning, the party was forced to do some serious soul-searching, mostly concerning its decreasing strength and the relevance and efficacy of its programmes. The answers were alarming. Between the party's last congress at Varanasi in 1982 and this one, it had succeeded in enrolling only a pathetic 11,282 members. The review report read out at the congress also revealed a disturbing drop-out rate: 20 per cent.

It did, however, try to pinpoint the reasons by saying that "the dropping out is not due to political reasons but the inability of the leadership at the local and district levels". But here too the report gave it the lie: the party's local committees, 1,926 in 1983, had dwindled to 1,842 in 1984 and to 1,805 in 1985. The number of the party's branches too had slumped from 25,125 in 1983 to 22,495 in 1984, increasing marginally to 23,607 in 1985. The report revealed that "a large number of party members are today either inactive or become active only at the time of elections or campaigns...a basic weakness is that a large part of the party is disoriented from mass work and militant mass and political struggles. It has become more oriented to bourgeois parliamentary institutions of all types."

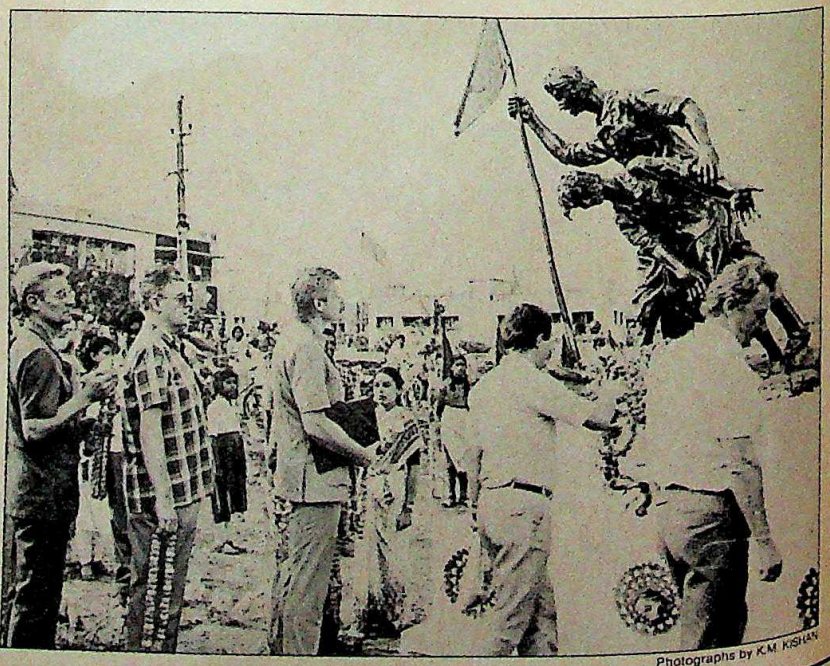
In fact, mass programmes were the overriding concern throughout the meet—a measure of the party's own reckoning of the masses' decreasing support. The leaders admitted that the party would be a dead organisation "unless it is moulded into a militant fighting party of the toiling masses".

Its final resolution declared: "As the problems of the rural poor and the Adivasis are aggravating, some extremist groups with Maoist leanings have stepped up their activities among these people. The party should take up the problems of these extremely poor people in a militant way so that these problems are solved and also fight the extremist forces."

But the CPI was still far from having resolved its inner conflicts. In fact, the entire congress was marked by indecision and uncertainty. That the party did not know its mind was borne out by the final resolution, which was amended and corrected to incorporate last-minute changes of mind. For instance, after blaming the CPI(M) of every ill in the country and the party, it suddenly decided that the Marxists were not so bad after all. The resolution apologetically said: "It would be better not to harp on the past but to concentrate on joint actions based on common understanding of the present situation and move forward."

Not only this, it vowed to "firmly defend and strengthen" the Left Front governments, while making "friendly criticism wherever necessary". These conciliatory gestures came as a logical corollary to the gradual softening of the party's attitude to the CPI(M).

The party's changing stances left a number of its members disillusioned and alienated. Many delegates at the congress wanted to censure the party leadership for its "unprincipled" participation in the three Opposition conclaves before 1984.



Party president at the congress (below right) Soviet delegates: soul searching

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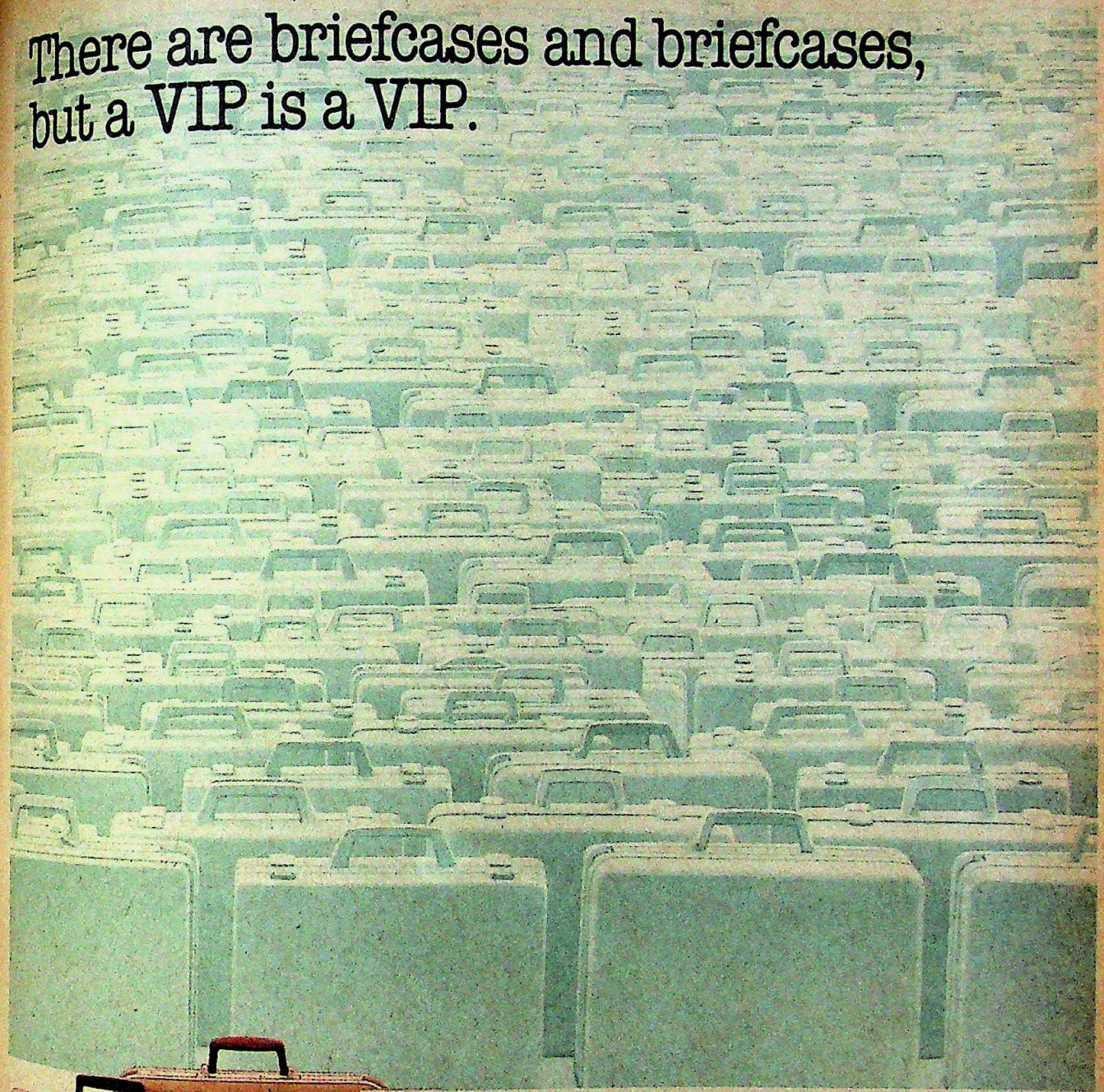

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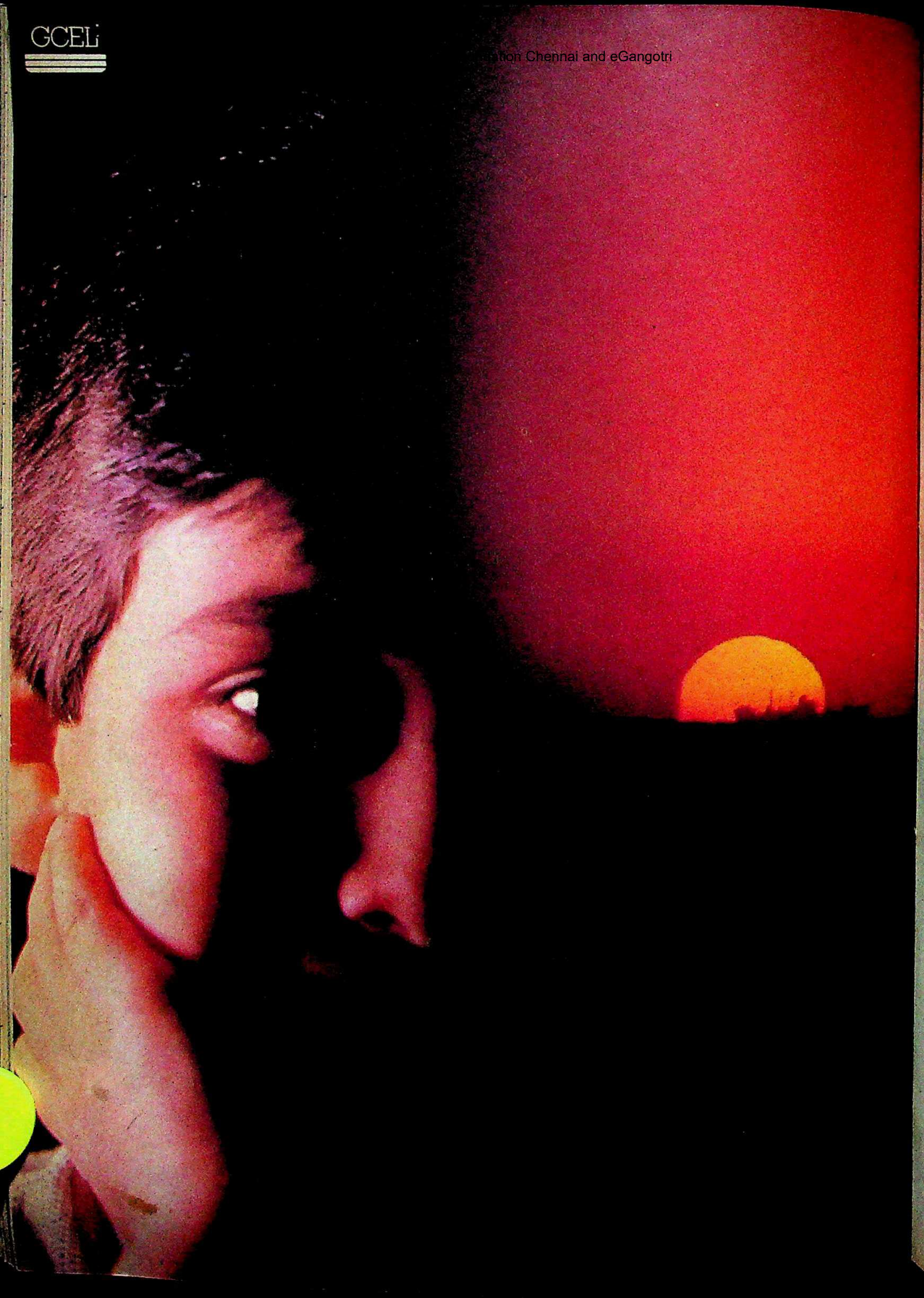

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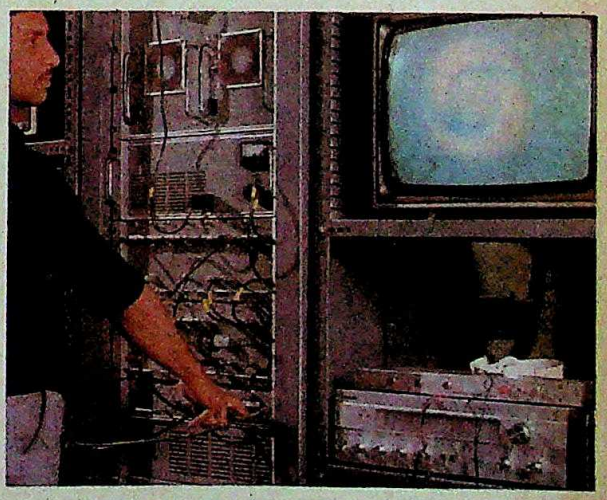

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Similarly the political resolution was taken to pieces by the delegates who grilled the leadership on certain major points. The commission of 400 delegates entrusted with the task of studying the resolution, found their job all the more difficult with a total of 243 amendments being proposed of which 45 were eventually accepted. Later when it came in for adoption at the plenary session, not a single major amendment was forwarded.

The biggest hurdle in the way is obviously the growing dissension and differences within the party. C. Rajeshwara Rao, who has kept the party under his iron grip for 22 years, and was re-elected at the congress as general secretary for the sixth consecutive term, saw to it that all talk of younger leadership was squashed and dissident leaders sidelined. The party's 125-member national council was reconstituted with as many as 20 members being replaced, including S.G. Sardesai, who had earlier submitted an alternative party line. Well-known critics like Mohit Sen, H.K. Vyas and K.S. Shukla were unceremoniously dropped from the national executive.

But dissension was not the only worry of the leadership. More serious was the fear that the party may be isolated from the international communist scene altogether. As it turned out, the fear was not unfounded. At the 27th congress of the CPSU, both the CPI(M) and the Congress(I) had been invited together for the first time and Gorbachev had spent considerable time with Congress(I) Vice-President Arjun Singh.

While the CPSU established a party-to-party relationship with the Congress(I), recognising it as a social democratic party, Singh conveyed Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's desire to work together with the two Indian communist parties. Soviet officials reportedly applied themselves to this job of influencing the collaboration. And it was this that shocked the CPI, because all along it had been joining hands with the rightists against Rajiv Gandhi's Government. The Kremlin message thus became clear: it wanted to be friends with New Delhi, even at the expense of the CPI.

It was perhaps because of these nagging fears that after the initial thunder, the congress lost its revolutionary tempo and ended almost in a whimper. On the face of it, the resolutions confirmed the party's commitment to chart a more effective course. But under the reassuring facade was the disturbing indication of the growing gap between its head and its limbs.

—FARZAND AHMED

Baba Amte (centre) in Delhi

BABA AMTE

New Crusade

HE LEANS on his stick for support, the silvery hair giving him a biblical aura. At 72, Murlidhar Devidas Amte—lawyer, messiah, and founder of Anandwan, a home for leprosy patients, has launched a new crusade—the Bharat Jodo Abhiyan or the Knit India March.

Disregarding his poor health, Baba Amte is on a march from Kanyakumari to Kashmir—traversing a distance of 5,042 km with 100 men and 16 women all under 35. His aim, very simply, is to re-infuse the spirit of national integration at a time of growing cynicism and communal strife. The marchers have already covered the southern states, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and spent two days in Delhi en route to Punjab.

The idea of a unity march was originally conceived in 1973 by Yadunath Thate, a senior aide of Baba Amte. It was however, delayed due to Amte's indifferent health. But the November riots in Delhi and other parts of north India disturbed him so much that he resolved to undertake the march. "My conscience just could not allow me to sit quietly after this," said Baba. He emphasised the objective of the movement: "It aims at mobilising the buoyant and dynamic energies of the nation's youth in the service of eradicating social evils."

To those who accompany him on his march, it has become an inspiration to try and change the face of India. Concrete plans are already on the anvil. The Youth Emergency Service (YES) and the People United for Serving Humanity (PUSH) are two of the projects which aim at undertaking relief work at the grassroots level.

The enthusiasm which has gripped the marchers has been nothing short of infectious. "The response has been overwhelming," said Baba, recalling the vast and emotional crowds who welcomed them, forgetting all barriers of caste, religion or political affiliation. For those who saw in his venture a hint of political ambition he had a ready answer: "There is an epidemic of self-deception. I am building a culture, not a cult."

For the women cyclists, it was a new experience altogether. Said Dr Kalpana Parulekar: "It gives us a new sense of self-confidence that we are in no way lagging behind the men." And Vilas Pautankar, a teacher, sounded the plea of rural India when he said: "It is easier to establish rapport in villages than in cities."

Of idealists there was no shortage. Pune student Babasaheb Suryavanshi has been crippled from birth, but he never thought twice about joining the march. For V.R. Nair and Nafisa, it was an inspired way to spend their honeymoon. Married just three weeks before Baba launched his Bharat Jodo Abhiyan, they decided to join it nevertheless.

However, there were some who were sceptical of the purpose of the march. Delhi's Khalsa College Principal M.S. Randhawa was vehement in his criticism: "If they want to promote national integration, why don't they go to Punjab where intensive care is needed?" But there was no doubting the fact that the march could not have been better timed. Baba Amte has built up an envious reputation as a sort of male counterpart of Mother Teresa. The march, for him, remains an ongoing task. As he says: "Like a miner, I am in search of a rich mineral deposit. Till I find it, the search will go on."

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA
and NANDITA SARDANA

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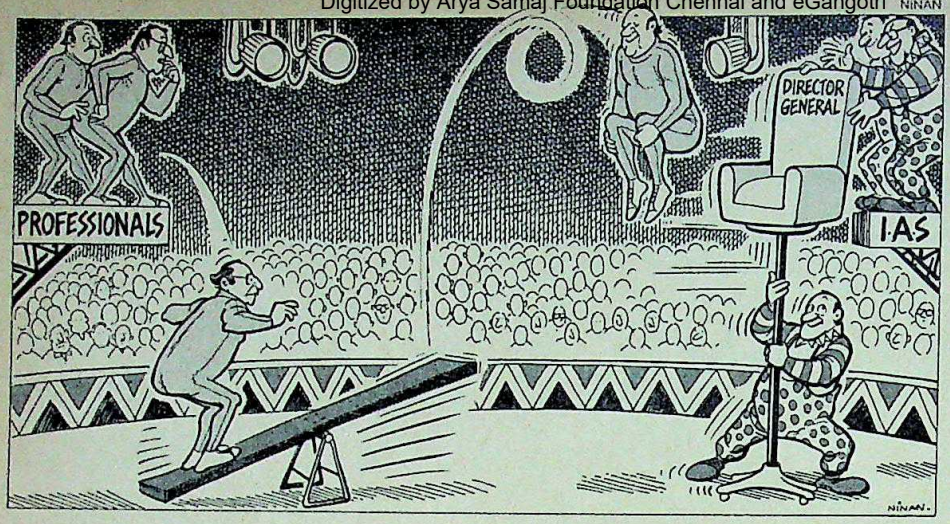

BUREAUCRACY

Poaching Problems

RIVALRIES between departmental cadres and the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) are everyday fodder for the bureaucratic mill. But relations between the 'specialists' and 'generalists' have now sunk to a new low in several ministries, with IAS men increasingly muscling their way into posts normally held by departmental specialists.

Sidelined departmental officials and their associations are up in arms in at least two ministries (tourism and information & broadcasting), with officers from the IAS cadres grabbing the posts of director-general in both Doordarshan and All India Radio (AIR), and of additional director-general and several directors in the Department of Tourism. In all the cases, the claims of broadcasters and tourism professionals have been pushed aside.

The Tourism Officers' Association (TOA) has taken its case to court, while the seniormost professional in AIR has gone to the Central Administrative Tribunal and challenged the appointment of an IAS officer as AIR's director-general. The tussle in the Tourism Department, meanwhile, has already resulted in the resignation of a senior tourism official, Vibha Pandhi, after she was passed up for the post of additional director-general, which went to an IAS officer. And a few months ago, the TOA took legal action to prevent an IAS officer, Mrs B. Prasad, from being posted as the director of the tourism office in Geneva.

That's not all. K.N. Kudesia, who has spent 10 years as deputy director-general of tourism, is not even being considered for the director's job at the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM); only four IAS officers figure in the list prepared for final selection.

But the most glaring case of turf-grabbing by the IAS is in information & broadcasting, where the rules have been changed and changed yet again in a manner that has prevented the seniormost broadcaster from qualifying for the top spot of director-general, which has gone to an IAS officer.

Till four years ago, the director-generals of both AIR and Doordarshan were invariably professional broadcasters from the programme staff. In 1981, a new rule was introduced that a deputy director-general had to put in seven years in that rank before he could be made director-general. When the post of director-general fell vacant, the seniormost deputy director-general, A.R. Shinde, was automatically disqualified by the new rule, and an IAS joint secretary in the ministry, Suresh Mathur, was given additional charge of AIR. Then an intermediary post of additional director-general was created, and Shinde promoted to this.

But the rules were amended yet again to specify that an officer had to put in three years as additional director-general to qualify for the top spot. This disqualified Shinde a second time, and S.S. Verma, another IAS officer, came in as director-general. Verma moved out in February last year, and Mathur returned because, said the ministry, Shinde had not yet completed three years as additional director-general.

And once again contrary to the rules which specify that when an IAS officer occupies one director-general's slot, the other post in AIR should be filled through internal promotion, both jobs today are held by IAS men. Shinde has gone to the tribunal over this, and his case is due to come up for hearing shortly.

In the Department of Tourism, even deputy director-generals who have the required period of seven years in the grade for being promoted to the rank of additional director-general are being bypassed in favour of IAS officers. Thus, Vibha Pandhi resigned because she was not promoted despite having nine years in the grade, and Kudesia is not being considered for a higher grade despite having been deputy director-general for 10 years.

The proliferation of the IAS is quite spectacular; till 1982 there were only two IAS officers in tourism—the director-general and the director (administration). Now there are three times as many in this department. Information & Broadcasting Secretary Girish Mehra, however, rejected the charge of favouritism towards the IAS, and said: "I don't believe in labels. The best man should be selected for the job, whichever service he comes from." And senior officials of the Department of Personnel, which controls Central government cadres, say the provision for a qualifying period of service for promotions was in line with its guidelines circulated in May 1979. "The recruitment rules are not at fault, but cadre management by some ministries is not good," said a senior cadre manager in the Department of Personnel. He added that the promotion rules were in fact being re-framed for the new information & broadcasting service.

The Shinde case will soon prove whether this is really so. Khanna retires soon from Doordarshan and Shinde, now having completed the three years of qualifying service as additional director-general, will again be the main contender.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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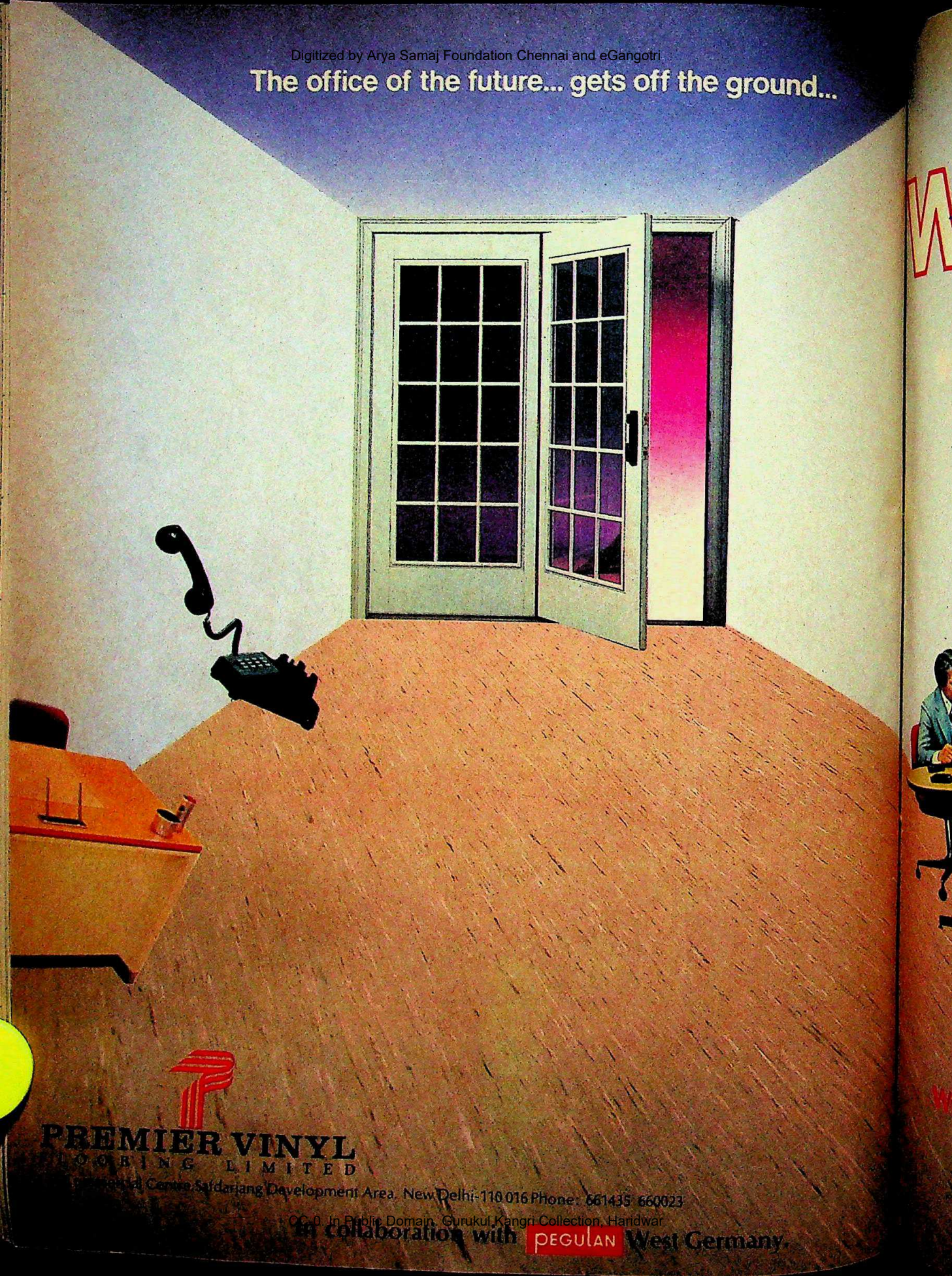

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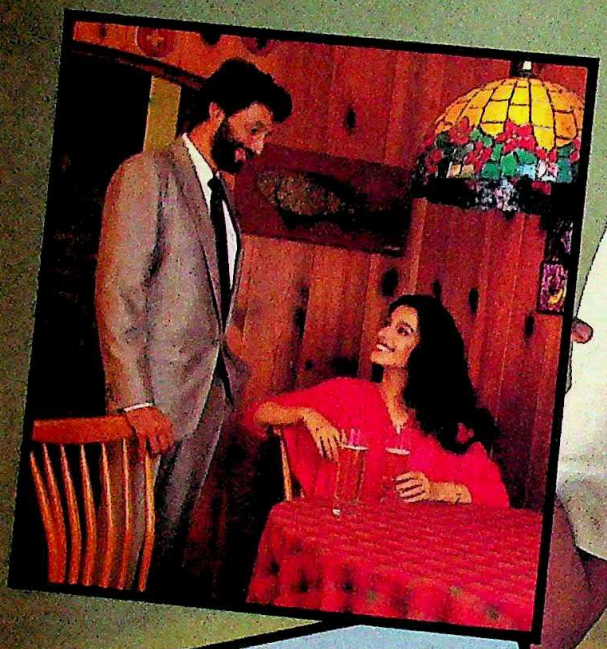

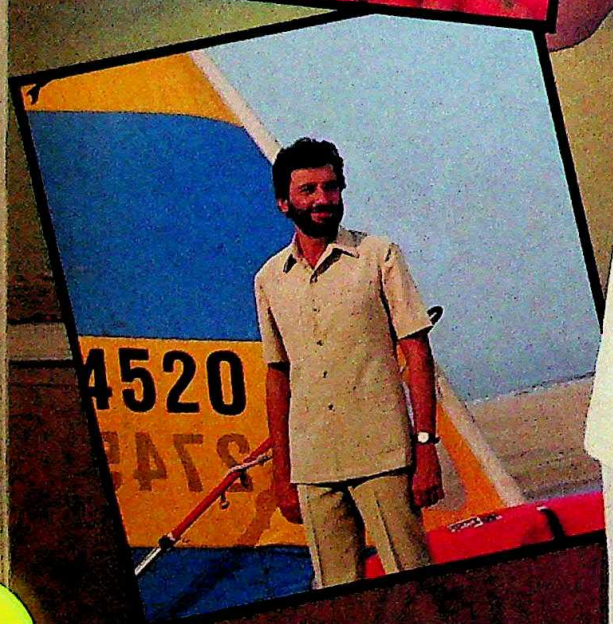

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BIHAR

Rallying Cry

A WAVE upon wave of opposition-sponsored rallies hit Bihar last fortnight like the vanguard of an advancing army. And, judging by the reactions of the panic-stricken Congress (I) Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, it appeared that the ruling party was really under siege.

Momentarily, the situation bore a strong resemblance to the mood in 1974 when opposition parties and students rallied under the banner unfurled by the late Jayaprakash Narayan and toured the rural areas to mobilise the masses in the first post-independence political revolution in the country. That last fortnight's rallies in Patna were impressive could not be doubted. Hardly had the familiar blood-red CPI hammer and sickle banners been removed after the party's congress on March 17, that they were replaced by a profusion of Janata Party flags and buntings to bid welcome to Chandra Shekhar, who trooped into the city's Gandhi Maidan after a 120-km long *Kranti March* from Sitabdiara (JP's birth-place) followed by fleets of luxury buses packed with supporters from eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The rally saw a galaxy of party leaders, including Karnataka Chief Minister R.K.Hegde, railing against the Central Government for its neglect of the region and calling for a return to JP's ideals. Thundered party General Secretary George Fernandes: "We pledge today to launch an unceasing struggle to restore the ideals of the freedom movement reiterated at this maidan 12 years ago when the clarion call for total revolution was first given by JP."

Next to arrive was the *Sampoorna Kranti March*—comprising 15-odd political organisations launched a decade ago with JP's blessings—which also held a pledge-taking rally the next day in the adjacent Adalatganj maidan. Led by journalist Kuldip Nayar, the rally made it clear that nothing would change for the better unless *Lok Shakti*, the essence of the JP movement, was created. And the dust had hardly settled on the Gandhi Maidan when hordes of poor farmers and workers led by Lok Dal leader Karpoori Thakur streamed in, their set faces mirroring their determination to get their 88-point charter of demands accepted. Claimed state Lok Dal chief Ramjiwan Singh: "We don't want to compete with anybody but the rally is definitely a show of strength."

Shows of strength they certainly were. While Fernandes put the figure of those attending the Janata rally at about 50,000, state Lok Dal General Secretary P.K.Sinha claimed more because they drew purely the rural people. Practically every Janata leader attended the rally. But numbers apart, the *Kranti March* attracted a surprisingly good response throughout its course, with Chandra Shekhar holding impromptu public meetings in villages, reeling out statistics of poverty and neglect.

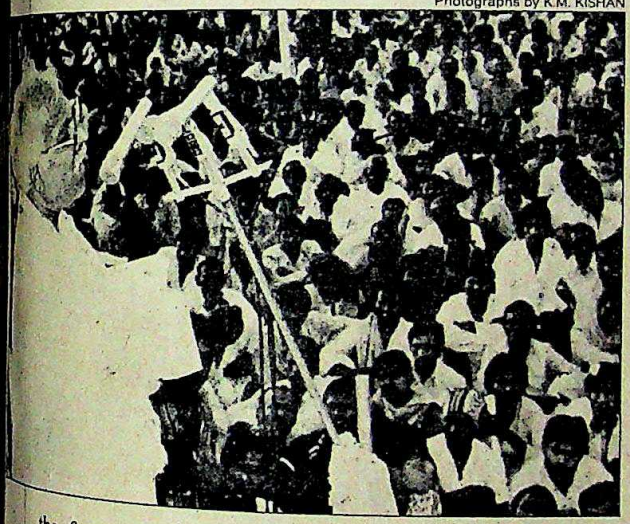
Clearly, Chandra Shekhar was out to recreate a political base for himself and the success was enough to force Dubey onto the defensive and promptly give his blessings to a Congress(I)-sponsored *Bharat Bachao Manch*. State Congress(I) Joint Secretary Indira Sinha, who toured universities and colleges for months on end, and also tried to mobilise people against the 'politics of padyatra' charged: "Frustrated opposition leaders are trying to plunge the country into chaos."

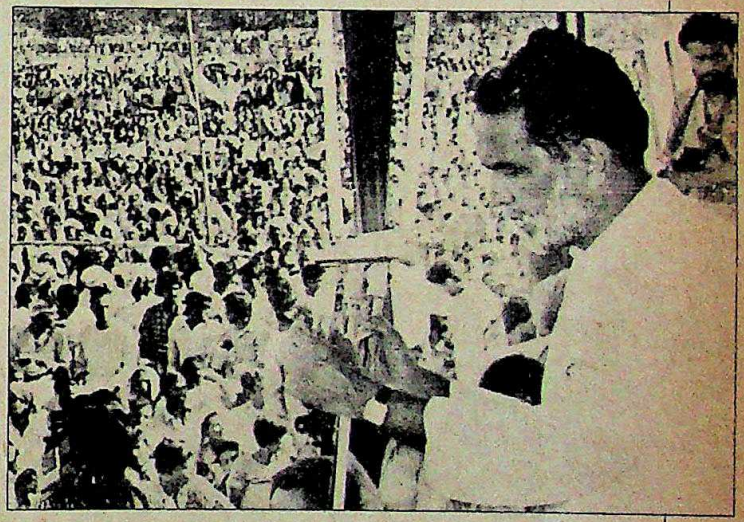
Having gauged the changing mood of the populace, the Opposition seems determined to seize the hour. Janata and Lok Dal leaders separately applied their minds to the task before them—the future course of the agitation. Janata Party leaders drew up an action plan beginning April 11 to June 25 when the 'Patna Declaration' took final shape and 'vikas sammelans' would be organised in each district in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. A 'save democracy' convention is also planned for June 25 to mark the declaration of the Emergency.

The Lok Dal plan was along similar lines. An estimated 1,000 party workers from Bihar are scheduled to converge on Delhi's Boat Club lawns on April 14, Dr Ambedkar's birthday, to join in a mass *satyagraha*. On May 7, the 'save democracy' front (including all opposition parties except the CPI) convened by Karpoori Thakur plans to organise a rail-rasta-roko to press for electoral reforms. On June 5, the day JP gave his call for 'total revolution', Lok Dal volunteers will offer dharnas at the block-level in some UP and Bihar districts and have similar demonstrations on June 25. The agitation is scheduled to enter its second phase on August 9, when the party plans an ambitious rail-air-road blockade.

But inevitable infighting cast a long shadow over whatever political mileage

Photographs by K.M. KISHAN





Lok Dal's Thakur (left) and Janata Party's Chandra Shekhar addressing Patna rallies: politics of padyatra

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had been gained by the rallies. A section of the Janata leaders wanted Chandra Shekhar to step down as president. He also broadly hinted that he no longer wanted the presidentship and wanted to devote himself fully to "people's causes". Differences in the Lok Dal saw Thakur and Paswan at odds over the former's support for the Soshan Mukti Sena of Shivnandan Paswan instead of the latter's Dalit Sena. Similarly, Congress(I) attempts to organise counter rallies in the districts on March 15 flopped because the dissidents did not co-operate. Party chief Dumar Lal Baitha tried to put a brave face on the episode by saying that parties rejected by the people were trying to regain their confidence through rallies, but it fooled no one.

The panic in local Congress (I) ranks revealed that the 'politics of padyatra' was proving highly effective. Though there were veiled charges that Chandra Shekhar and Fernandes were using the occasion to try and re-establish their lost political bases in the area, it could not be denied that the moment had been well chosen. Disillusionment with the ruling party is evident in the area and the ineffectiveness of the state Governments has only made the area ripe for political exploitation. JP may not be alive but his memory certainly is. In the tumultuous period of 1974-75 in Bihar, he showed the rest of the country the way. History could well be repeating itself.

—FARZAND AHMED

ORISSA

Muzzling Media

ORISSA Chief Minister Janaki Ballav Patnaik started his professional career as a journalist. And now, his political career stands threatened because of a journalist. As Patnaik prepared to celebrate a record sixth year as chief minister last fortnight, the tiny state was buffeted by the uproar over the bomb attack on Dr Radhanath Rath, 84, a fearless journalist and freedom fighter, allegedly by Congress(I) hoodlums. Rath was one of the state's most respected personalities and editor of the influential Oriya daily, *The Samaj*, and doyen of the state's harassed press corps.

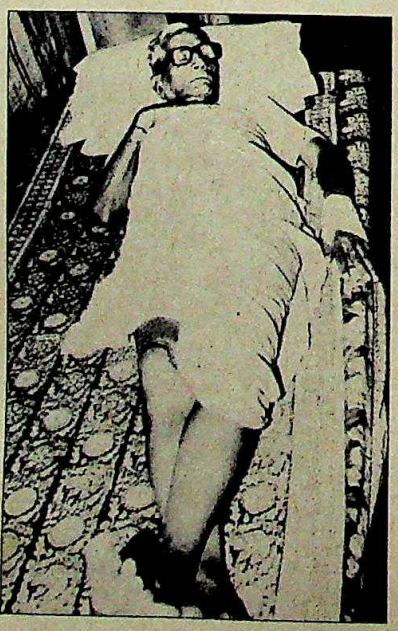
Rath, through the columns of his newspaper and in public speeches, had launched a sustained campaign against

Janaki Ballav Patnaik's political career stands threatened because of a bomb attack on Dr Radhanath Rath a fearless journalist.

Patnaik and the rampant corruption in the state Government. Last fortnight, in what appeared to be a premeditated attack, Rath was ambushed some 30 km from the state capital, while on his way to a function at a private college in Puri district, by a gang of hoodlums armed with lathis. The driver of the jeep, Rath and two others managed to evade the ambushers but found the road ahead blocked. Before the driver could turn the vehicle around, crude bombs were thrown at them.

The immediate and sustained outcry

Injured Rath in hospital: ambushed



forced the state Government on the defensive, particularly once it was discovered that most of the people arrested or wanted in connection with the bomb attack were members of the ruling Congress(I) party. An embarrassed Patnaik promised that all the culprits would be apprehended and punished "irrespective of their political affiliations". But few people in the state gave any credence to his promise, particularly since the attack on Rath fitted the pattern of a series of deliberate attacks on the media, especially *The Samaj*, in recent years.

In fact, barely a week before the Rath affair, the Press Council had announced that the state Government had given a written undertaking that it would ensure the freedom and independence of the press. Ironically enough, the Government had also assured *The Samaj* that no journalist working for them would be inconvenienced in the discharge of their duties. The Press Council had approached the state Government with a long list of attacks on the press in Orissa. These included:

► Chabi Rani, a journalist, who was raped and subsequently murdered by Congress(I) goons.

► *Samaj* correspondent Jatadharu Rana was arrested, handcuffed and forced to drink his own urine by the police. Subsequently, a *Samaj* vehicle carrying copies of the paper was bombed.

► In another case, students attacked and destroyed the offices of two publications, *Khabarkagaj*, a daily, and *Tuesday*, a weekly, in the presence of the police.

► Compounding these incidents was the attack on the offices of *The Samaj* in Bhubaneshwar followed by the assault of a senior journalist, Swaroop Jena, who later succumbed to his injuries.

That all these attacks were politically motivated and intended to muzzle the press by creating a climate of fear is beyond doubt. Patnaik is already under considerable pressure from the Centre, especially after his mishandling of the Kalahandi affair. Charges of corruption have been levelled against him and the small coterie around him. Last fortnight, three Congress(I) MP's in New Delhi, Nityanand Mishra, Banamali Babu and Anandi Das, called on Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to complain that Orissa was being ruined by Patnaik's autocratic rule. Faced with the sudden onslaught from all sides, Patnaik's long rule might well be entering its final count-down.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneshwar

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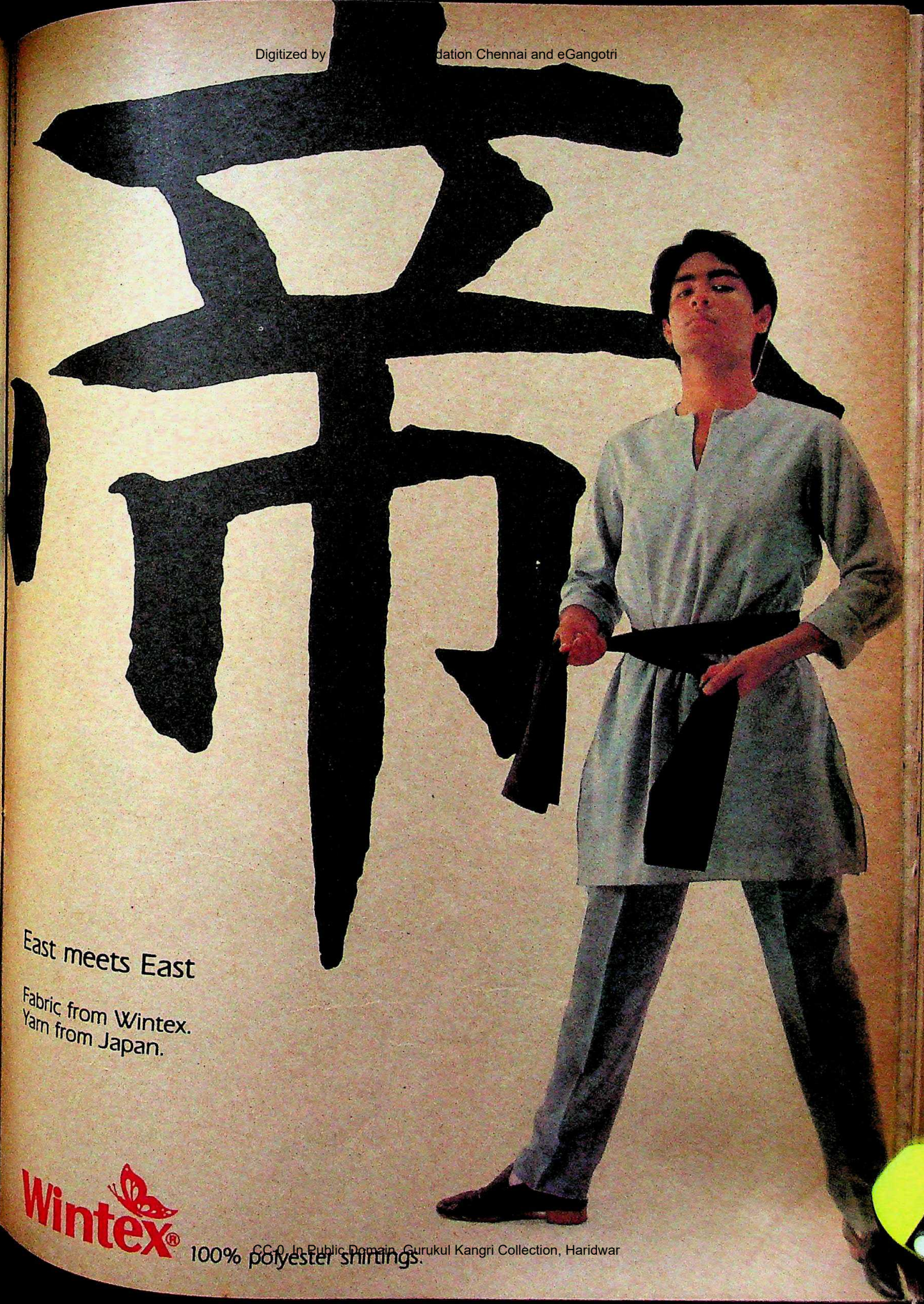

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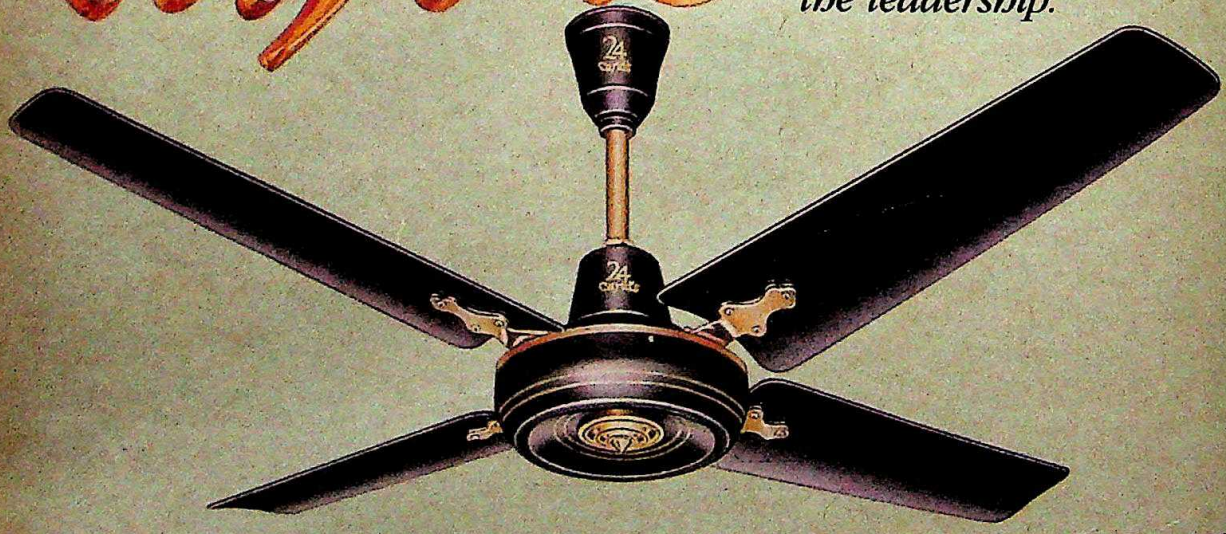

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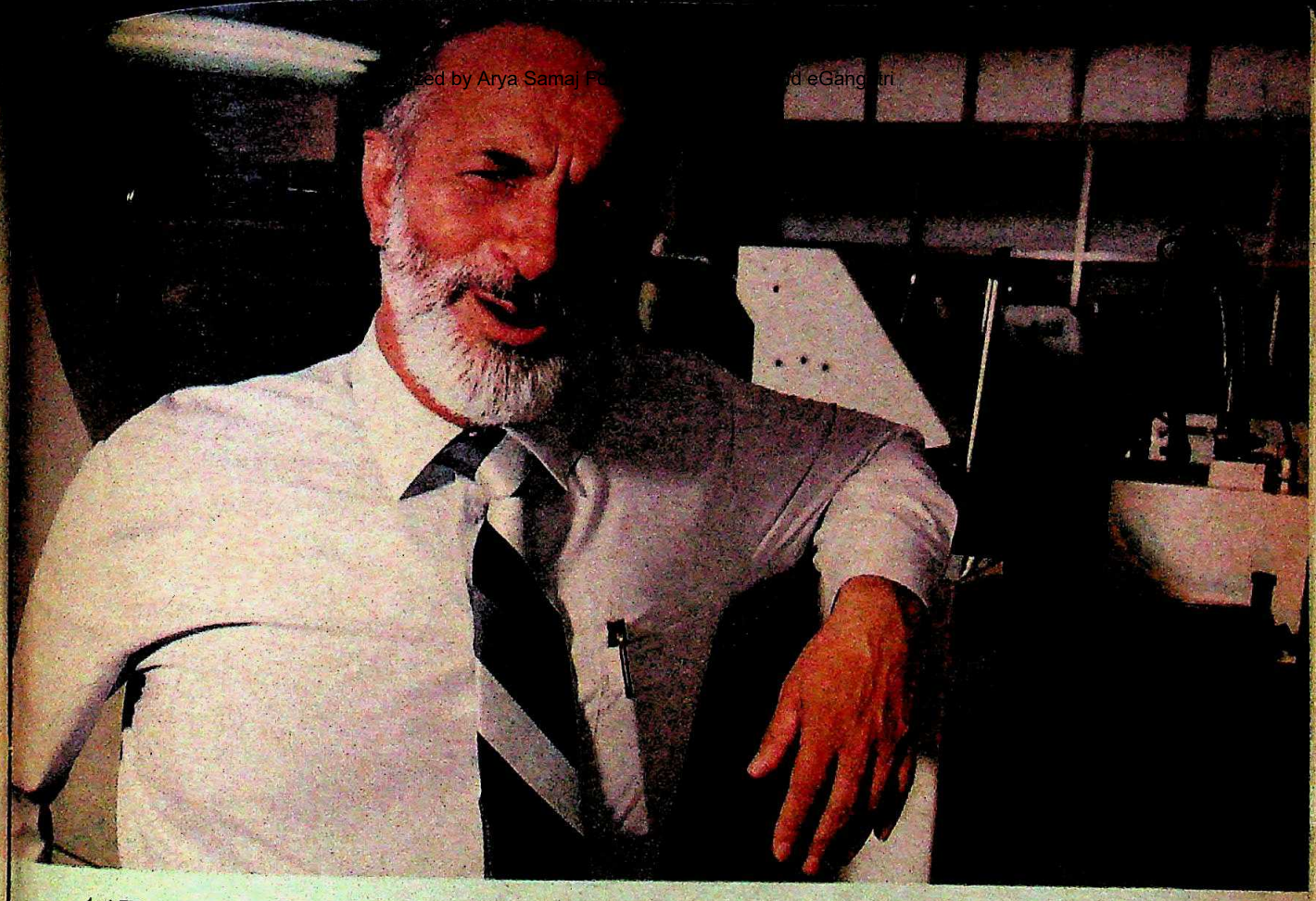

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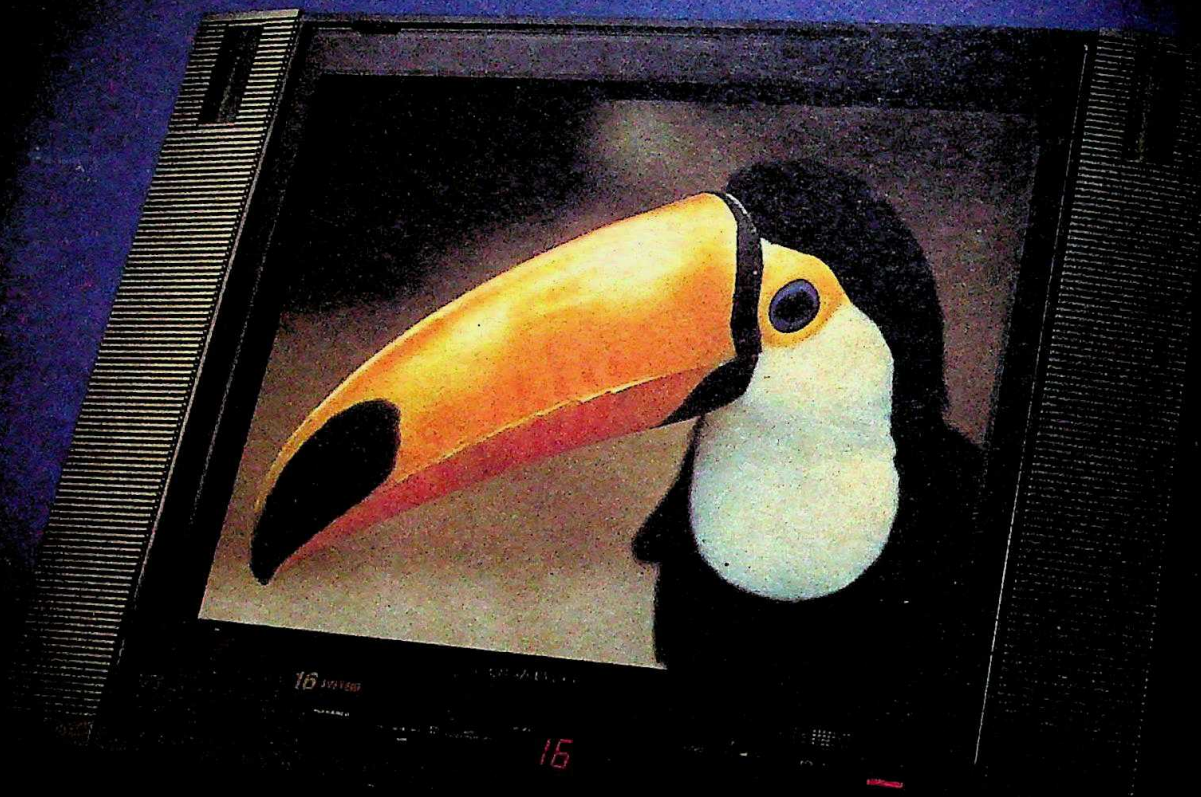

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JAMMU & KASHMIR

Cleaning Up

AFTER a brief spell of political turbulence leading to the crash of G.M. Shah's government in Jammu and Kashmir, a new phase of stability and consolidation began last fortnight. Governor Jagmohan got down quickly to the business of refurbishing what had become a corrupt and inefficient administrative apparatus.

In less than a week of taking charge, he transferred every third IAS officer in the state and brought in senior officials from New Delhi and other states. He undertook extensive tours of the valley and made surprise visits to hospitals, police stations and revenue offices. And he released the previous government's political detenus, while rounding up anti-national and communal elements. Said Jagmohan: "Our immediate task is to provide a responsive and efficient government."

The hyper-active governor also launched a development offensive. He sent a detailed development plan to New Delhi which included cleaning up the Dal Lake with the help of international agencies, constructing houses for poor people encroaching on public land, and pushing through with hydel power projects to boost electricity supply. The Centre assured him an extra Rs 100 crore in the next few months, and Jagmohan himself promised to raise extra resources in the state.

Going by the estimates of the Finance Ministry, the previous government had been softpedalling the recovery of arrears of over Rs 50 crore by the departments of sales tax, excise, forest and electricity, and by other municipal and civic bodies in the state. In fact, the recovery operations were either postponed or cancelled under political pressure from ministers. Claimed Jagmohan: "It is wrong to say that the state survives on doles from outside alone. There are enough resources for generating money, but one has to tap them and put the money into productive ventures."

Then, in a major administrative step, Jagmohan promised to promulgate an ordinance aimed at delegating decision-making powers to middle-rung civil servants. Earlier, none of them were authorised to take final decisions, these needing the approval of the concerned minister. The proposed ordinance will enable officials to take decisions of a quasi-judicial nature, including the issue of transport and arms licences, and to settle revenue disputes without referring them to ministers, who would only have the power to hear appeals.

But Jagmohan's most concerted thrust, predictable in the context of his past record, was on urban development.

SUMAN DUBEY

In less than a week of taking charge, the hyper-active Jagmohan has sent a development plan to New Delhi which includes cleaning up the Dal Lake, constructing houses for the poor and hydel power projects.

He drew up ambitious plans for the resettlement of slum dwellers and dairy owners in Jammu, for the redevelopment of Gulmarg and Pahalgam as two of the most attractive tourist resorts in the country, the construction of glass houses with attractive cafetarias throughout the valley, and the creation of additional tourist facilities of international standards. With the summer setting in, he was determined to attract a record number of tourists to a state that has seen its tourism industry suffer severely from disturbed political conditions over the last three years.

But Jagmohan's ability to ensure peace was closely linked with the cooperation he would get from the major political and religious groups in the state. Assured of solid Congress(I) support, he succeeded in wooing both National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah and Awami Action Committee leader Mirwaiz Farooq. Both of them were major political headaches for Shah's Goverment, and it was at their call that various protests had been organised in the state, forcing the administration to enforce curfew every fourth day in one part of the state or the other. In fact, Jagmohan earned kudos from Farooq Abdullah for his handling of the situation after Shah's dismissal. Said Farooq: "The state is in the hands of a capable person and we are sure that he will be able to establish an efficient government in the state."

With Jagmohan busy asserting himself as an administrator, speculation began on the future political alignments in the state. Since neither the governor nor the Centre has made any commitment on the duration of governor's rule, a section of the Congress(I) was certain that the party would ultimately form the next government with the help of those who have defected from G.M.Shah's faction of the National Front. What gave credence to this speculation was the delay in dissolving the Assembly, which must be the first step towards calling for the fresh elections that have been demanded by Farooq Abdullah and other major opposition parties. The Congress(I), interestingly enough, has not taken any stand on this issue. The party clearly hopes that after Jagmohan is able to establish his credibility with the Kashmiri people as the nominee of the *Markazi Sarkar* (Centre), the Congress(I) will be able to claim the chief ministership for the first time in a decade.

But this may not be easy. For Farooq said that if it took him 18 months to get rid of the Shah government, it should not take another 18 months to get fresh elections ordered. He also warned that if the Congress(I) formed a government with the help of those who wanted to shift loyalties for a consideration, it would be a major set-back for Rajiv's claims to practising clean politics. But the Congress(I)'s past performance in the state has never been consistent with its avowed principles on this score.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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Youth Power

G. DEEPAK PAWAR

Somasekhariah: brain's trust

ADIGENEBELE is a sleepy little village in Kolar district in Karnataka. The village is so remote that not many district officials deigned to visit. Fed up of waiting for the officials, the village's youth decided in 1979 to take over the reins of the village's administration themselves. They took over the machinery of law and order and imposed fines on anyone who dared venture on the wrong side of the law. The result: the village today is Karnataka's Utopia. Everything is just perfect: no thefts, no land grabs, no adulteration, no nothing. Though there is no prohibition in the state, nobody drinks in the village. "No one is allowed to enter the village after drinking," says N. Somasekhariah, 40, and the brain behind the local self government. There was only one crime last year: a villager tried to fish on the sly in the local pond. He was caught and fined. And everyone has been living happily ever after.

Surplus Students

THE SANSKRIT University of Varanasi is a unique seat of learning. So its final examination has to be the only one of its kind. Take this year's, for instance. Only 121 students were on the rolls. But as many as 2,100 filled out the examination forms. And when the exam was held, the authorities were stunned to see 2,900 actually appear for it. When the Uttar Pradesh Government ordered an inquiry into the whole affair, it was predictably found that most of these extra examinees did not even belong to Varanasi, let alone the university. They had gained entrance on bogus admission cards, procured for "fees" ranging up to Rs 5,000 each. It is learnt that some "outsiders", backed by various politicians, have been running various rackets from the varsity's hostels with apparent impunity. The police do not want to touch them because that would mean "interfering in students affairs".

Without Win

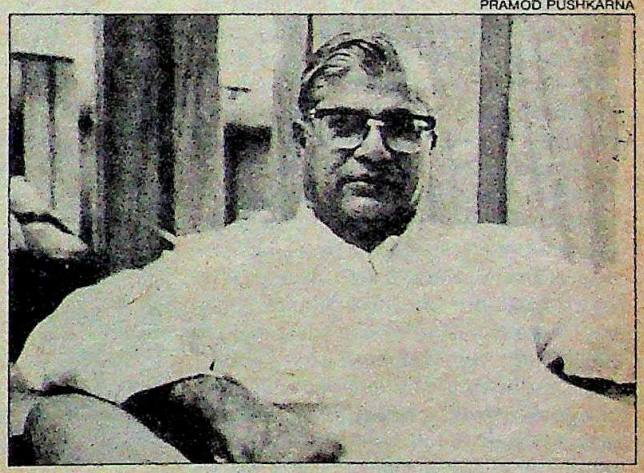
IN THE battle of beauty versus brains, it's not always beauty that wins, though it may seem so at first. The planeload of aspirants to the Congress(I) Rajya Sabha seat in Kerala who descended on the capital to lobby for the ticket were apalled to discover that Chief Minister K. Karunakaran had set his heart on M.T. Padma, a buxom lawyer from Calicut and secretary of the state women's wing of the Congress(I). Rather rudely nicknamed the Silk Smitha of Kerala politics, there was enough to link her to former irrigation minister M.P. Gangadharan. So, it wasn't Padma but T.K.C. Vaduthala, a Harijan leader, who got the nomination. And Padma was heard saying: "I will do whatever the high command wants. But I feel the Congressmen need not have carried their witchhunt so far as to tarnish my image."

Padma: silk image

Cold Shoulder

BY NOW former Gujarat chief minister Madhavsinh Solanki's nasty little note, written to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi but leaked to the press, has passed into posterity as probably the sneakiest piece of rebellion that ever plagued the Congress(I). And though the prime minister magnanimously declared that he had sorted out matters and all was well between him and Solanki, things seem to be quite the opposite. While on a tour of Gujarat last fortnight, Rajiv made no secret of his contempt for Solanki, ignoring him and dismissing his views on the budget with a terse: "Anybody with a little intelligence will know what the policies are." The cold shoulder has already diminished the number of Solanki supporters in the Assembly from 75 to 25. Not that it has deterred him. He has stepped up his activities and it was largely thanks to him that the party lost out to the BJP in the state's recent cooperative federation elections. Reservations, are not Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary's only problem now.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Solanki: down but not out

Swan Song

HE WAS a Harijan and he dared to keep up with the Joneses. So they all got together and decided to put him in his place. And it turned out to be his final resting place—the funeral pyre. The Harijan upasarpanch of Naugaon village near Bina in Madhya Pradesh wanted to give his daughter the very best at her wedding. So he did everything in great style—band-baaja, special lighting, the works. But as the groom and bride did their rounds around the fire and tied the knot, some drunken persons entered the pandal, smashed the tubelights and began beating up the guests. Why? Because the upasarpanch had dared to be an equal. Not much later, the body of the upasarpanch was found in a nearby field. While two persons were arrested by the police for this, two others were said to be absconding.

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UTTAR PRADESH

Operation Disarm

THE Uttar Pradesh Government has suddenly woken up to the alarming discovery that the state currently boasts of the biggest stockpile of privately—owned arms in the country, far more than the armoury of the state police force. More serious is the fact that many of the weapons in private hands are sophisticated carbines, banned elsewhere in the country. Assistant Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *visited the state to detail the dangers posed by the alarming trend and the state Government's efforts to neutralise the problem. His report.*

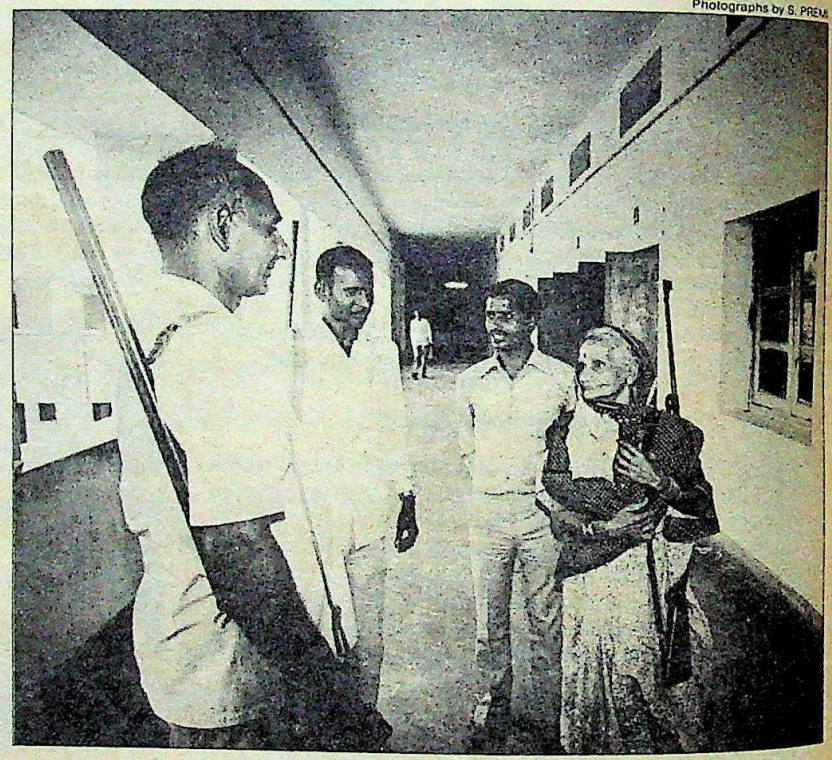
Photographs by S. PREM

UTTAR Pradesh has long led the field of states in a number of areas; the highest population, human and livestock, and foodgrains and oil-seeds production. Lately, however, it has unobtrusively earned yet another but far more dubious distinction—arms. Uttar Pradesh has the largest private arsenal of arms of any state in the country. Last fortnight, incredulous officials at the office of the state's home secretary finished compiling their latest tally, revealing that there were six lakh people holding arms licences, or one for every 200 population. More incredible was the fact that a large number of the licensed weapons were carbines, a weapon banned for private ownership in the rest of the country.

The issuing of arms licences in the state has been eclectic, to say the least. Licence-holders include 60-year-old Saraswati Devi of Karagapur village, 20 km away from the Lucknow-Sitapur highway, who could barely climb the stairs of the licence renewal authority without help. She owns a .315 bore rifle which she bought last year for Rs 14,000 against the licence issued in her name. Ram Avtar is totally blind and has been for the last 10 years, but his licence was renewed last fortnight. More prominent holders include Mayapati Tripathi, firebrand son of Congress(I) Working President Kamlapati Tripathi, who was issued a licence for a .30 carbine along with many other politicians in the state. R.C.Takru, the state's former home secretary, is just one of scores of senior bureaucrats who have also been granted licences for carbines.

There is, quite literally, enough ammunition in that for a major explosion. It is estimated that private licence holders had stocks of over two crore cartridges and other ammunition. As against this, the state police had in stock less than one third of that amount and one sixth of the number of privately owned firearms.

Only now has the state Government



60-year-old Saraswati and blind Ram Avtar: licence to kill

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"We can't just sit back and allow the state to become a warehouse for piling arms just because few moneyed and caste leaders want them for social prestige and influence."

BIR BAHADUR SINGH
chief minister, Uttar Pradesh

"We can handle the illegal trade in arms but what worries us most is the possibility of this large amount of ammunition falling into the hands of the criminals."

MATA PARSHAD
state home secretary

woken up to the fact that the arms collection in the state poses a serious law and order threat. Says Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh: "These arms are a great threat to the security of the state. We can't just sit back and allow the state to become a warehouse for piling arms just because few moneyed and caste leaders want them for social prestige and influence." Added Tilak Kak, Lucknow's senior superintendent of police: "There is a need to reduce the number of arms with the public before it becomes a headache for us."

The headache assumes more serious overtones considering the curious fact that Uttar Pradesh is perhaps the only state in the country where the police-population ratio has actually declined over the last five years. As against 945 policemen per 100,000 population in 1976, there are only 782 now compared to 1,100 in Maharashtra and 1,500 in Delhi. More important, 10 per cent of the state's 1.5 lakh villages have a mostly symbolic police presence. One police station in the state covers 10 lakh people. Even in terms of mobility and communication the Uttar Pradesh police (UPP) is most ill-equipped. It has only 3,675 vehicles and only 2,449 telephones to monitor a state in which every seventh Indian lives. The entire state police, including the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) posesses only 50,000 firearms. Said Inspector General of Police (Personnel) Vasudev Punjani: "If one goes by the amount of arms to which our forces are entitled then we are definitely underarmed. But we are more concerned about the large amount of arms in private hands."

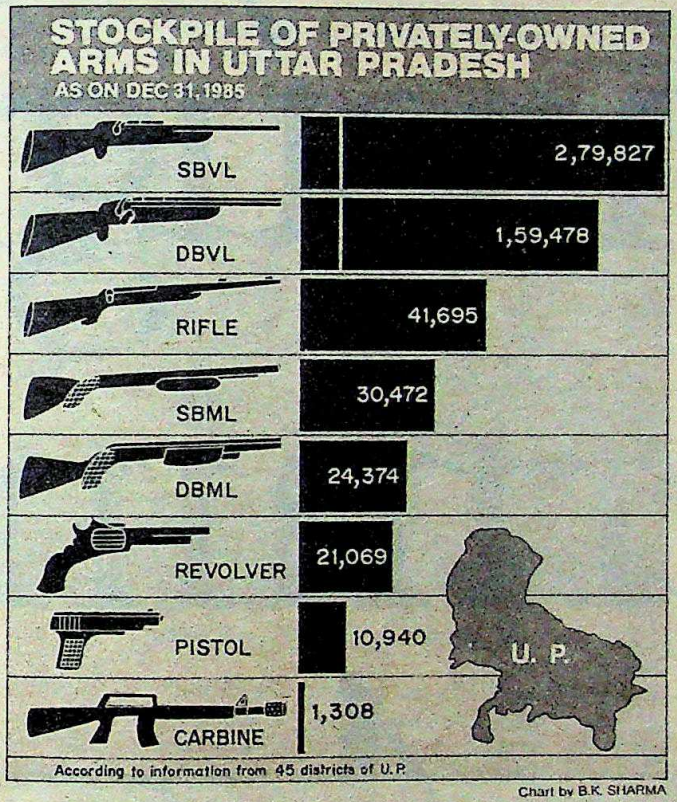
That concern is now being sought to be translated into action. Under orders from the chief minister, the disarming of Uttar Pradesh has been launched in right earnest. The state Home Department inned a series of orders last fortnight aimed at controlling the arms proliferation in the state. Home Secretary Mata Parshad sent off directives to all district magistrates to stop issuing new firearms licences and to carry out a vigorous scrutiny of all the licences issued in the state. Earlier, the district administration used to renew licences without receiving any clearance from the local police. Under the new guidelines, not only has police clearance been made absolutely essential, but licencees have been ordered to get their licences renewed every year instead of every three years as was the case earlier.

The launching of Operation Disarm has not come too soon. In a secret report, the Home Department admitted that over 80 per cent of social and communal tensions were due to ownership of arms by the warring factions. Says a Home Ministry communique to district magistrates: "It has been noticed that the use of firearms in the commission of offences and breach of public peace are on the increase...at the same time there has been sharp increase in the number of firearms licences issued to the public."

Bir Bahadur Singh's Government has launched its campaign on a war footing. Over the last six weeks it ordered:

- ▶ A special drive for physical verification of all types of firearms, including carbines.
- ▶ Searches to be conducted on all firearms dealers to check their stock situation.
- ▶ All dealers to procure and sell arms and ammunition only with the approval of the district authorities.
- ▶ The amount of cartridges to be held in stock by a licencee to be reduced from 100 to 10 only.
- ▶ Fixing the number of firearms licences to three per person as against no limit earlier.

These instructions were issued following the fact that a secret study done by the Home Department showed that a large quantity of ammunition issued to licencees was finding its way to the criminal world. Only last month police arrested an arms dealer in Mainpuri district who was peddling ammunition without any valid permit from the district authorities. Over a dozen similar cases were detected last year from other parts of the state. Says state Home Secretary Mata Parshad: "We can handle the illegal trade in arms but what worries us most is the possibility of this large amount of ammunition falling into the hands of the criminals." According to the Home Department, even if 10 per cent



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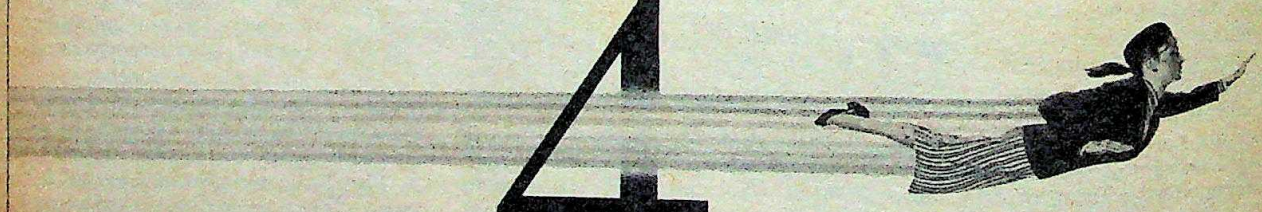

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of the two crore cartridges issued legally to licence-holders are sold to criminals every year, it can create a major law and order problem for the state.

BUT THERE are other problems. During scrutiny of the list of licence-holders, the Home Department discovered that over 30 per cent of revolvers and carbine licences were held by policemen in their capacity as private citizens, or by their relations. Another 40 per cent were cornered by politicians and their relatives. During the Janata regime, when the state Government allowed carbine licences, the first hundred licensees were either politicians or policemen. Later, the Government succumbed to pressure brought upon it by other community leaders for liberalisation of the licensing policy.

Between 1980-85, a number of controversial leaders involved either in caste or political rivalries were able to secure licences on the plea that their life was in danger. Supporters of Balram Singh Yadav, a Congress (I) MP and a former state minister, and Mulayam Singh Yadav, leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, were granted arms licences galore on the grounds that they were being threatened by each other. Similarly, in Gorakhpur, Hari Shanker Tiwari and Ravindra Pratap Shahi, who are now members of the state Assembly, were able to get any number of arms licences because they were involved in a bloody feud. By the end of last year, over 100 sitting and former MP's, over 1,500 ex-legislators and over 10,000 policemen and other civil servants were issued arms licences.

The situation took a serious turn last year when arms holders became civil contractors overnight and started grabbing contracts from the Public Works Department (PWD) as well as the Irrigation Department at the point of a gun. Even some Central Government projects were cornered by armed contractors who would demand money for incomplete work. According to a state intelligence report, criminal gangs in eastern and central Uttar Pradesh were able to secure civil works worth over Rs 50 crore at gunpoint. Admitted a PWD official in Lucknow: "In far off villages and districts our system of calling tenders became a mockery because these armed people would just force the officials to allot them the contract irrespective of their quotations."

An official notification issued last month stated: "District magistrates and superintendents of police must ensure that contractors do not obtain contracts by use of force or show of arms at the time of filing tenders or giving bids. Furthermore, contractors should not be permitted to terrorise or overawe engineers and others for making payments which are not due to them."

Seized illegal firearms: excess armour

But the new crack-down also faces some major hurdles, not the least being the existence of illegal, locally manufactured arms in huge quantities. Last year alone, the police seized over 10,000 illegal firearms and over 20,000 cartridges from raids on criminal gangs. In addition, 281 units manufacturing firearms illegally were detected during the same period. The haul of over 30,000 pistols, 3,000 guns and over 1.30 lakh cartridges from unauthorised people during the last three years is more than the total stock held by the 80,000 strong UPP (excluding the PAC). In fact, the total amount of unauthorised arms unearthed in Uttar Pradesh during the last decade is 1.50 lakh which is equivalent to the country's total police armoury. Admits R.N. Dwivedi, Lucknow's district magistrate: "What bothers us is not licensed arms as much as the use of illegally manufactured arms."

Though state government officials disagree, many politicians feel that the upsurge of arms have contributed to social tensions. Says Mohan Singh, a Lok Dal leader and former chief whip of the party in the state legislature: "Since only rich and influential people can get both a licence and a firearm, they do not hesitate in using them to suppress the economically weaker sections in the villages." According to the latest figures released by the chief minister in the Assembly last fortnight the incidence of atrocities against Harijans and Scheduled Tribes rose from 11,346 in 1983 to 12,501 in 1985. The number of murders alone rose from 200 to 223 during the same period. And Minister of State for Internal Security Arun Nehru declared in Parliament last fortnight that the incidence of crime was the highest in Uttar Pradash.

The chief minister and his aides believe that there is definite correlation between the incidence of crime and the number of licensed weapons in a particular district. For example, in districts like Lucknow, Basti, Mainpuri, Agra, Gorakhpur, Meerut, Faizabad and Aligarh which had more than 15,000 fire arms, issued to licence-holders the incidence of crime was above the state average.

What effect the drive against firearms will have on the law and order situation is debatable. It has certainly begun to affect the 2,000 licensed arms dealers in the state. Since the issue of new licences has been banned, their combined turnover has plummeted to less than Rs 50 lakh as against Rs one crore last year. Complains Daljit Singh, a gun dealer and secretary of the Lucknow Arms Dealers Association: "It is unfair to draw a conclusion that ammunition for criminal use comes from licensed dealers. There are other sources from where criminals get their supplies. By putting a blanket ban on arms licences, the Government will not only ruin our business but will force the people to look for unauthorised channels of supply."

But such side effects will cut little ice with the state Government which appears genuinely determined to curb the growing arms population in the state by whatever means at its disposal. But considering the powerful lobbies that it will have to confront if it is to make any headway, the disarming of Uttar Pradesh might prove to be a loaded issue.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Lucknow

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MOROCCO

The Sahara Mirage

MOROCCO'S King Hassan II celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ascension to the throne last fortnight with customary pomp and circumstance. In fact, much more of the latter. Morocco turned the celebrations into a massive public relations exercise in an attempt to convince the world that it's festering war with the Polisario guerillas was over and that the territorial claims of their Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) were nothing more than a mirage in the desert sands.

Indirectly, it was also meant to prove that India had committed a diplomatic blunder by recognising the SADR (in September 1985) which led to the snapping of diplomatic relations between New Delhi and Rabat. The list of invitees to the celebrations in Marrakesh included over 100 foreign journalists. But the real reason for their inclusion was soon evident. Immediately after the two-day festivities were over, the entire press corps was bundled into a fleet of army aircraft and helicopters and flown off to the Sahara desert.

Free-lance journalist TAVLEEN SINGH *was the only Indian journalist present and the Moroccon Government went out of its way to convince her that India had recognised a country that did not exist and was unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future. She was escorted down the length of the most recent wall the Government has built from Mahbes on the Algerian border to Bir Anzarane near Mauritania in the south as proof that the Polisario's claims on precisely that territory were patently false. Her exclusive report for* INDIA TODAY:

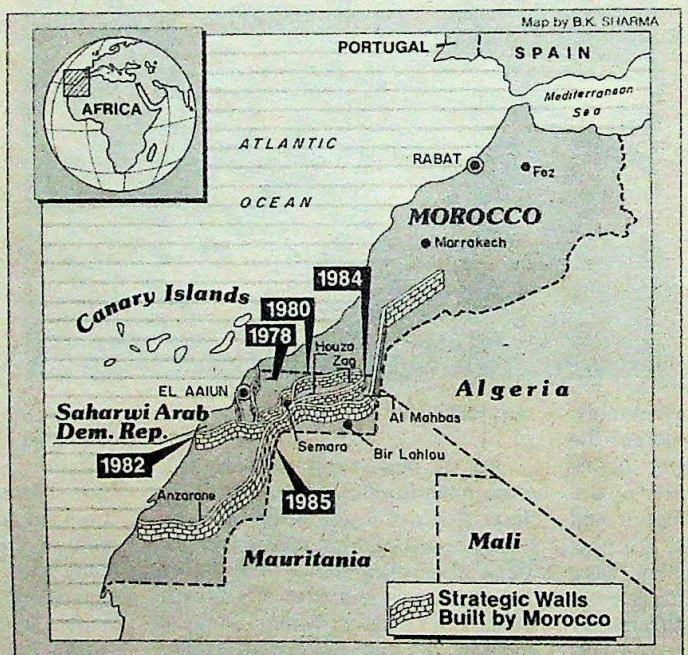
FROM the army helicopter, all that was visible of Houza, described as the former provisional capital of the SADR in western Sahara, is a tin shed built on a gravel embankment which had 'Houza' carved into it in large letters. The rest of Houza is situated a kilometre away and consists of a handful of small hutments, shells of ruined buildings and burnt-out tanks, relics of the last major battle with the Polisario rebels in November 1984. In one of the hutments sits Khalifa El Hnani Khatri, the village headman, swathed in the characteristic white robes of the nomadic tribes that roam the desert. "How could a country like India make the mistake of recognising a republic that does not exist?" he queries.

It is a good question to be asked in Houza, or, for that mattter, in South Block, New Delhi. Khatri's nomadic life-style has matched the fortunes of the war between Morocco and the Polisario. Born and raised in Houza, he left in 1975 when Polisario guerillas chased away the Moroccon army garrison that had taken over the desert outpost after the Spanish left. They returned in 1984 when the Moroccon Government erected yet another of their strategic walls *(see map)* fitted with electronic devices as a deterrent against invasions by guerillas and proof that the disputed territory had been reoccupied. With the building of the wall and the stationing of additional troops, other tribes had also returned to Houza to open shops and eke out a living from animal husbandry, the mainstay of the desert economy.

Polisario representatives in Delhi claim that the war is still being fought in full force and that they constantly manage to cross over the walls. Says Member of the Political Bureau of the Front, Malainine Sadik-Bachir: "We sometimes succeed in destroying over 100 km of the wall at a time and we breach it nearly everyday."

But nowhere along the entire length of the wall were there signs of any recent battles or major breaches and western diplomats and journalists in Rabat scoff scornfully at Polisario claims. Says Stephen Hughes, the Reuter's man in Rabat who has covered western Sahara for more than a decade: "The wall acts as a tripwire. The last major breach was near Zag in October 1984, when the Polasario came across with 20 tanks. But it was suicidal because once they were across, they were trapped and eight of the tanks were captured intact. They never tried that again."

To see the walls (the five built so far are together about 25,000 km long), from close up is to realise how tough they would be to breach. They average a height of about 25 feet and have manned defensive points equipped with machine- guns every 5 km. All along the wall are sensitive electronic sensors capable of picking up enemy movement even 60 km away. The base of the wall is strewn with buried landmines and sophisticated American



The Polisario is still a long way from achieving their goals and India might well have been guilty of a hasty and premature step in their recognition of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic.

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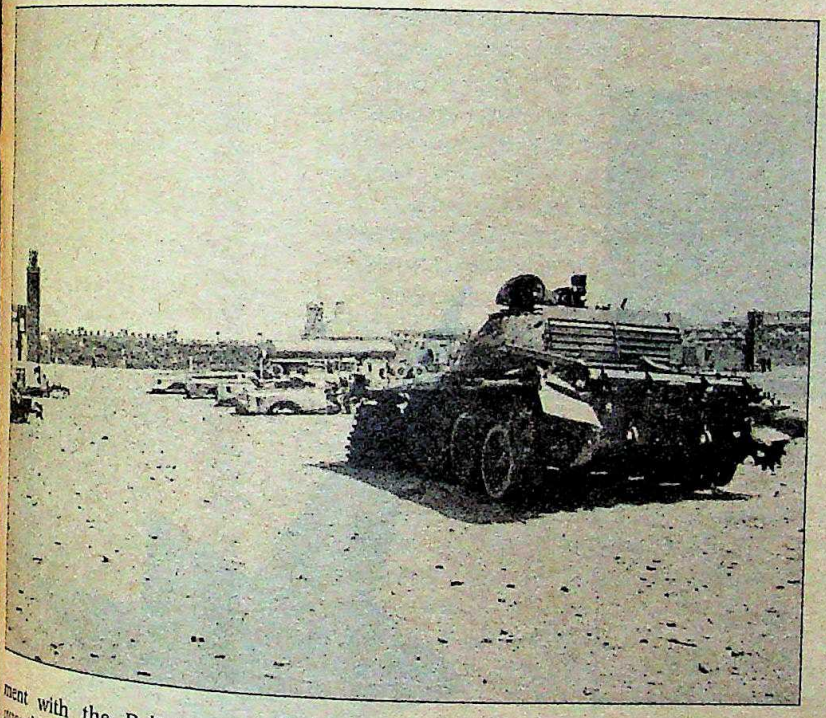
tanks act as a back-up. Nearly 100,000 Moroccon troops are posted along the walls or at military camps alongside.

The backdrop to the Saharan problem lies in the Spanish division, in 1975, of what was formerly Spanish Sahara, an area rich in phosphates, between Morocco and Mauritania. The Saharawi people, represented by the Polisario, felt that they had the right to determine their own destiny and the liberation war they had been fighting against Spain was now directed against Morocco and Mauritania.

Their claims were, however, ignored and hundreds of Sharawis fled across the border into Algeria to continue their battle for liberation. In 1979, Mauritania surrendered its claims under an agreement with the Polisario and subsequently, the Polisario guerillas succeeded in driving the Moroccon army out of the desert posts it had taken over from the Spanish. The Moroccons, however, with the help of the US, then launched their wall strategy and gradually reclaimed much of the territory which is now disputed in claims and counter-claims.

Polisario representatives claim that they have bases in the 60,000 sq km beyond the wall and that their new provisional capital is Bir Lahlou. In fact, a delegation of Indian members of Parliament were taken recently by them to one of their bases in western Sahara for the celebration of the SADR national day (February 27).



A section of the electronic wall

IN SOUTH Block, officials of the Ministry of External Affairs justify the recognition on the grounds that in the matter of regional disputes, they tend to be guided by the main regional organisation in the area, in this case, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The OAU recognised the SADR in 1982 and so far 63 other countries, mostly members of the Non-Aligned Movement from Africa and Latin America, have followed suit. Other factors mentioned by South Block in defence of their stand are that relations with Morocco have never been all that good (The Indian foreign minister was thrown out of the Islamic Conference in Rabat in 1972) and Morocco has always been considered a camp-follower of America. They also point to India's record of backing genuine liberation movements like the PLO.

But the fact remains that the Polisario is still a long way from achieving their liberation goals and India might well have been guilty of a hasty and premature step in their recognition of the SADR. In fact, former foreign secretary K.Rasgotra had been sent to Rabat as a special emissary in August last year, just before India's recognition move, to assess the situation and prepare the ground for the action India intended to take. INDIA TODAY has learnt that Rasgotra's advice was that recognition of the SADR would be a mistake. He recommended that if India was determined to go ahead, it would be advisable to wait till Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi met King Hassan at the United Nations (UN) in October. Rasgotra tried to meet Rajiv but, curiously enough, was unable to get an appointment. Failing that, he sent in his report, which was obviously ignored.

The Indian Government has also been sceptical of Morocco's oft-repeated promises to hold a referendum in the Sahara under UN supervision. However, according to Morocco's Interior Minister Dris Bassri, they are now prepared to hold the referendum at any time. But they have two significant pre-conditions: one, that it is held on the basis of the 1975 census conducted by the Spanish which put the Saharawi population at 75,000 and secondly, that Morocco is not obliged to recognise the Polisario.

That would hardly be acceptable to the Polisario since they have refused to accept the 1975 census figures on the basis that a large majority of the Saharawi population has been living in refugee camps in Algeria. Logically, the only way out of the present stalemate is a UN-supervised referendum. Despite its military claims, Morocco is nowhere near achieving total military superiority over the Polisario, which has the full support of Algeria. Libya was also supporting the Polisario but pulled out in 1984 after Colonel Gadaffi signed an accord with King Hassan.

Rabat seems well aware of the fact that it cannot wipe out the Polisario in military terms, which is why it is pouring money into the Sahara for development projects in the hope that if the referendum is held, the Saharawis will opt to stay in Morocco. Spanking new hospitals, schools and hotels are springing up in cities like Layoune and Dakhla. Medical and educational care is free for the Saharawis and every family is being provided a free house. In fact, Moroccons pay what is called a 'solidarity tax' which goes into the development of the Sahara with the result that per capita investment for the Saharawis has been seven times what it is for the rest of the Moroccon population.

King Hassan is obviously banking heavily on a combination of his electronic walls and financial inducements to lure the Saharawi population back into the Moroccon fold. And, as the celebrations of last fortnight showed, also try and convince the world that the SADR does not exist in physical terms, despite recognition by countries like India. And so far, Morocco does appear to have the edge in the battle for the Sahara.

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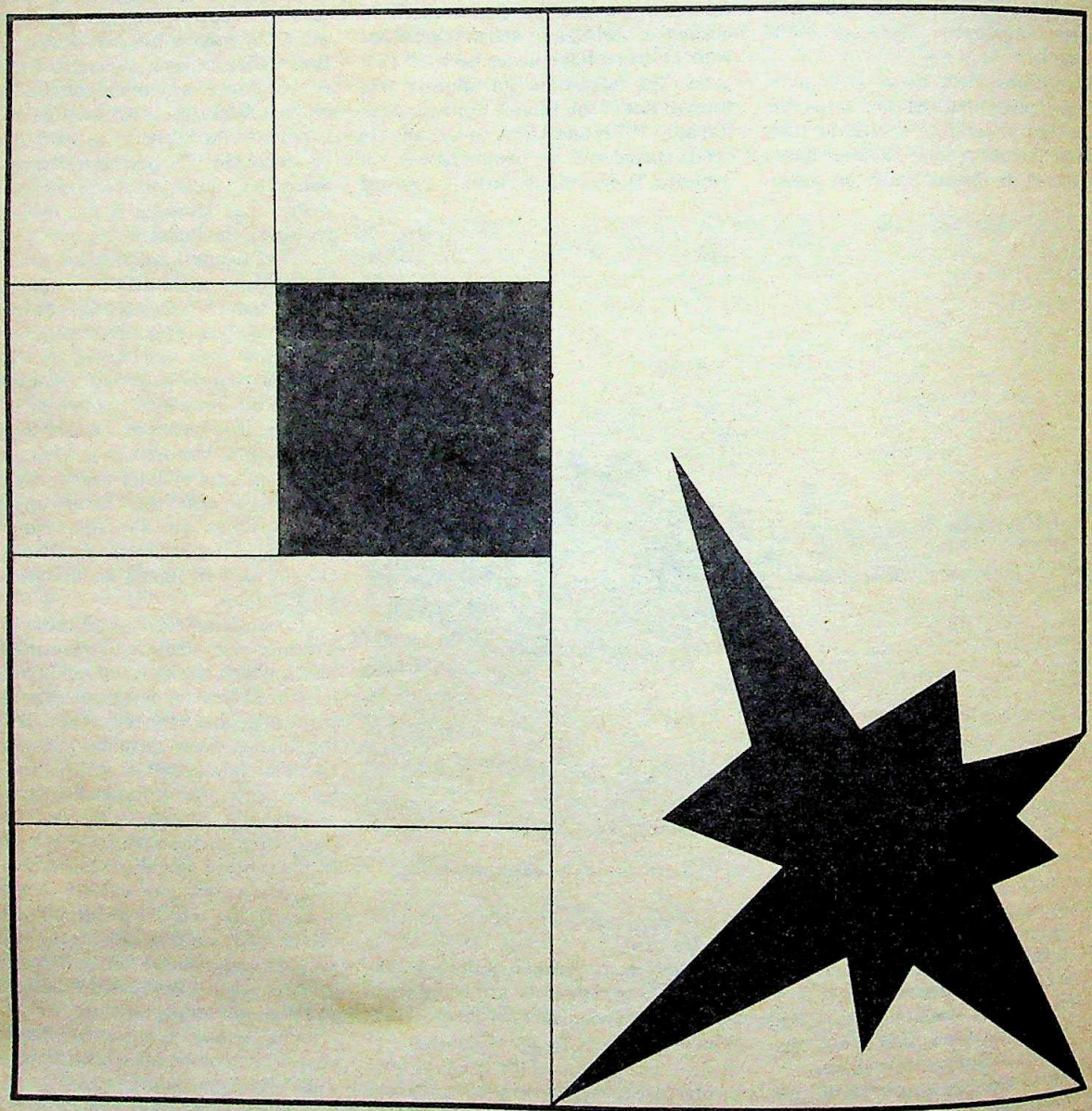

Survival of the fittest.

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DEFENCE

The Spending Spree

MARTIN Ardbo is the quintessential Scandinavian businessman—dapper, business-like and extremely reticent. Last fortnight, rushing through dozens of closed-door meetings in room 1462 of New Delhi's Maurya Sheraton Hotel, he had good reason to be nervous.

Ardbo is the head of Bofors, one of the largest armament manufacturing companies in Sweden which is currently in the throes of a serious crisis. And in Delhi, he has the best chance of reviving his company's fortunes by swinging the largest arms sales deal Sweden has ever signed. The indications last fortnight were that India had finally taken a decision on the choice of the new 155mm field gun for the heavy artillery regiments and that Bofors had pipped at the post the British FH-70 and French GIAT guns in a contentious, five-year sales war.

The deal, according to reliable sources in South Block, involves the outright purchase of about 400 pieces costing around Rs 1,500 crore. This is to be followed by licensed production which should see a majority of the Indian field artillery units re-equipped with the new gun and will cost, inclusive of spares, an additional Rs 5,000 crore in the years to come. "This," said a Defence Ministry official, "is the biggest single deal after the Mirage-2000 that we have signed with a country outside the Soviet Union."

But in South Block, it has been 'big deal' time for many months. The Defence Ministry is currently on an arms buying spree—perhaps the biggest in the country's history. Reports of a decision on the artillery purchase followed closely the conclusion of a Rs 120-crore deal with the British Westland Corporation for the supply of 21 helicopters for the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) and the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the sale of HMS Hermes, the Falklands' war flagship which the Royal Navy discarded almost two years ago. The price of the carrier is expected to be in the range of Rs 80 crore. But retrofit costs could double that.

The Hermes deal will also necessarily imply another fat order for Sea-Harrier jump-jets and Sea King helicopters, besides an assortment of missiles and electronic equipment making the whole package run into several hundred crores of rupees. Along with that has been the carefully leaked information that having already signed a contract with West Germany for the supply of two Type 209 submarines and the assembly of another two in India, the country's defence planners were now looking at the Type 245 submarines manufactured by Sweden's Kockum company.

Also on the anvil is the final decision on the Rs 200-crore deal for the Swiss Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns. The decision hinged on the opinion of experts who have been trying to find out if the system, one of the most modern and expensive in the world, was compatible with the Dutch Flycatcher early warning system which the army has already ordered.

Officials in the Defence Ministry acknowledge that the country is currently on the biggest defence buying spree of all times in European markets. "We have had major buying phases earlier, but in the past, invariably, a large slice of the cake went to the Soviet Union. Times have obviously changed now," said an official mentioning the fact that the decision on the Swedish guns was taken though the Russians have been pressing the case of their 152mm gun with only marginally lesser range and on much cheaper terms.

But defence officials say the decision to cold shoulder the Soviet offer was based not so much on political considerations as on the fact that the army insisted on the best available in the world markets. In spite of the high cost, they say, the Swedish gun gives India the best bargain and in the field of submarines, marine aviation and electronics, the Soviet offerings are just not comparable to the Europeans.

But in terms of sheer magnitude, all the other deals pale in comparison to the artillery purchase—the indecision on which nearly broke the record of seven years taken to finalise the Jaguar deal in the late '70s. For over five years now, rival manufacturers have fought a bitter battle for the contract which even saw the ambassadors of three contending countries write an unprecedented letter to the Indian Government pleading their respective cases. The American offer of the M-198 Towed Howitzer (of the kind that Pakistan has), was rejected in the initial stages as the Indian experts insisted on the gun's own power unit to shift it quickly in the battlefield after firing a round. In the trials that followed, the Austrian Voest Alpine Gun seemed to be winning hands down and the Indian gunners were seemingly happy with its sturdiness. But the Austrian offer was rejected on the relatively specious ground that the manufacturers imported the ammunition from elsewhere in Europe. The French gun is still in a state of development and in firing trials the British product just could not match the range of the Swedish gun.

But even till the last moment the

British were trying hard with a new version of their gun with enhanced range, and once the deal is signed, questions will be asked as to whether this was the best bargain available to the country. The critics of the deal within the Government are at pains to point out that just like many other defence purchases in the recent past, the gun deal was also signed under the pressure of political hard-sell spearheaded by none else than the late Swedish premier Olaf Palme, who had taken up the Bofors case with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during his two visits to India. "Ever since he struck a rapport with the Indian Government, the defence planners here have been tilting towards Sweden", a well-known arms agent alleged, pointing also to the fact that it was during this period when India began to look at even the Swedish subs.

That was an approach which sur-

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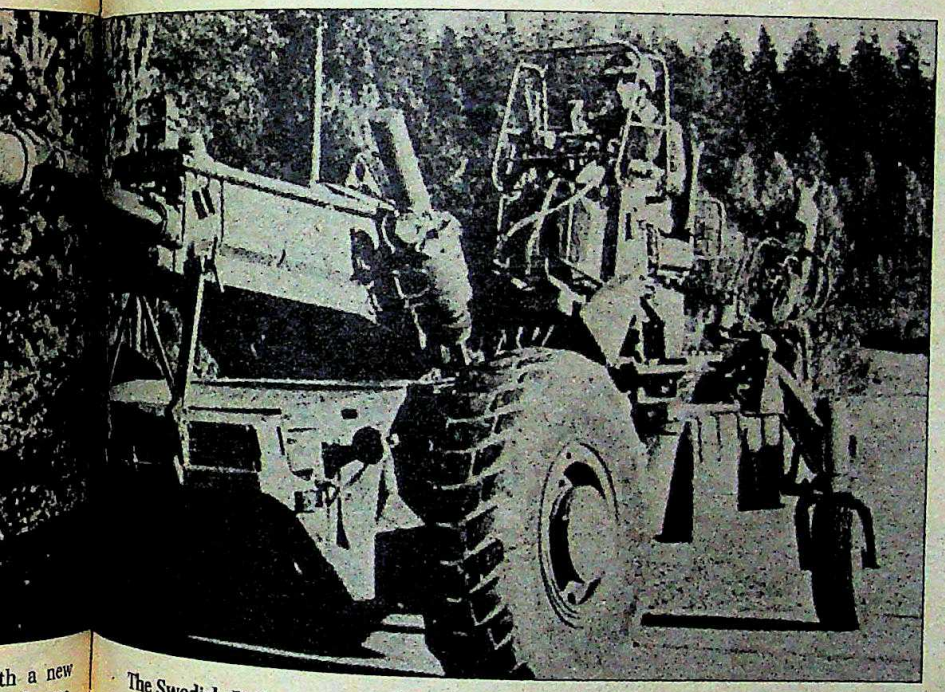
prised even the Swedes. Sources in the Defence Ministry say that initially when they approached the Swedish dealers they were sceptical. They could hardly believe that India would think of diversifying the source of a system as complicated as a modern submarine just when the two West German subs manufactured for India were undergoing trials in the Baltic and hundreds of Indian sailors, officers and technical personnel being trained.

THIS had followed strong rumours in the arms business grapevine that India's negotiations with West Germany for two more subs were running into problems over the question of price escalation. Officials in South Block say the Swedes felt that India had made the approach to them merely to pressurise the Germans and refused to furnish a proposal unless the Government paid them for it. Consequently, India payed Sweden close to a crore of rupees to prepare a proposal for the sale of two submarines.

High level sources in the Defence Ministry, however, say that the approach is not a mere ploy. The Type 209 subs, it is said, were ordered despite certain doubts in naval headquarters. These doubts increased after the two Type 209s, operated by the Argentinian Navy, failed to show up anywhere near the scene of action during the Falklands War while the British fleet continued its depredations. While the Germans obviously blamed this on the disinclination of the Argentinian Government to commit its navy in the battle, many in Delhi thought that this confirmed their worst suspicion—that the sub was too noisy to go close to a modern, well-protected fleet.

But experts in Delhi also admit that any shift from one line of submarine production to another now will entail enormous costs and unless the bargain with the Germans fails completely, it will hardly be wise to switch subs in midstream. "Such a shift at this stage can only be a major political decision," a senior official said.



The Swedish Bofors 155mm field gun: sales war

That, however, has indeed been the case with practically every major defence purchase in the recent past. The most significant example is that of the Westland order on which so much hinged for the tottering manufacturing company.

So desperate were the British to clinch the deal that they produced five prototypes of the helicopter incorporating improvements sought by India, and on the negotiating table, India was more or less able to grab the price and terms she wanted and even succeeded in linking the deal to the demand for sterner treatment of the Sikh secessionists in the UK. And in London there were audible sighs of relief as the contract was signed. "I am delighted, " said Westland President Sir John Cuckney who could hardly have hoped to bag the order after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi vehemently criticised the helicopter in Parliament last year. Now, even if the Westland order means buying a little less than the best available in the world markets, India expects to offset that in terms of political and diplomatic gain.

Similarly, the proposed purchase of the 23,000 ton aircraft carrier, the Hermes, has been greeted with a mixture of euphoria and surprise in Britain. The carrier has been lying idle in Portsmouth for the last two years and defence analysts have openly queried India's interest in a carrier already rejected by several countries.

On an entirely different and purely military level, the new buying spree raises familiar questions. Why, for example, has the Indian armament industry failed to grow out of the 105mm gun stage? Why, also, is a decision being made now to buy an old aircraft carrier while there has been talk of manufacturing one indigenously for many years now? The obvious explanation is that Hermes is expected to fill the gap of over a decade between the period when INS Vikrant becomes increasingly a liability and the new production begins. But similar explanations have been given before for ad hoc purchases. The Soviet T-72 tank is a case in point.

But when it comes to military purchases it is often not easy to find an acceptable rationale. While it is still one thing to purchase tanks, advanced fighter planes, submarines and missiles, the Government hardly has an explanation to the kind of illogical shopping-mania that tends to prevail in the Defence Ministry. There is hardly a reason, for example, why India should have bought Rs 10 crore worth of parachutes from South Korea and France when parachutes have been manufactured at Kanpur for many years. Similar lack of reason marks many other recent, smaller orders such as the ones for 1,000 passive night goggles and 3,000 pieces of illuminating ammunition for 81mm mortars. Both commodities are manufactured in India but the local goggles are not accepted by the army because of problems with a small component and the Indian ammunition needs a better fuse. "The Indian equipment could become as good as the imported one if only the small component and the fuse were imported at one hudredth of the total import now," says an official in the Department of Defence Production. But in the ministry, officials like him are in a minority and can do little more than stop only the odd order such as the ridiculous one for 1.4 million blankets from Australia last year at a time when most Indian woollen mills had excess capacity.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA with RAMESH CHANDRAN

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TEARING UP

THE EICHER Goodearth group of companies is reorganising itself. Three subsidiary companies—Eicher Tractors, Eicher Farm Machinery and Continental Auto Parwanoo Ancillaries—are to be merged into a new company which will be called Eicher Tractors. The three were privately held, but the new firm will go public. Also on the drawing-boards are a Rs 6-crore modernisation programme and a new range of tractors, most of them of the small horsepower variety.

While the mergers are meant to increase production efficiencies by bringing manufacturing facilities under one roof, the overall drive is in response to shifts in the tractor market. The tractor company's share of its traditional northern strongholds has marginally increased, but sales in the south and the east have fallen when compared with other tractor manufacturers who have picked up more orders in these regions. So Eicher's share of the national market has dipped by about 3 per cent over the past three or four years.

SUGAR COATING

CONTRARY to what Finance Ministry economists have been saying, the Government will shop overseas for sugar this year as well. More than five lakh tonnes are to be imported, involving a foreign exchange outgo of around Rs 125 crore. Official sources insist, however, that the import is meant as an insurance against domestic sugar prices flaring up, and that the sugar stock position is comfortable. Consumer demand is pegged at about 80 lakh tonnes a year, but much of the 19.5 lakh tonnes of sugar bought abroad last year landed in the country after last October, when the sugar year begins. Production this year is expected to cross 65 lakh tonnes, 3.6 lakh tonnes more than last year's level.

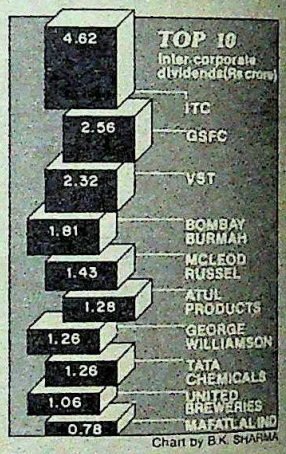
TREASURE HUNT

UNDETERRED by the flak that he has got because of the numerous raids mounted in recent weeks by tax officials, Finance Minister V.P. Singh has charted out new categories of people who will come under the taxman's scrutiny. First it was businessmen; then officials were added to the list. Soon the focus of the raids will shift to professionals, including doctors and lawyers, many of whom are believed to be amassing small fortunes as income while not paying the Government its dues. The Government's records show that even though there are large numbers of prosperous professionals, the taxes paid by them are very small in relation to the incomes that they are believed to be earning. There has been little action on this front so far because of the usual paucity of records, but Singh is confident that the raids will deliver results once they get into top gear.

SMALL SERVICE

SMALL-SCALE industrialists have fought and managed to win a successful battle against the Government's move to close down Small Industries Service Institutes in some of the southern states. The matter, however, does not end there. An official committee on the functioning of the service institutes is still looking into the case. These institutes aid small companies in a number of ways, but their functions are duplicated by the directorates of industries and district industry centres in the states. The committee is expected to submit its report in another month.

TAX BURDEN



THE BUDGET proposal to do away with the tax concession on inter-corporate dividends is likely to have significant impact only on the Unit Trust of India (UTI). A study by the research bureau of the *Economic Times* shows that 101 large and medium companies had invested Rs 463.37 crore in the shares of other companies and in UTI units. But 95 per cent of this was in UTI. The total dividend income earned from this was Rs 31.51 crore, but the rate of return was poor: no more than 6.8 per cent. And the total tax liability as a result of the withdrawal of the tax concession is estimated at Rs 9.45 crore. The companies that will bear most of this burden are ITC (which had a dividend income last year of Rs 4.62 crore), its sister company VST (Rs 2.32 crore), Gujarat State Fertiliser (Rs 2.56 crore), Bombay Burmah (Rs 1.81 crore), Mcleod Russel (Rs 1.43 crore), Atul Products (Rs 1.28 crore), George Williamson and Tata Chemicals (both Rs 1.26 crore), United Breweries (Rs 1.06 crore) and Mafatlal Industries (Rs 0.78 crore).

WRONG NUMBER

THE RESOURCES crunch in the seventh plan has had yet another fall-out. The Planning Commission has temporarily closed the door to companies seeking to invest in jelly-filled cable projects. The commission recommended that a public sector firm's expansion plan be turned down because several state government-owned firms have letters of intent to turn out some 75 lakh conductor km of these cables. While the commission argued that higher levels of cable production were justified by the demand for telephones, it also said that the money for this is not available: the Department of Telecommunication's seventh plan budget was drastically slashed from some Rs 12,000 crore to slightly over Rs 4,000 crore. However, the position may be reviewed after two years if more cash is found for telecommunications.

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The classy vest. See it as a basic executive perk.

While you tackle a hectic schedule every minute of your working day, make sure physical comfort is in body hugging proximity! New VIP Royal vests. Designed with the minutest attention to detail. And stitched to perfection to give you the kind of executive comfort you've never had before. VIP Royal. You've come to deserve this perk.

The executive class of comfort.

VIP Royal VEST

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INTRODUCING MICO-SUPER

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INDIA'S FIRST BI-METAL ELECTRODE SPARK PLUG WITH PROJECTED INSULATOR

A new generation spark plug for the new generation of Indian vehicles

Vehicle technology is undergoing a rapid revolution in India. Keeping pace is MICO. With a new spark plug that has two unique features, for greater reliability and performance.

A projected insulator tip for super starting

Deposits on the nose of a spark plug can lead to misfiring. The longer the nose, the less likely misfiring will occur. The Super's long insulator nose is highly heat-absorptive – and helps the spark plug reach burn-off temperature quickly. Which in turn means super starting, every time!

A bi-metallic centre electrode to protect against overheating

The Super's composite electrode is made of two metals – nickel and copper. This enables it to have much lower electrode temperatures. The centre electrode's high heat-conductivity protects against thermal overload. That's why the Super has a wider heat range than conventional spark plugs with solid chromium-nickel electrodes!

Better starting, better acceleration and longer life

The Super is a premium spark plug for today's vehicles. Designed by BOSCH engineers in West Germany, the Super is now brought to you in India by MICO – leaders in spark plug and fuel injection technology.

Before fitting a Super in your vehicle, make sure you're buying the right type!

- **W8DC** FOR MARUTI
- **W5BC** FOR RAJDOOT - YAMAHA 350 CC

Super spark plugs for other new Indian vehicles will follow.

① **Composite centre electrode**
High heat-conductivity (copper core) and wear resistance (chromium-nickel coating)

② **Air gap**
To compensate for different expansion characteristics of centre electrode and insulator under heat

③ **Long insulator nose**
Highly absorptive of heat, reaches burn-off temperature quickly

THE NEW MICO-SUPER. SPARKING OFF A REVOLUTION IN SPARK PLUG TECHNOLOGY.

MICO

LICENCE BOSCH

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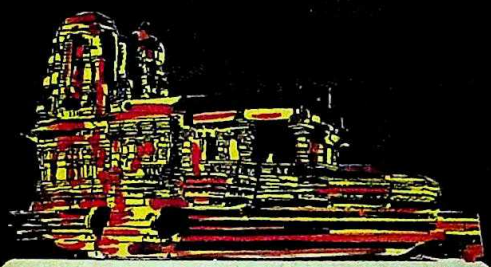
Recreating poetry in silks — a monumental rhapsody



PILLALAMARI

From time immemorial, inborn aspirations of the creator-artisan finds expression in beauty evocative of his confidence-of-touch and grace. The handiwork of nature's splendour resplendent in beauty meets the eye ... And oneness of the earth-soul flows through the magic cycles of time.

Weaving a world of sensation into visible vibrations of loveliness is the mastercraftsman who absorbs and sustains the flow of nature in this sensational Gadwal saree.

apco

fabrics

kiron/apco/85/s3

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MOHAN MURJANI

Dressing up for the Future

MOHAN Bhagwandas Murjani has made it happen before—creating the class of designer jeans by launching his Gloria Vanderbilt brand in 1978 at four times the price of a pair of Levi's, then making a sensation last year with the mass marketing of Coca Cola clothes, and in between, broadening his range of products to include a wider array of apparel, plus shoes and fragrances.

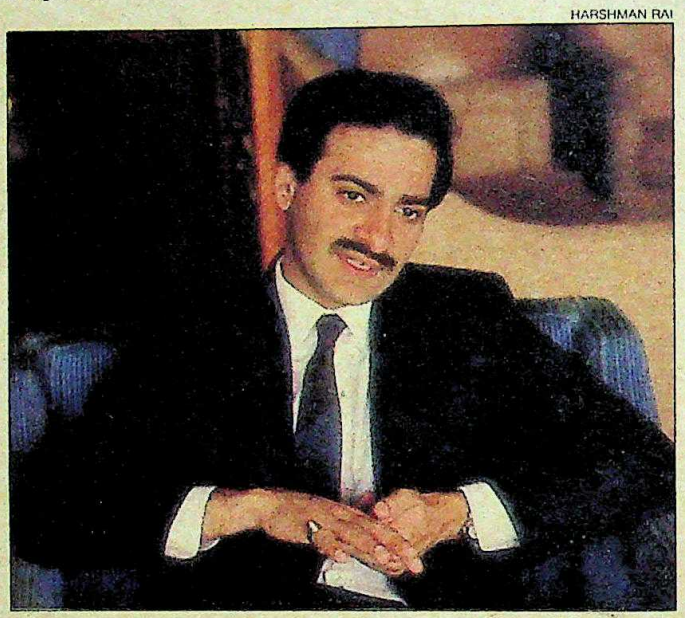
Now the 39-year-old Sindhi businessman of Hong Kong origin, London-based and New York oriented, plans to do it yet again, with jeans priced at a horrendous $75 (Rs 900). The objective—go straight to the top of the designer market again by appealing to the status-conscious buyer. After that, there is his all-new concept of electronic shopping that he calls 'Project 21st Century'.

And last fortnight, he was in India, scouting the market, weighing his options on business partners and project proposals, talking of touching home base because he felt he could relate to Rajiv Gandhi. Already the largest Indian-owned textile company abroad (turnover last year: $500 million—Rs 600 crore), with a place in the top 10 of America's clothing industry, Murjani is clearly getting ready to hit the headlines yet again, both at home and abroad.

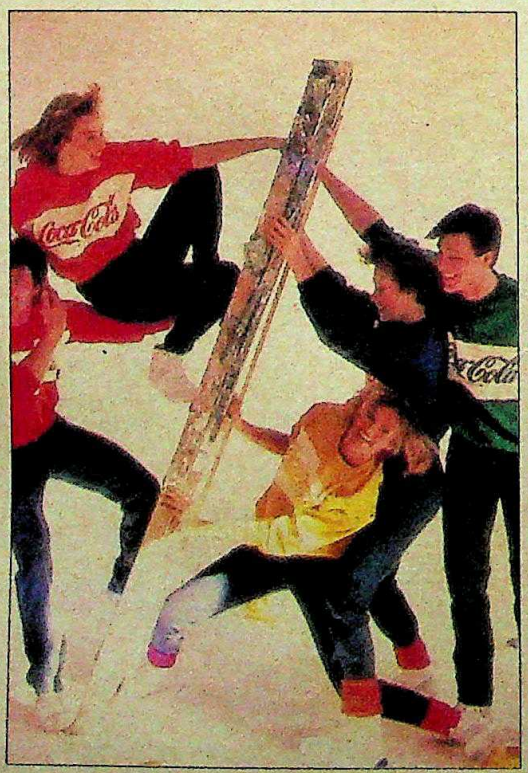
He has, of course, been doing just that ever since 1978 when he launched the Gloria Vanderbilt jeans. After that phenomenal success, he diversified his clothing range in 1980, then began licensing out the manufacture of items like shoes and fragrances (his launch of Gloria Vanderbilt fragrances was the most successful in America's history, outselling Charlie in its first year with sales of $55 million—Rs 66 crore), and moved on to be the winner in the race for the Coca Cola clothes contract.

Two months ago, his business flair was evident yet again when he did a neat marketing trick to launch an unknown designer called Tommy Hilfiger. Advertisements informed fashion-conscious New York that the initials of the four leading designers in the country were C...K..., R...L..., P...E..., and T...H... The first three were easy to guess (Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren and Perry Ellis), but since no one had heard of Tommy Hilfiger, the ads created curiosity. Murjani then went in for the kill by saying that Hilfiger was going to be the next big name in the fashion business.

HARSHMAN RAI



The $2 million campaign, including 6-page spreads in leading magazines, worked, and an unknown designer whose name no one could pronounce till then became an overnight celebrity. Market research showed that 82 per cent of the target audience wanted to buy Hilfiger clothes, that 90 per cent believed he was better than the other men's designers. "It was an attempt to corrupt the minds of the consumers," Murjani says disarmingly, "to make them believe that what they had in their wardrobes was yesterday's fashion. And through our ad campaign we straightaway put Hilfiger in the same league as Calvin Klein and all the others. It's almost embarrassing how successful this campaign was. We manufactured the guy. People now believe this is the new guy."



The press took up the refrain. GQ called Hilfiger "the big talent taking shape". *USA Today* headlined an article: "Is he the next Calvin Klein?" Murjani says Hilfiger's clothes are now in Sachs, Bloomingdales and Nieman Marcus. Designed for the *yuppies* ("We dress Wall Street lawyers on weekends," says the new Calvin Klein), his clothes are described as 'classics with a twist' and 'liberated basics' (*basics* being trade jargon for clothes like khaki trousers and white shirts). One example of such 'liberated basics'—extra-large pockets

Murjani (above) and the Coca Cola campaign: high flyers

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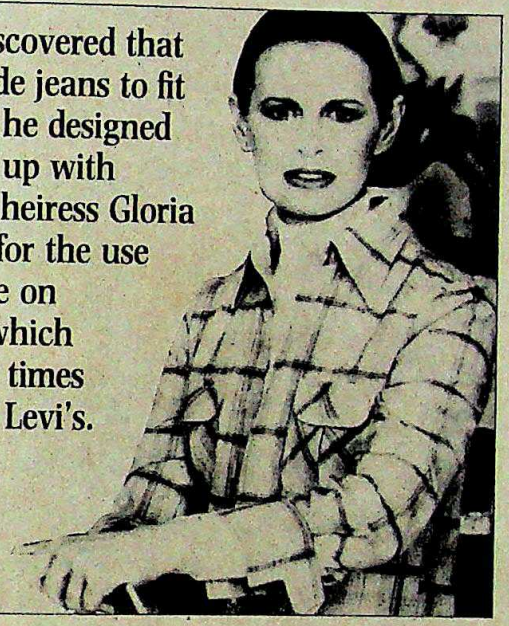
on a plain, white, cotton 'Oxford' shirt.

The Hilfiger campaign came close on the heels of what could be Murjani's biggest line of business: Coca Cola clothes. There always have been Coca Cola clothes, but nothing more than promotional give-aways like T-shirts and caps. The proposal in 1984 to broaden this range and make it a major line of business came not from any marketing genius but from Coca Cola's legal department, which said new products would have to be launched to protect the brand name and make it mean something "more than a brown drink". Suggestions: Coke shoes, Coke watches, Coke clothes.

The Atlanta-based company picked Murjani from among the various contenders for the licence to peddle new Coca Cola products, including clothes. There was scepticism in the trade, and the inevitable wisecracks (one suggestion was a diet sweatshirt). But Murjani saw the challenge as twofold: first, to transfer the positive image of Coke (quality, reliability, value) to apparel, and second, to determine how far this could be taken. His conclusion: "We achieved the biggest brand transfer in trade-mark history."

Murjani discovered that no one made jeans to fit women; so he designed and signed up with millionaire heiress Gloria Vanderbilt for the use of her name on the jeans, which sold at four times the price of Levi's.



Gloria Vanderbilt: 'royal' partnership

SO MURJANI was into the volume business, peddling clothes in bright colours with large graphics (like the Coke logo, or pop art cartoons), in traditional colours with small graphics, then in pastels, sometimes without even the Coca Cola logo being visible. The media-blitz advertising cost $12 million (Rs 15 crore), and sales in the first year, ending in August, are expected to top $100 million (Rs 120 crore).

Suddenly, Murjani was once again awash in headlines. Stories on the new venture were run by *Businessweek*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *People*, *USA Today*, *New York Times* and others. He said last fortnight in Bombay that his Gloria Vanderbilt range of products still sold more than the Coca Cola range (despite the jeans taking a beating in the textile market crash of 1983), but that this would soon change.

His next big game plan is Lois jeans. The brand is well known in Europe and elsewhere as a mass market product like Levi's and Wrangler, but is relatively unknown in the US. Murjani had been looking for a base in Europe, and tied up with Lois manufacturer TYCESA (which he says is the largest textile company in Europe) for reciprocal selling arrangements: TYCESA would sell Gloria Vanderbilt jeans in Europe, and Murjani would hawk Lois Jeans in the US.

But rather than market a basic product, Murjani decided to go upmarket once again: If Gloria Vanderbilt could sell for $32 back in 1978, why couldn't Lois sell for $75 in 1986? So he designed to make Lois top rung quality. The trick, as always with Murjani, is in the marketing gameplan. For you can sell the best jeans for up to $40 or a little more (the most expensive jeans on the market today are priced at $48), but it is image and status which will take the price to $75. Hence the novel concept of French Cowboy jeans: because, as the ad says, "while the American cowboy owns his boots, his horse and his gun, the French cowboy owns the ranch". More advertiser corruption: the shift to French cowboy jeans is like moving from beer to champagne. And more hype: "French women have been getting into our jeans for years."

How successful this outrageous campaign will be remains to be seen. Lois Jeans are only being test marketed now, and Murjani says a formal launch will be in 1987. But he explains that the status jeans dropped out of the market three years ago, when the textile crash forced all prices down, and the slot is vacant again. He intends filling it, in the same way that he did back in 1978 with Gloria Vanderbilt.

At that time, looking for a way to move from his manufacturing operation in Hong Kong to a marketing base in the United States, he had surveyed the market and come up with what he calls a simple discovery—that in 150 years of making jeans, no one had designed a pair of jeans to fit women. So women who wanted to wear jeans had to either live with ill-fitting clothes or take them in at the waist. Simplifying matters today, Murjani says: "All I had to do was get jeans to fit a woman."

But he didn't want to compete with Levi's and Wrangler, and wanted also to be the "Rolls Royce in jeans". For this, he needed a brand name, "and the one name that stood out was that of Gloria Vanderbilt". It spelt royalty in America, Gloria herself was personally famous because in her childhood there had been a celebrated case for her custody, fought by her mother and aunt, and she herself was a painter and therefore associated with the art world. They signed a deal, the jeans were priced at $32 (Levi's were then selling for $8), and were an instant success. What had for Murjani been a $50 million business till then grew to 10 times that size in two years.

But a shake-out in the textile business in 1983 forced down the prices of all designer jeans (Gloria Vanderbilt Jeans now sell for under $30), and Murjani had to adapt. He did the sensible thing—broadened his range of products because focussing on just jeans meant being vulnerable. Since all these could not possibly be made by Murjani himself, this diversification inevitably took him into the licensing business. Murjani International now focussed on sourcing supplies and marketing them by creating brand names, providing the design support, creating the image for the product. As Murjani says, the licensing business is worth $40 billion (Rs 48,000 crore) in the US, and more than 30 per cent of this is in apparel—plenty of opportunity there.

The business has other advantages: launching new products does not call for great investments of capital diversification, expansion can be quick, and a downturn in sales does not mean retrenching staff from your own factories.

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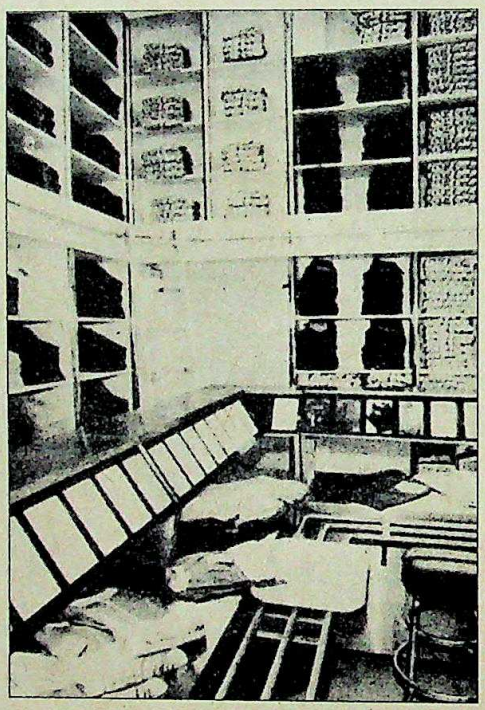
Also, it helps Murjani be "market driven rather than manufacturing driven".

It hasn't been roses all the way, of course, and Murjani has made his share of mistakes. Back in the early 1970s, fresh out of a Boston college with a business degree and still in his 20s, he diversified the business that his father had founded in Hong Kong in 1946, and went into bicycle manufacturing and spinning. But business underwent a downturn, and both units had to be sold, with substantial losses. More recently, Murjani tried launching coloured jeans because black jeans had done extraordinarily well. But the market remained unenthusiastic, and the project had to be given up.

Inevitably, some of the high hopes of growth that Murjani had in the first flush of the Vanderbilt success have not materialised. In 1980, for instance, he had told INDIA TODAY that he hoped to hit a group turnover of $1 billion (Rs 1,200 crore) in 1981 after doing $500 million in 1980. But last fortnight he said in Bombay that his current turnover was $500 million. Clearly, despite the diversifications and the launching of new products and brand names, the total size of the business has not grown.

BUT MURJANI has had his profitable flashes of foresight too. When negotiating with Gloria Vanderbilt for a jeans tie-up, he wanted a clause in the contract for buying her brand name outright. The great-granddaughter of the railroad king was initially outraged at the question of 'buying a Vanderbilt' but at her lawyer's suggestion, put in a price tag that both she and her lawyer were certain Murjani would never be able to afford. The jeans did so well that he could afford the price just two years later (as he says, annual royalty payments to her were half the buyout price). He bought the brand name outright and then licensed the manufacture of the jeans to an American company, so that now someone else did the work and he got the royalties. None of this helped Murjani's relationship with the glamorous Vanderbilt, but he shrugs off the subject with a cryptic: "That's business."

Murjani, of course, is more than the sum total of his businesses. Though personally low-key, he has marketing flair and business style, and he sees himself essentially as "a creative force in the organisation". And the one idea that he hopes to push clear through to the 21st century is electronic marketing. The concept was born in a small way, when he opened a store on New York's Columbus Avenue, called Fizzazz, to market Coca Cola clothes—using interacting video screens to attract customers into the store and getting them to push buttons that would activate the video screens to show them what the shelves had for them one floor below. Murjani then went a step further and thought up the idea of a video catalogue mail order service—video cassettes handed out either free or for up to $9 each at video libraries. Potential customers could take these home and take a look at what they could order by calling a toll free number and giving their credit card numbers—delivery in 24 hours. As usual, there was the clever advertising line: 'Pop this cassette open for a sparkling, carbonated fashion video: free'.



Murjani's video store: innovative

Now Murjani has taken electronic shopping to its logical conclusion: He is thinking of setting up a chain of electronic kiosks much like the streetside electronic machines introduced by banks a few years ago, where you can press a button, see what is on offer and then place your order for mail order delivery. Murjani sees enormous potential for this: "Imagine a world without boundaries," he says. "And I can install such a kiosk anywhere, even on Chowpatty beach, so that you can mail order clothes you want from New York. It's not such a difficult thing. The technology, transport service and other requirements for this are all there."

In the middle of all this excitement, Murjani has finally set his sights on India. He met Rajiv Gandhi in the US last November: "Rajiv was highly respectful of what I had achieved in the US as an Indian, and said I should come to India. Because of that, I am here today (in Bombay)." During his two weeks in the country, Murjani found that "we are very well known in India, that we command respect". He thinks that any public share issue that he makes in India would be a 'hot stock', but he is wary of jumping in straightaway: "We have to be careful because we must live up to our promise and give a good solid return."

So he hasn't yet decided how exactly he should enter the Indian market, with what and in partnership with whom. He is thinking in terms of being a bridge between American and Indian companies because "US companies are normally slightly uncomfortable about India because the cultures are different. And they hear lots of things, both good and bad. We say we are in the US, and we are also Indian, so both sides can relate to us and we can be an ideal business partner from both sides."

Some of these assumptions and assessments of India under Rajiv Gandhi may be naive, but Murjani is confident, and says he will go into the areas where the Government wants the country to be in, and not just apparel: "We can be in almost any field, and there is nothing specific yet. But we will start with something new and high quality." He mentions telecommunications, food processing and electronics as possibilities, and feels that "in India you've got to be almost foolish to be not successful."

Murjani, who retains his Indian passport, had once earlier located some Indian suppliers for his products sold abroad, but problems with power supply, strikes and delivery schedules forced him to give up. And while stressing the importance his family has always placed on integrity and morality, he said: "We were not very comfortable with the bureaucracy and the methods of doing business in India." Now he thinks things

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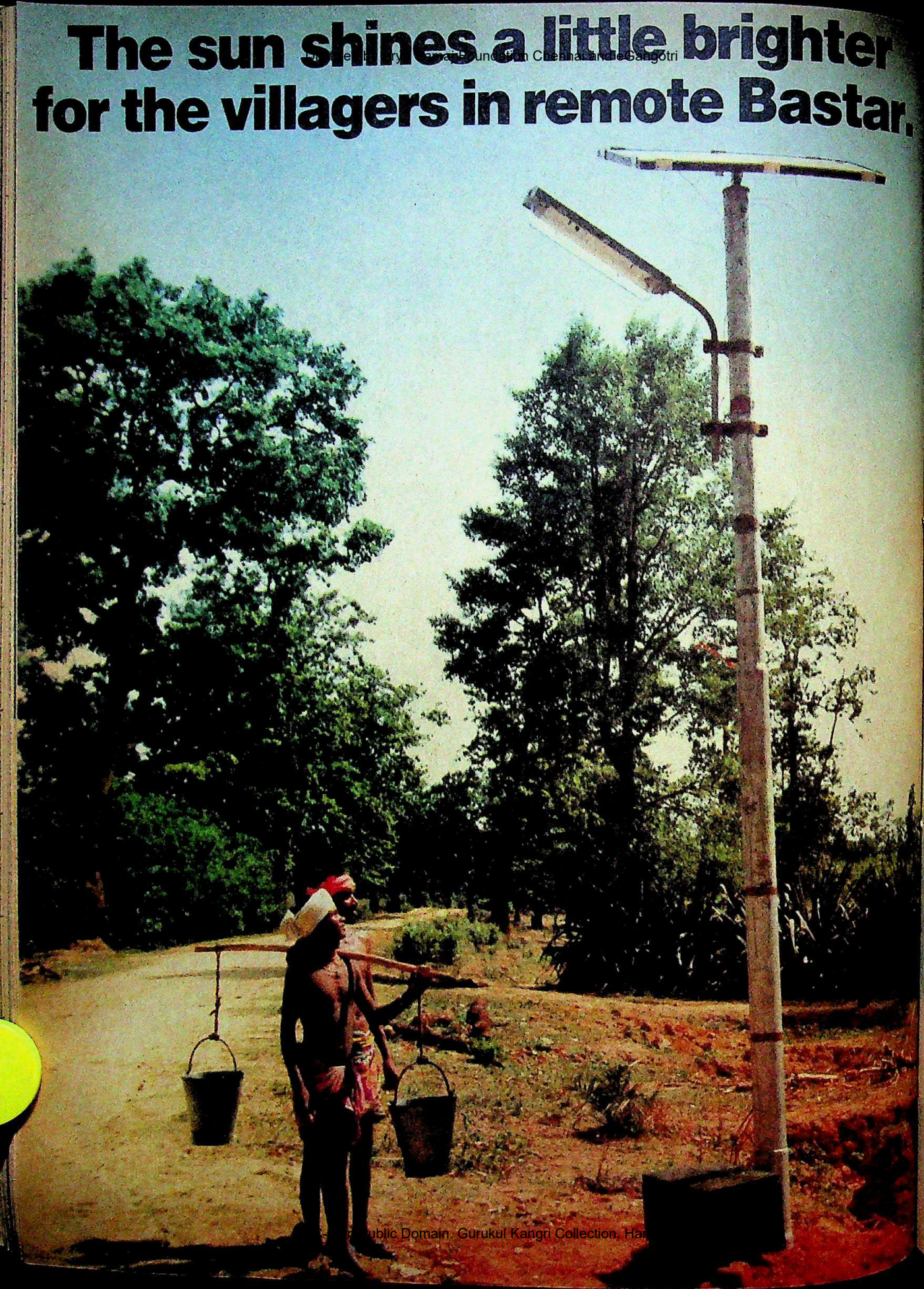
The sun shines a little brighter for the villagers in remote Bastar.



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Central Electronics Limited. Brightening up the life of the commonest of the common man.

The remote, little village of Orcha in the Bastar District of Madhya Pradesh had a problem.

A power problem.

The nearest electricity transmission point was about 90 km away and was separated from the village by a forest. And there was no way to bring electrical power to Orcha without criminal deforestation.

Simple to operate and maintain, Solar Photovoltaic (SPV) Systems designed and manufactured by CEL were provided to Orcha. To bring a little happiness to the villagers.

Hundreds of Shining Examples

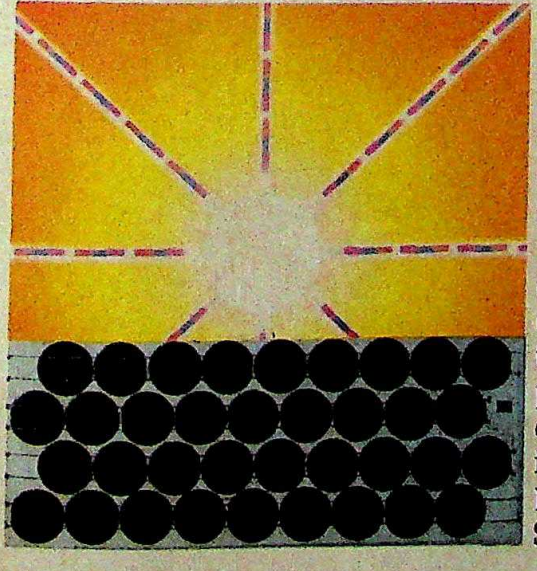
Today, like Orcha, many far-flung villages have benefited from the SPV power provided by CEL.

Electricity from solar energy for lighting, water pumping, community radio and TV sets, telecommunications, weather monitoring and for many other purposes.

Power from the Sun

Efficient and direct conversion of solar energy into electricity is slowly but surely becoming a reality, especially in remote and far-flung areas, where electricity may never reach otherwise.

The international state-of-the-art technology that was pioneered in this country by Central Electronics Limited.



Indeed, an independent U.S. study in June 1985 recognised CEL's role not merely as the leader in all Third-World countries, but also as one of the top 10 firms in the world.

A Corporation that is dedicated to tapping energy from the sun and taking electrical power to places where it was once considered next to impossible to do so.

In collaboration with the SUN – the inexhaustible source.

CEL Central Electronics Limited

A Govt. of India (DSIR) Enterprise

Shaping the future with the sun

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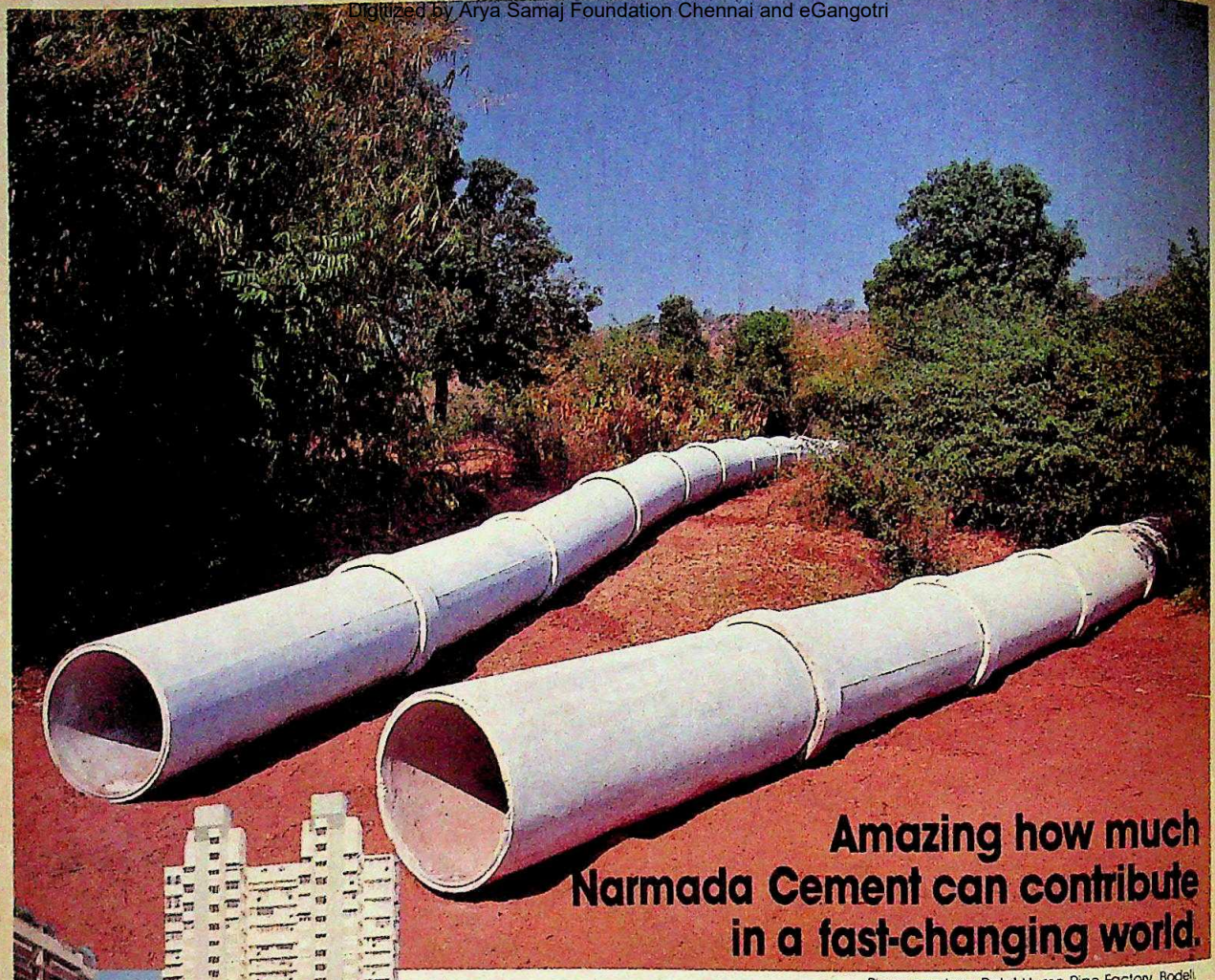
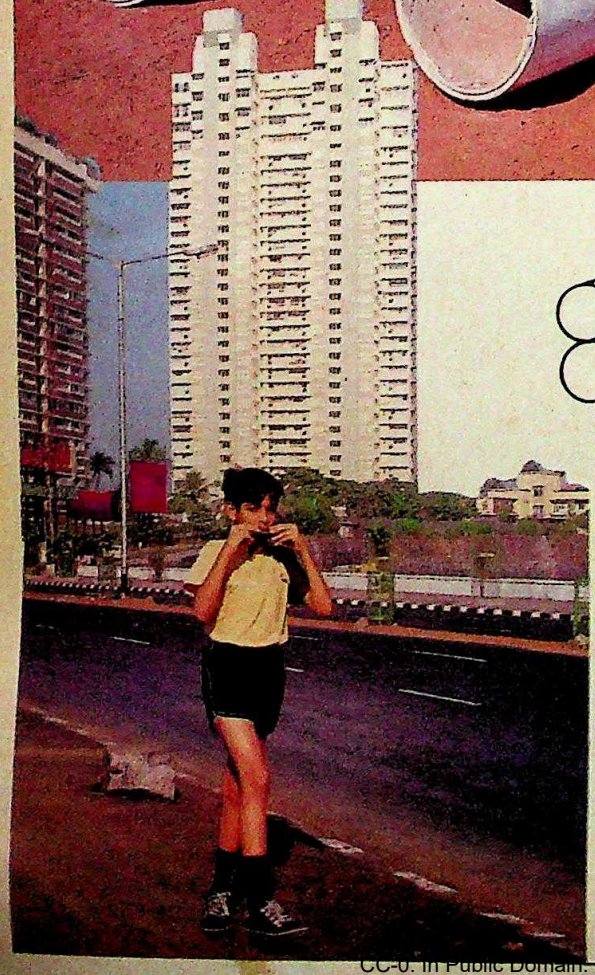
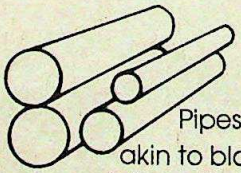


Amazing how much Narmada Cement can contribute in a fast-changing world.

Pipes, courtesy: Patel Hume Pipe Factory, Bodeli





Pipes are akin to blood vessels in a city. They'd better be fighting fit. Just as choking or bursting of blood vessels can ruin a human body, a crack or break in a major pipeline can create havoc in a city.

That's why Narmada Cement. Its higher compressive strength imparts sturdiness to pipes. Just so that they perform the way they should — all their lives. It also means no breakage and wastage during production. Quite apart from this Narmada fact —its quick-setting time actually ensures greater production from the same mould.

narmada cement

The years will tell.

4th Floor, Bakhtawar, Nariman Point, Bombay-400 021.

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are changing because of Rajiv Gandhi's drive towards liberalisation, against corruption, in favour of modernisation. Says Murjani: "I can relate to him. He is the same age, he has surrounded himself with young, bright people."

He shrugs off any suggestion that he is coming to India either because Hong Kong's future is uncertain or because his businesses elsewhere are not doing very well just now. "I'm not pulling out of Hong Kong: China wants us, so that doesn't bother me at all. We're going to continue as a strong, influential force in Hong Kong." And he dismisses unconfirmed talk that his businesses worldwide are not doing very well: "Look at my stores, at my factories. They don't smell trouble. If this is what being down is, I'd like to see what's up."

He knows what being up is, of course. Today, his Gloria Vanderbilt fragrances sell $150 million (Rs 180 crore) annually in terms of retail prices (half that at the wholesale level), his shoes "outsell every designer brand" (another $150 million retail), his jeans remain among the top three designer brands, and Coca Cola clothes are still climbing the sales charts. The Gloria Vanderbilt brand name, in fact, has now been assessed as being worth $121 million (Rs 150 crore).

Interestingly enough, each new venture has entailed a new marketing concept—selling a celebrity name in the case of Vanderbilt, creating a celebrity out of a nobody in the case of Hilfiger, transferring a brand from a drink to clothes, as in Coca Cola, being first with the concept of electronic marketing, and so on. Murjani also talks of the "electric environment" in his company ("my people don't want to leave the office at night"), his belief in a lean organisation (he has no more than 250 employees in the US), a flexible organisational style ("we have a structure and don't have a structure"), and his willingness to "try anything if it makes sense".

He has critics, of course. Fellow businessmen dismiss innovations like the Fizzazz store as gimmicks that don't amount to much. But Mohan Murjani is convinced that this is going to be the shape of retail marketing in the 21st century, and he intends getting there ahead of the pack. And if his plans work out right, the man who has been called the Spielberg of the fashion industry could soon be setting up shop back home, in a country where another man talks constantly of reaching for the 21st century.

—T.N. NINAN

BUSINESSPEAK

Of Raids and Raiders

Rama Prasad Goenka, the new president of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), has become the business community's primary spokesman at a time when most industrialists are concerned about the Government's tax raids on their community. The raids figured prominently in the deliberations at FICCI's annual session which was held last fortnight.

Goenka, who heads companies like Ceat Tyres, Philips Carbon Black and Asian Cables, is no stranger to raids: he himself has been raided by the Government in the past. Last fortnight, he spoke to Senior Editor T.N. NINAN on the latest round of raids and how the business community views them.

THERE are three issues involved in the business of raids. First, no one is questioning the authority of the Government to investigate cases of tax evasion. That right the Government has, and no one can dispute this. So if you ask me whether the raids qualitatively change the relationship between industry and Government, my answer is no. In any case, I don't think it is important for the Government whether the business community supports it or not: the community has only a few votes, and they don't count.

But one can criticise the methodology of the raids, and this is the second issue. Every active person works on the basis of his goodwill and his standing in the community. His relationship with others and the level of his interaction with them count considerably. This is the case whether you're a businessman, lawyer, doctor or politician. All these people work on goodwill. So till such time as a case is not established, the goodwill and reputation of a businessman should not be jeopardised.

The third point is that the finance minister himself has said that the proposal in his budget speech to conduct individual house-to-house surveys by the tax authorities may not be a good thing. And Mr V.P. Singh has assured some of us that he is going to take a second look at this subject.

Today, there is a feeling of insecurity among businessmen, because what it amounts to is that anyone can get raided. I can say this, that everyone is scared. But I think the raids will continue. This is the impression I get after reading and listening to the finance minister's speeches. During the period of the Janata government, I was harassed a lot. In the 30 months of Janata rule, my offices and homes were raided no fewer than 43 times. So I feel that no one can 'improve' on that harassment. But I don't see any political motivation in the raids now; to this extent the raids are different from those in the Janata period.

If the raids are for gaining political mileage, such drastic action would be wrong. But I think the Government's objectives today are two fold. First, it wants to get more tax revenue. Second, it is trying to tell people: Well, boys, we've relaxed the laws, but these laws are to be followed. The Government, I think, has achieved both its objectives. So from the Government's point of view the raids may not be counter-productive.

I don't know whether the people who have been raided were the right targets for being raided. My information is one-sided. Some of the people who have been raided have told me that the Government's action was unnecessary. But the Government has not told me what information it has on these people. So how do I say anything? As for the question of whether the raids have prompted people to make voluntary disclosures, once again I don't know. If people have declared hidden income or wealth, they're not sharing that information.

But the Government has responded to criticism. There is much much less publicity, and I mean much much less publicity, being given to raids now. The instant publicity that was earlier being given to raids is no longer there. So the Government has already changed its approach.

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FICCI

House Divided

RESIGNATIONS and disputes over elections are once again the order of the day in the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). At the federation's annual jamboree last fortnight, several leading members withdrew their candidature from the elections to the committee, and a few days later, the Indian Merchants Chamber decided to pull out of FICCI altogether. More resignations were expected to follow from such business houses as the Singhanias, the Jains and others. Already, large groups like the Tatas and Reliance are not members; if the expected resignations materialise, FICCI will be left with less than half of the top 20 industrial houses in its ranks.

The squalid dispute over bogus memberships has simmered, died down, and boiled over again in repetitive cycles for the last five years. Matters came to a head last year when several leading lights resigned in protest. But a compromise formula was worked out for weeding out 1,300 bogus members out of the 1,600 membership and the resignations were withdrawn. Peace was finally expected to reign after the formation of a consensus committee that would sort out contentious issues concerning the election of office-bearers, with another 'seniors' committee' to arbitrate if the consensus committee was deadlocked.

But the issue has come to the fore again because only 950 resignations have been effected so far, and because of a deadlock over the post of vice-president of the Indian national committee of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). The post is significant this year because the vice-president will be the president of the next convention to be held in New Delhi a few months hence. Both contenders, H.S. Singhania and S.K. Birla, were business stalwarts; the consensus committee failed to agree on which one to pick, and the issue was not referred to the seniors' committee as should have been done under the compromise worked out last year. This resulted in two members of the seniors' committee, S.P. Jain and Bharat Ram, submitting their resignations.

With the compromise arrangement in a shambles, many businessmen were bitter. Viren Shah of Mukand Iron and Steel said: "This is the last time I will be attending a FICCI session; enough is enough." Singhania was more circumspect: "What pained me was the attitude of some of the members. They don't seem to realise that an institution with a large number of bogus members cannot command credibility with the Government."

Others argued, however, that the question of bogus membership had been resolved at a late night session just before FICCI's annual jamboree, with 956 resignations already having taken place and another 134 committed to resigning by June, taking the total to 1,100 out of a target of 1,200. Said a prominent FICCI member: "The people who have walked out had agreed to this revised time-table. So I don't see how the membership issue was a matter of concern." But the rival group argued that even today half the 650 members left in FICCI were bogus.

The group led by the Jains and Singhanias also pointed out that the question of electing the vice-president of the ICC should have been referred to the seniors' committee. FICCI's in-coming president R.P. Goenka had promised to do this. But the reference was never made, presumably because of opposition from the powerful Modi-Birla combine. Said a disgruntled member: "The lesson we learnt from this was that they would use the compromise arrangement only when it suited them. How can this be acceptable to us?"

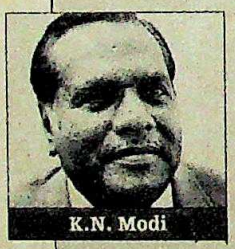
Goenka, who emerged some months ago as the chief mediator in the dispute, has got a lot of the flak for the latest fracas. Some 40 resignations of bogus members had been given to him by the Jains and Singhanias on the condition that they would be formally submitted to FICCI only if matching resignations were handed in by the Birlas and Modis. But apparently because of a slip by his personal staff, the resignations were telexed to FICCI, which took up the issue at its next committee meeting, where the then president D.N. Patodia pushed them through despite protests from some of the members present.

Goenka himself relates a different version of these events, arguing that resignations from the rival group had come in earlier. He had also not yet given up hope of another *rapprochement* and a final end to the issue. "I am going to let passions cool for a couple of weeks," he said, "and will pick up the threads again after that. If all the resignations of bogus members come in by May or June, I hope the problem will be solved."

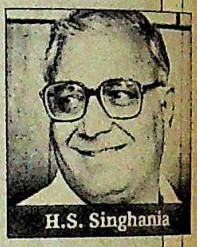
But the Jains, Singhanias, Bajajs, Chowgules and others who walked out last year and came back only on the strength of the compromise that had been hammered out, are aware that they will make laughing stocks of themselves if they keep storming out and coming back. So if they resign once again from FICCI, it will be for the last time. While this will leave the breakaway group with the difficult choice of either starting a rival federation or joining one of the other chambers of commerce already in existence, FICCI itself is bound to lose some of its representative character as the primary voice of Indian business. If that happens, the biggest names in Indian business will have no one to blame but themselves.

—T.N. NINAN

S.K. Birla


K.N. Modi

The squalid dispute over bogus memberships in FICCI has boiled over repeatedly over the last five years. The latest fracas could lead to a spate of resignations which would dilute the organisation's representative character as the primary voice of Indian business.


H.S. Singhania

Viren Shah

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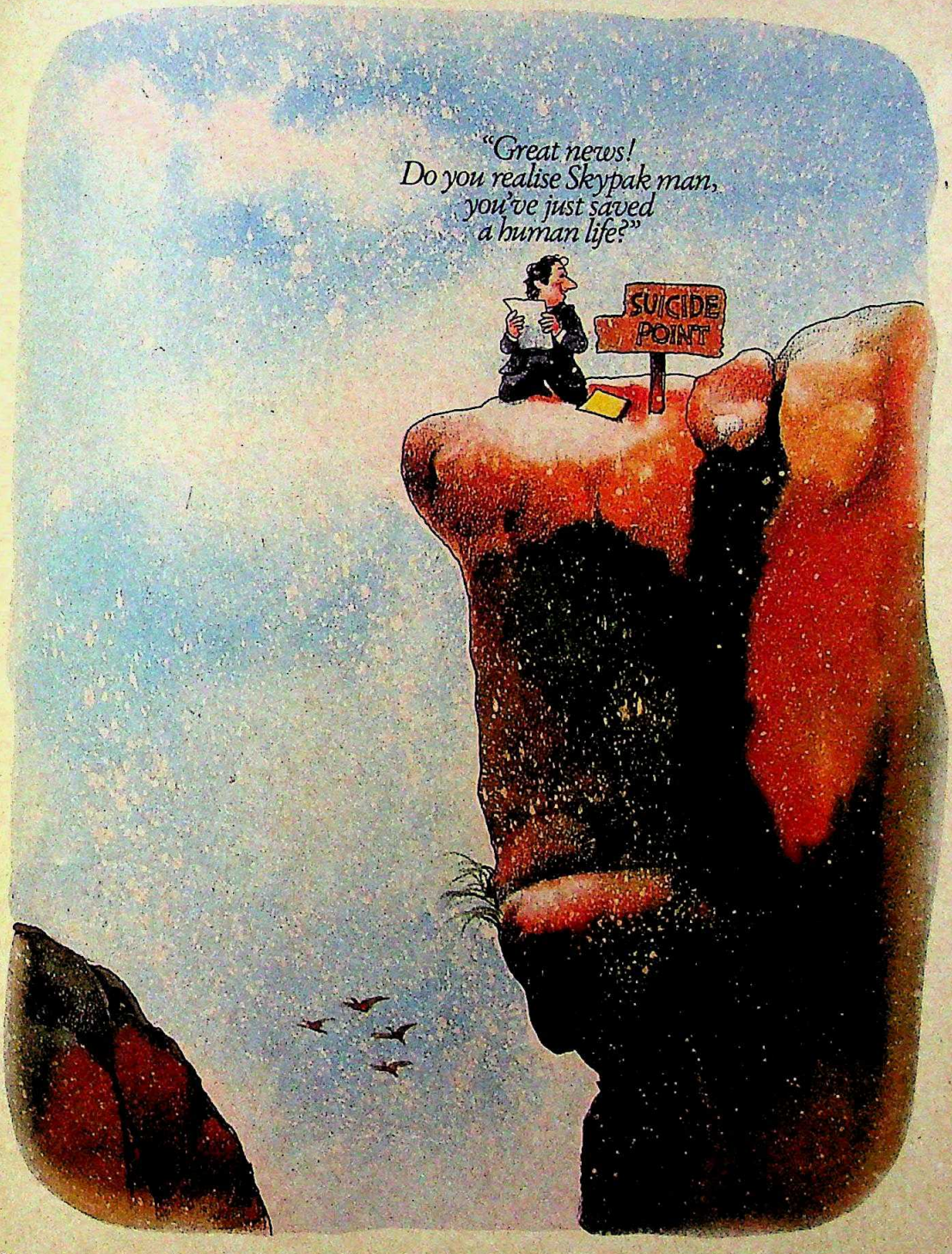

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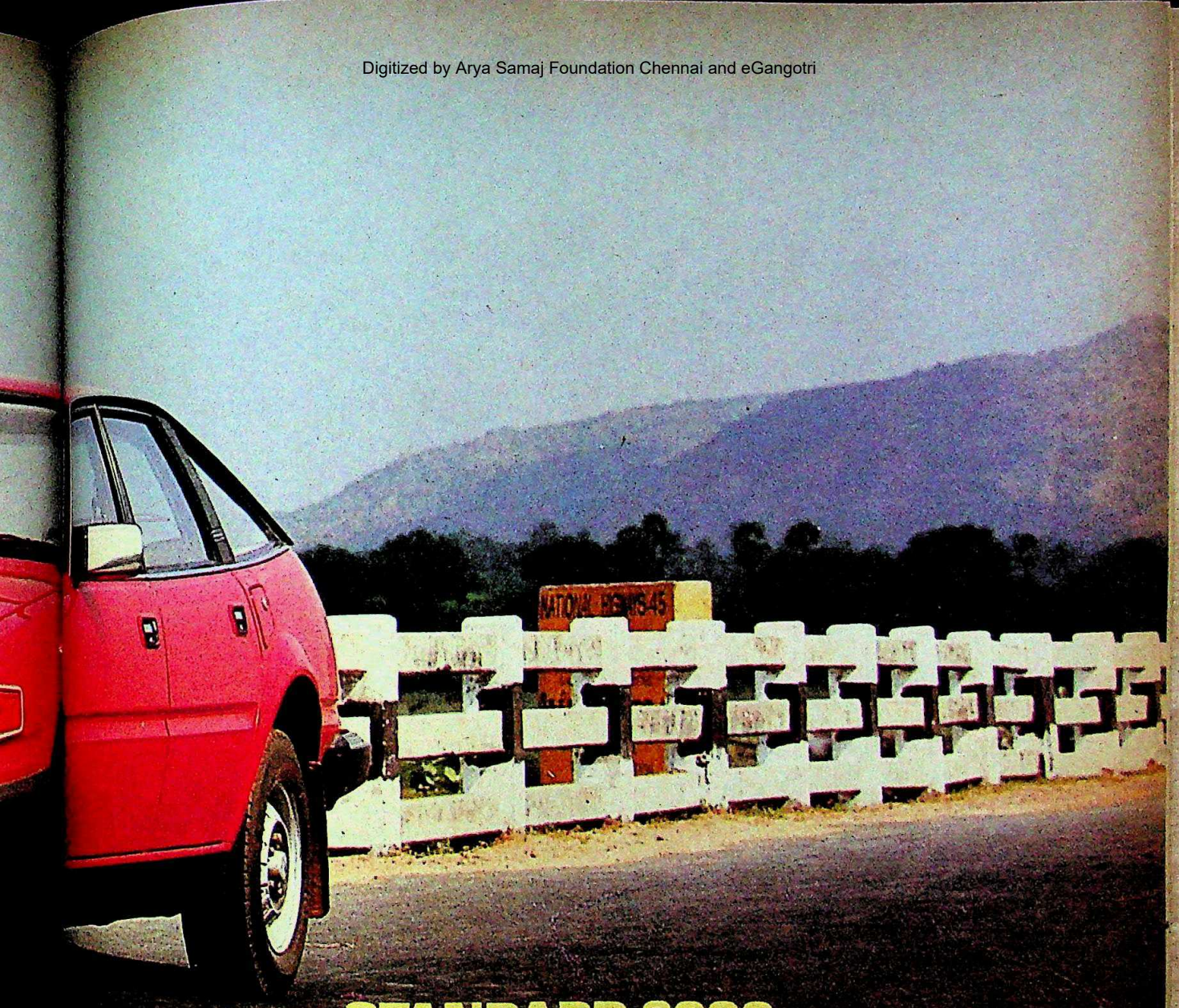

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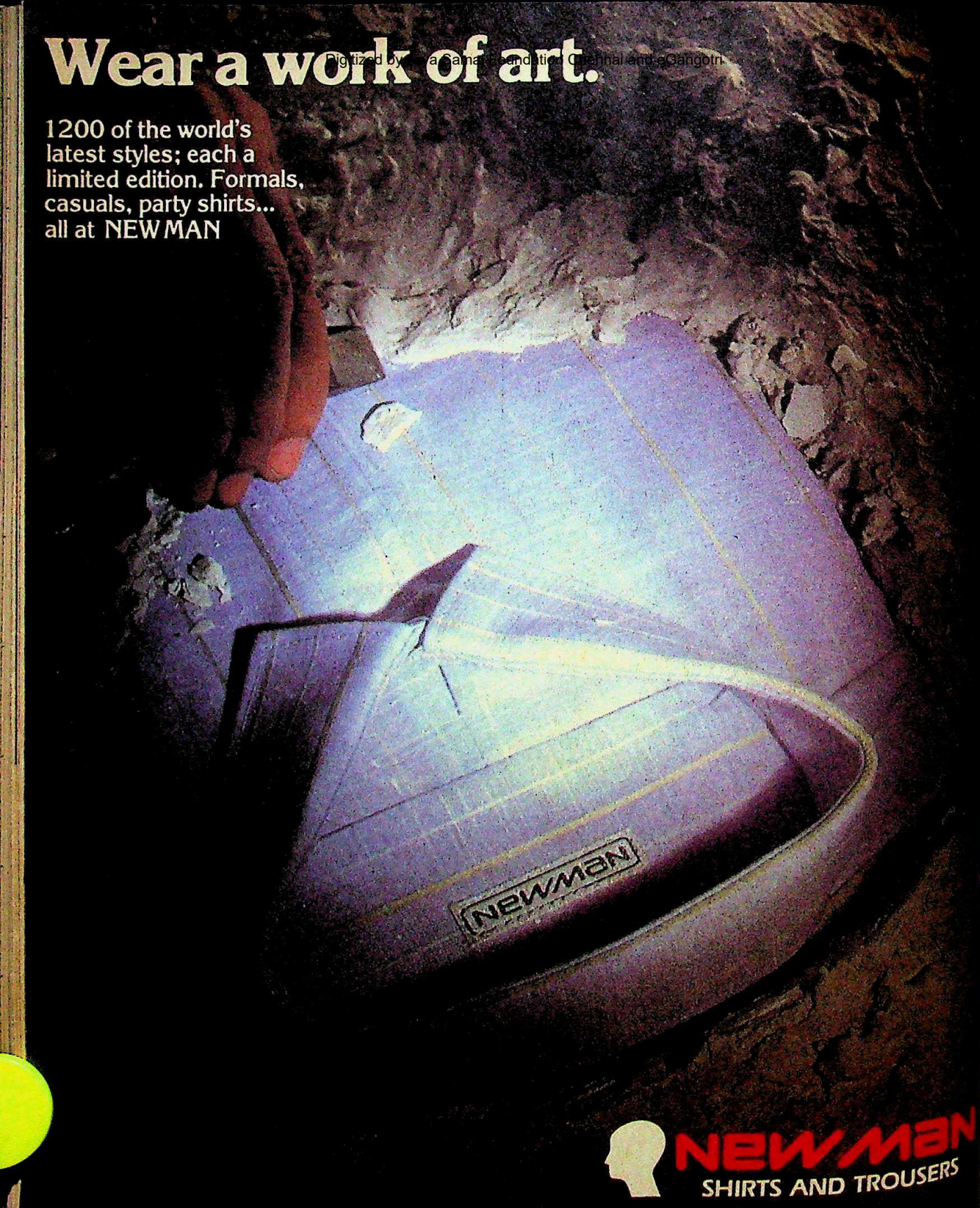

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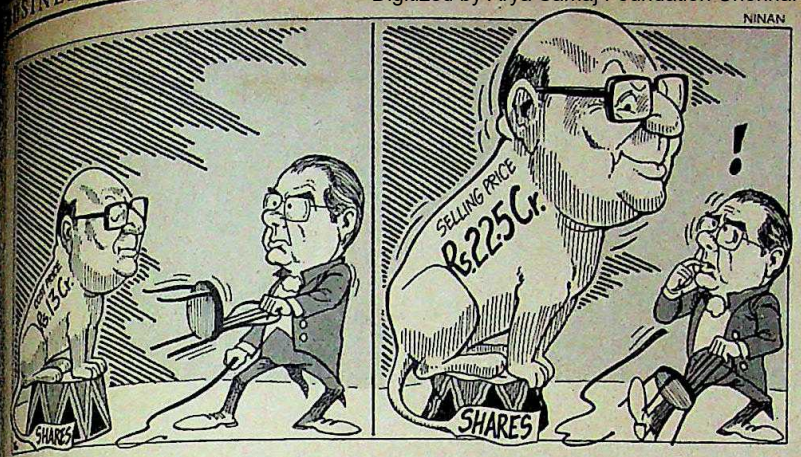

SWRAJ PAUL

The Raider's Revenge

THREE years ago, when he launched his headline-hitting stock-market raid on Escorts and DCM with share purchases worth Rs 13 crore, the London-based Swraj Paul had said he was merely doing his duty because the "Government had requested Indians living abroad to put money into India". That duty led him straight into battle. And last fortnight, near the end of an epic fight for the right to register his share purchases, Paul was finally heading for victory.

In December, the Supreme Court handed down a verdict in his favour on a case filed by Escorts Chairman H.P.Nanda, but asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to check once again that the investments had been made in accordance with legal requirements. Last fortnight, at the end of the three-month deadline set by the court, the RBI cleared the investments and exonerated Paul's bank, Punjab National Bank, of charges of having violated the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act while routing Paul's money. This virtually paved the way for Paul to get the shares registered in his name.

Interviewed on the telephone in London, Paul gave every indication of enjoying his moment of triumph: "I think it's marvellous," he said. "I'm really enjoying myself. Everything has gone my way." But he added that his earlier decision to pull out of India (announced when Nanda was given a fresh five-year term in Escorts, immediately after the Supreme Court judgement last December), remained unchanged.

Meanwhile, the mood in the Escorts camp was suitably sombre. Nanda said that he had no information on the RBI decision, and that he did not know what exactly the RBI had cleared. He added: "No one has approached us for the registration of the shares." However, there was little doubt that the voluminous paper-work required for this could be done fairly simply. And with the Government-owned financial institutions, which own 52 per cent of Escorts shares, sitting in a majority on the Escorts board of directors, there seems little doubt that when the shares are lodged afresh for registration, the board will not put any road-blocks in the way.

However, with Paul declaring that he was not interested in maintaining his presence in India or in joining the Escorts board ("Why should I want to be on a lousy board?"), the present managements of neither Escorts nor DCM are in any danger of being unseated. So the real result of the RBI verdict is that it puts Paul in the driver's seat in terms of demanding his price for selling his shares. This, he said, was Rs 22.5 crore.

Paul's initial investment had been Rs 13 crore, and his current selling price takes into account the interest charges on this money for the last three years, the foreign exchange loss incurred because the rupee has lost ground vis-a-vis the pound during the intervening period, plus compensation for the tax that the Government might levy on his capital gains. However, negotiations for selling the shares have remained grounded in recent weeks because neither Escorts nor DCM is prepared to pay the price that Paul is demanding. An Escorts spokesman argued that the RBI would not allow a share deal that compensated Paul for the loss caused by foreign exchange fluctuations as this would set an undesirable precedent. He also said that if a higher price for Paul merely compensated him for the interest burden that he has borne for three years, there might not be any question of paying any tax on capital gains.

Asked what he would do if the Escorts and DCM managements did not offer him a suitable price, Paul said he was confident that, "Once my shares are registered, there will be plenty of buyers." And he derisorily dismissed the offers he had so far received from Escorts: "I have been hearing of a lot of proposals for a long time. But I don't listen to silly offers. Someone should come to me with some money, and Mr Nanda said three years ago that he didn't have the money to buy my shares."

Paul has also worked out a strategy in case his shares do not get the price that he wants: "In that case, the first thing I will do is ask the auditors to check the company books properly, in case they have been cooking the books. If Mr Nanda is not honest, I will question him and make him honest."

The only mild flutter in this moment of triumph was a question mark over whether Caparo Properties, one of Paul's companies that had bought Escorts shares had been sold to British interests last year, so that it ceased to be a non-resident Indian company. But Paul explained that Caparo Properties (a private limited company) had changed its name to Atlantic Associates, and another of his companies, called E.Austin, had been renamed Caparo Properties and gone public: "I was planning to make E.Austin a public limited company, and I wanted the Caparo name there when I was going public. So I switched the names around. The company that has invested in Escorts is still mine. The new Caparo Properties that has merged with a British company has nothing to do with Escorts."

That odd corporate twist at the end of a three-year battle was symbolic of the various questions that had been raised about Paul's investments from the start. But with both the Supreme Court and the RBI eventually giving Paul a clean chit, he could finally say, without any fear of contradiction last fortnight: "I knew I had done nothing wrong. The last three years show the ability of mischief-makers to waste my time, and I have no time to waste. I have my companies here to run, and am happy doing so."

—T.N. NINAN

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TELEPHONE NIGAM

Hopeful Signs

TELEPHONE subscribers across the country got tired long ago of promises from the Government of an improved telephone service. And tens of thousands who booked their telephones several years ago have got similarly accustomed to the prospect of waiting indefinitely for long-promised connections. Now, at least in the cities of Bombay and Delhi, things might change for the better. Or so the Government hopes.

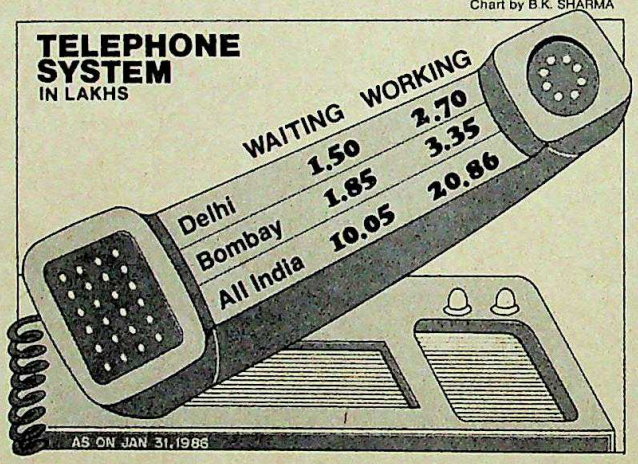
The scenario may be different this time because the telephone systems in the two cities—accounting for one-fifth of all telephone connections in the country—have been converted into a new, autonomous, public sector corporation named Mahanagar Telephone Nigam (MTN). The new corporation will be flush with cash, free from the need to get government clearance for minor decisions, able to discipline a troublesome and inefficient workforce if it so chooses by initiating a new work culture, and as a result of all this (so the Government hopes) able to quickly expand the system, improve customer service and innovate with new, more sophisticated telephone systems and services.

Money is the one thing that should not be a problem. The telephone systems in the two cities generate an annual revenue of Rs 700 crore, of which a handsome Rs 200 crore are profit. So far this enormous amount of cash has got lost in government coffers, used to subsidise the losing postal service or invested in telephone systems elsewhere. Not any more. These riches apart, MTN has also been allowed the freedom to issue bonds and borrow money from the public: no less than Rs 2,000 crore may be raised in this fashion over the next five years. This compares with the Rs 1,200 crore invested in the two metros' systems so far, and the Rs 4,010 crore that the Planning Commission has allowed for telecommunications as a whole during the Seventh Five Year Plan.

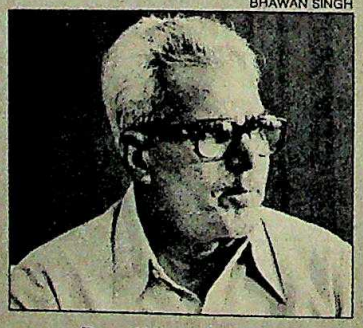
Though the idea of floating a public corporation was first mooted in 1982, it got bogged down in bureaucratic machinations, with a powerful section of the ministry, led by the telecommunications engineers, opposing the move on the plea that the corporation would block their promotional avenues within the department and that outsiders would grab plum posts. But both Union Minister of State for Communications, Ram Niwas Mirdha, and the Prime Minister's Secretariat stuck to their stand, and the Cabinet eventually cleared the proposal last December.

However, the implementation of this decision was once again blocked in the ministry. But the financial squeeze applied by both the Planning Commission and the Finance Ministry finally left the telecommunications people with no choice: creating the corporation was the only means by which additional resources could be raised through the issuing of bonds. All opposition vanished, and the draft legislation for the new corporation was quickly readied.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



BHAWAN SINGH



Ram Niwas Mirdha

The minister has argued that if the new corporation is successful the Government might create corporations for other cities.

If the success of the new experiment hinges on the men who will be asked to run the new corporation, the Government quickly signalled that it meant business by picking for the key post of managing director, M.P.Shukla, who has made a name for himself as the go-getting boss of the public sector Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd (TCIL). Shukla is a relatively junior officer in the business, with the existing general managers of both the Bombay and Delhi telephone organisations being senior to him in the Government. Inevitably, then, both had to make way for junior, hand-picked general managers in the new set-up: B.M.Khanna and M.C.Venkatram. Said Shukla: "It is a question of choosing the best of the available lot for providing better service to the customers."

Shukla has his priorities worked out elsewhere too. Focusing quickly on the prime need to improve the quality of service offered to harassed subscribers, he issued a series of instructions aimed at this objective, and pointed out that the only way to generate more revenue from the subscribers was by improving the level of service. And among the innovations he has in mind are such wonder-gadgets as sophisticated car telephone networks, paging systems, and the use of fibre optics for transmitting inter-exchange calls.

The only danger in this entire game plan is that the profitable corporation might generate all the revenue and expand the telephone systems in both Bombay and Delhi while the rest of the country's telephone network, starved of funds, languishes without hope of better tomorrows. But Mirdha argued that if the new corporation was successful, the Government might create similar corporations for other cities as well. He also said that the Government would now be free to concentrate on the communication needs of the backward areas.

It now remains to be seen whether this hope is justified, and if the new set-up will succeed in providing better telecommunications to the privileged subscribers in the country's political and commercial capitals.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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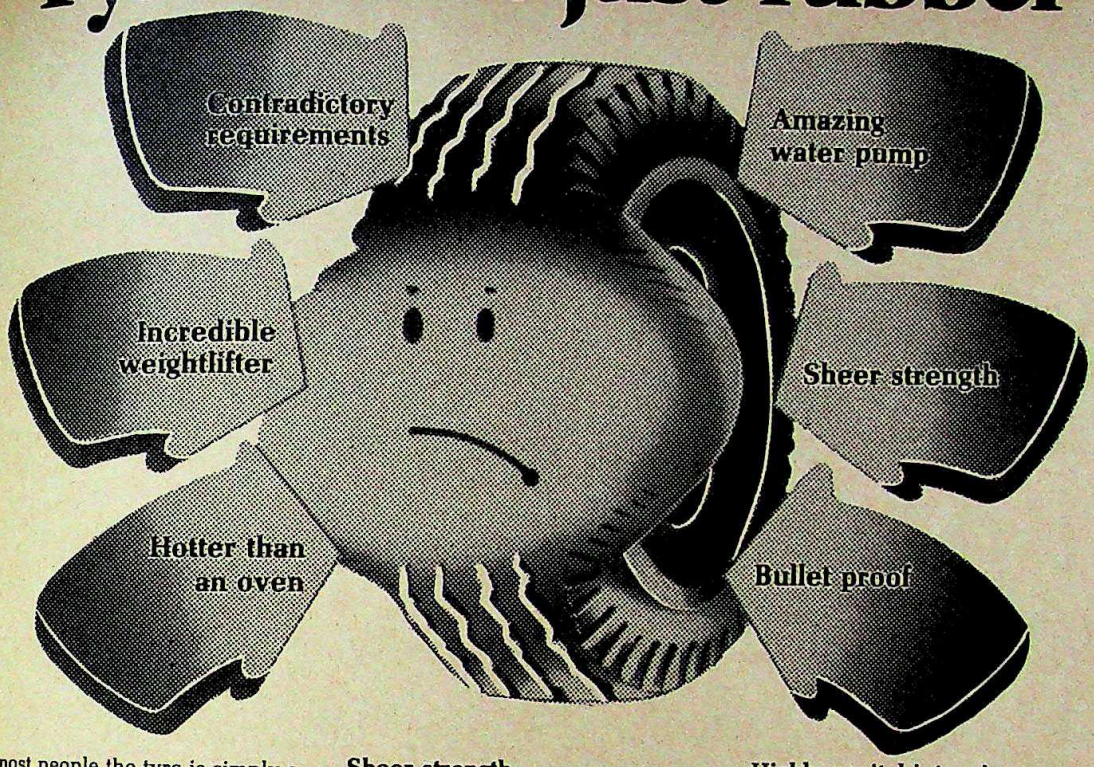
Tyre is not just rubber



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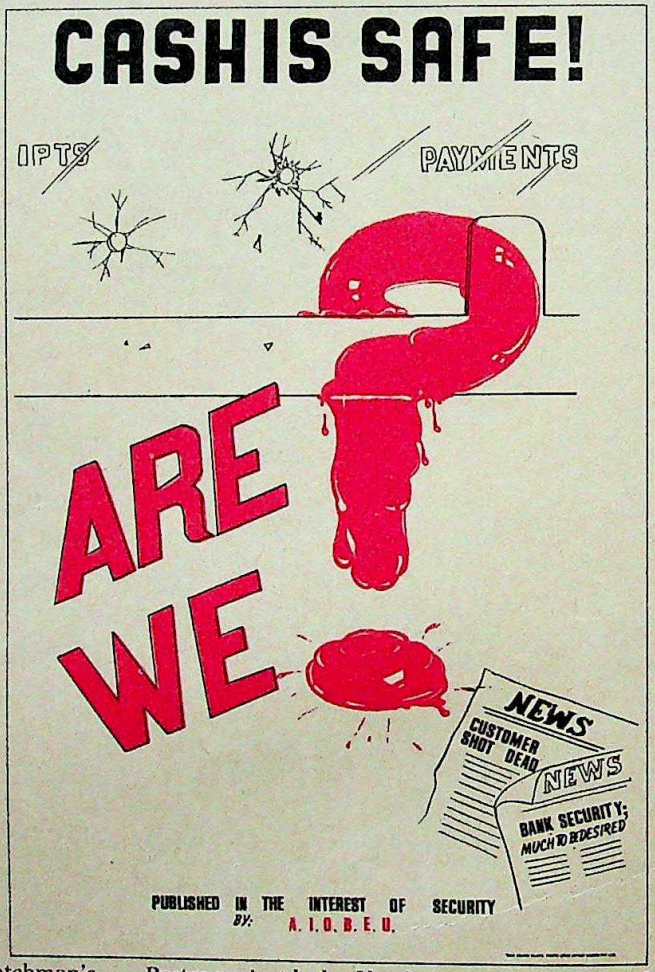
BANKS

Vulnerable Targets

THE EMPLOYEES of a suburban Bombay branch of the Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) were used to the sight of film stars like Rekha and Shatrughan Sinha occasionally walking into the bank's ground floor premises in a secluded side-street in Bandra, home for a large number of celebrities from the Hindi film industry. But little did they expect one hot and humid day in March that the bank would become the location for a terrifying real life drama that left a customer dead and two bank employees seriously injured.

Around noon on March 4, three men strolled into IOB's largest suburban branch just half an hour before the bank was to down shutters. Peak banking hours were over, and employees were leisurely attending to half a dozen late customers. Two men headed for the cash counter, while the third entered the manager's cabin. As the first man reached the cashier's counter, he dropped a bundle of Rs 50 notes, attempting to distract the bank watchman's attention and snatch his rifle. As the watchman, Sitaram Gujjar, and one of the intruders grappled for possession of the rifle, 40-year-old Raj Panjwani, a Swissair employee waiting to encash his cheque, sprang to the watchman's aid. The second man whipped out a .32 bore revolver, shot Panjwani through the neck, and pumped another bullet into the watchman's abdomen. In a spontaneous reaction a clerk and a stenotypist sitting across the counter began throwing ledger books and chairs at the two gunmen. Just then the third man rushed out of the manager's cabin with a gun in his hand shouting, "Hands up everybody, hands up." He shot the young stenotypist, Srikant Desai, twice. The cashier switched on the alarm, and with the injured watchman in pursuit the three men ran out with the bank's rifle, jumped into a waiting white Premier Padmini, and disappeared. Two days later the police found the stolen car abandoned barely a kilometre away from the bank. Gujjar's antiquated double-barrelled, 12-bore rifle was inside, but the gun and the car had been completely cleaned of fingerprints. Obviously, as police later said, the attempted bank robbery was the work of "a ruthless and very skilled gang".



Poster against lack of bank security

The armed raid on the IOB branch in Bandra was the second in a spate of bank robberies within barely five weeks.

► On February 13 at 12.50 p.m., 10 minutes before closing time four men walked into the first floor office of the Punjab and Sind Bank in a residential block on B.G. Kher Marg on Malabar Hill, just round the corner from the chief minister's bungalow. Three of the intruders carried hand-guns, but the bank neither had an armed guard nor an alarm system. Fifteen employees, two customers and the building's *gurkha* watchman were herded into the bank's strong-room, while the robbers decamped with Rs 1.65 lakh from the cashier's cabin.

► On February 24, four armed men walked into the SBI's Juhu branch, again in off peak hours. They locked the employees into a room, cleared the cashier's cabin of Rs 1.44 lakh, and disappeared. The branch did not have an armed guard.

► On March 20 around 10.30 a.m. four gunmen raided the Bank of Maharashtra branch at Shivaji Park a quiet residential area, across the road from the mayor's bungalow. There were just six customers at that hour in the bank and the watchman was on leave. The gunmen casually took Rs 2.67 lakh from the cashier's counter, wrapped the cash in a curtain, latched the main door from outside and walked away. The employees forgot to switch on the alarm.

The four sensational robberies in the nation's banking capital suddenly brought into sharp focus the abysmally inadequate and outdated security arrangements in Indian banks. "The situation is explosive," said M.R. Pai, president of the Bombay branch of the All-India Bank Depositors' Association. "Banks have become sitting ducks both for amateur robbers and organised gangs. Bank managements find it easier to collect from insurance companies after a robbery than to devise proper security measures for the country's 55,000 bank branches."

E.K. Thakur, vice-president of the All India Confederation of Bank Officers' Organisations (AICOBOO) complained that a "fear psychosis" had gripped bank employees with the increase of armed bank robberies. He said that while robberies had gone up from 40 in 1981 and 77 in 1982 to 350 in 1985, managements had done nothing to implement the guidelines provided by the N. Balasubramaniam Sub-committee on bank security.

In its 1983 report, the sub-committee had recommended, among other things, the installation of closed circuit TV and a hot line to the local police station in all

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large metropolitan branches and in those branches where the RBI's 3,900 currency chests were maintained (some of these chests contain as much as Rs 50 crore), the provision of sophisticated hand-guns to bank guards, the use of "decoy money" at cash counters to help trace the robbers after a heist, consultations with the local police before locating a new branch, and proper training of employees on how to react during a robbery. It also pointed out that "though most banks had issued internal instructions on security precautions to be followed by their branches, these instructions were not only dissimilar but also incomplete." It was also noticed that in most of the banks, the instructions were not being implemented effectively. The seriousness of the problem had not been emphasised or felt adequately.

"I am sure the sub-committee's guidelines have been conveyed to all bank branches," said Central Bank's M.N. Coiporia, chairman of the Indian Banks' Association (IBA). "Things need to be tightened up at our end though and the IBA is meeting the police commissioner soon to find out what the police can suggest about security. There is no room for complacency."

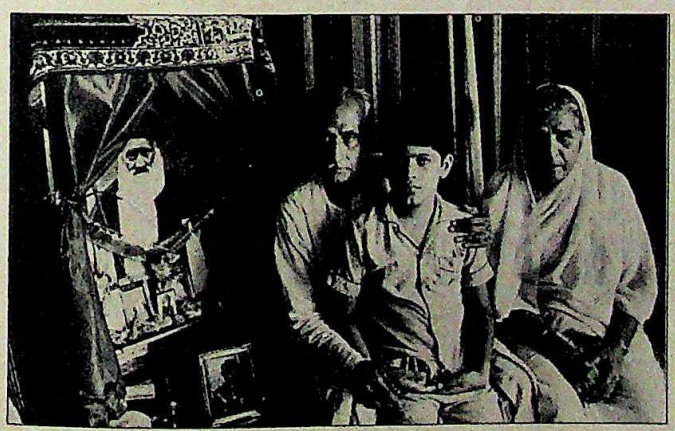
However, the police have little doubt that the major problem is the sense of complacency. "There seems to be a surprising lack of security consciousness in banks," said Bombay's Police Commissioner D.S. Soman. "My main complaint is that nobody seems to even know the procedures to be followed when there is a robbery. And the police are never consulted before the location and layout of a new branch is decided."

Soman said the police would welcome the installation of hot lines, but emphatically ruled out licensing of hand-guns for bank watchmen. "Handling a revolver is not as easy as it appears in Hindi movies," he explained. "You have to be in continuous practice and I shudder to think what will happen if these irresponsible people are given revolvers and pistols."

It is time the banks went in for all the gadgets available," said R.H. Mendonca, additional commissioner (crime), "but just now it's probably true that two-thirds of Bombay's 1,500 bank branches do not even have armed guards. And at least 200 branches are located in vulnerable, isolated neighbourhoods in the suburbs." S. Srinivasan, regional secretary of the All-India Overseas Bank Employees' Association, which organised a morcha to the police commissioner's office after the Bandra shoot-out, pointed out that for the 48 IOB branches in the city there were just nine armed guards. "The rest do not even have lathis," he said. "Bank managements are more keen on computerisation than on security."

D.S. SOMAN
police commissioner, Bombay

"There seems to be a surprising lack of security consciousness in banks. Nobody seems to know the procedures to be followed when there is a robbery."



Mourning relatives of Parjwani: victim of negligence

While bank managements complain of inordinate delays before the police issue licences even for standard 12-bore rifles, some police offers wonder how far banks are prepared to go to ensure the safety of their cash, employees and customers. "Apparently the bank's financial wizards feel that any large expenditure on security would be uneconomical," said one harassed policeman. "Even if the insurance companies do not cover all the looted cash, it would still be cheaper for banks to go on with the present system." The sub-committee reported that in 1982 more than Rs 1.5 crore was looted from Indian banks. ICOBOO's Thakur estimates that banks would have to spend Rs 200 crore in order to implement the sub-committee's recommendations. "But banks have that kind of money," he argues. "What about the Rs 100 crore wasted in stationery purchases, cancellation of air tickets, unnecessary transfers and things like that?"

While the IBA displays an astonishing lack of urgency in response to the spate of armed robberies in Bombay, bank employees, wonder with considerable apprehension whether the gang will strike at their branch next. "I find it difficult to keep my eyes down even while counting the cash now," said a Bandra bank cashier. "Who knows the next guy on the other side of the glass may be the one with the gun."

In the absence of definite clues, wild speculation has begun about the identity of the gang. What seems certain is that three of the robberies were committed by one gang, it's members are between 25 and 30 years old, the leader appears educated and speaks in a Punjabi or Jat Hindi accent, at least one of the guns the gang carries is factory made and the heists are professionally organised. Given a chance, the gang also has the tendency to loudly proclaim that it is not against any individuals but only interested in "settling scores" with the Government. This and the arrest of a 25-year-old Sikh on suspicion after the Bank of Maharashtra robbery has led to reports in newspapers that the gang may be a desperate bunch of extremists from Punjab. But the police remain sceptical. "All we can say is that the gang has a professional touch," said a police officer. "The political message could be an attempt at deception. In any case with the kind of security banks have, it's open house here for any gang of robbers."

—M. RAHMAN

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ANALGESICS

Ridake Row

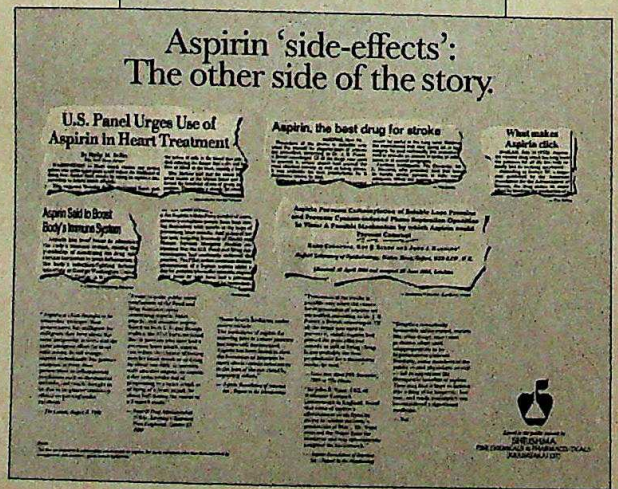
ANALGESICS are used as commonly as headaches occur, and the analgesic market in India—covering brand names like Aspro, Anacin, Saridon, and Disprin—is worth a cool Rs 50 crore and more. Last fortnight, Burroughs Wellcome Pvt Ltd (turnover Rs 44.60 crore) made an aggressive attempt at grabbing a slice of this cake and in the process kicked up a storm of protest that led to more headaches than it cured.

The cause of the commotion was Ridake, a new analgesic tablet manufactured by a Pune company and marketed by Wellcome, and touted through a massive advertising campaign in selected states in the south and the west of the country. The difference between Ridake and the other analgesics sold across the counter is that it is paracetamol-based while the others are aspirin-based. If potential customers didn't know the difference, the advertisements yelled it at them in a way which could only be described as strident and aimed at driving the point home forcefully. "The safest way to clear headaches," screamed one, "without aspirin side-effects." The advertisement went on to quote from a 1981 article in *Lancet* that aspirin "causes erosive gastritis with occult and over gastro-intestinal bleeding, gastric ulcer and has also been implicated as a cause of perforation of peptic ulcers."

That was the start of the controversy, and cudgels were taken up on behalf of aspirin manufacturers by a relative newcomer to the industry, Shrishma Fine Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals (K) Ltd, which is setting up a 2,000-tonne aspirin plant in Karnataka at a cost of Rs 10.47 crore. Last fortnight, Shrishma took out its own half-page advertisements, giving "the other side of the story" and quoting extensively from *The International Herald Tribune* and *Newsweek*, and more to the point from a publication of the Aspirin Foundation of America, pointing out that Sir John Vane, FRS, of Wellcome Research Laboratories in the United Kingdom had won a Nobel Prize for his work on aspirin.

The controversy really boiled over when Dr S.R. Dasgupta of Calcutta, a retired professor of pharmocology at the Postgraduate College of Medicine, wrote to Wellcome accusing it of taking the *Lancet* quotation out of context. Dasgupta added that paracetamol was described in the same article as linked with toxic hepatitis—in other words, that it could seriously and perhaps irreparably damage the liver. Professor Dasgupta also made a pointed reference to the Sir John Vane connection and added that Thomas D. Kennedy of Burroughs Wellcome in the United States was a director of the Aspirin Foundation. "Against this background do you consider it ethical to run down aspirin in order to promote Ridake in India?" Dasgupta asked.

The Ridake row has left a bad taste, not because the product is inferior in itself, but because it was promoted at the expense of another equally useful product.



The Wellcome people were understandably excited over the letter, especially as it turned out not to have come from Professor Dasgupta at all. His son later wrote to Wellcome, saying that his father had been ill for the last six months, that he had never written the letter, "nor does he know anything about the drug Ridake". Who, then, knew about the drug Ridake? It turned out that the postmark on the envelope was not Calcutta but Bangalore. "Our advertisement has not even been released in West Bengal," said Dr C. Gupta, Wellcome's director of medical services. "So Prof. Dasgupta could not have seen it."

The hullabaloo only blurred the facts: both aspirin and paracetamol are effective drugs in their own way—both dull pain and bring down body temperatures. But aspirin is anti-inflammatory—relieving contusions and bruises where paracetamol can't. Aspirin is not recommended for patients with stomach disorders because it precipitates bleeding. Paracetamol, on the other hand is not recommended for people with liver trouble. Said a spokesman of Geoffrey Manners, makers of Anacin, second only to Roche's Saridon in over-the-counter (orc) sales of analgesics: "These people are unnecessarily quoting out of context and confusing the facts in order to sell their product."

Gupta of Wellcome argued that they had not misrepresented facts and added that Ridake is meant only for headaches, and is advertised as such. "There is no doubt that aspirin is a fine drug and its use against strokes, arthritis and heart conditions is well-known." He explained that Ridake is in fact only the orc version of Calpol, Wellcome's analgesic that is sold only on the basis of doctors' prescriptions.

But that has done little to pacify competitors, most of whom suspect that the excessively hard-sell campaign may have been brought out to cover the fact that Ridake, at 30 paise a tablet, is more than twice as expensive as aspirin-based orc's like Aspro, which sells for slightly under 13 paise a

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tablet. "An analgesic is seen not as a specific drug but as a general pain and discomfort reliever," said Homi Bhabha, marketing manager of Nicholas Laboratories, makers of Aspro. "Even though Wellcome says that Ridake is only for headaches people might take it for contusions or even arthritis, which aspirin is effective against but paracetamol is not." Bhabha gave an example of the pitfalls of confusing paracetamol and aspirin as interchangeable drugs: rheumatic joints require about 6 grammes of aspirin for relief, which means about 20 tablets. "You take 20 tablets of paracetamol at one time you'll drop dead".

The Ridake row has left a bad taste in the industry's mouth, not because the product is inferior in itself—doctors regularly prescribe paracetamol-based drugs for fevers as these are less heavy on the stomach—but because it was promoted at the expense of another equally useful product. Perhaps Wellcome was goaded into its anti-aspirin drive by the sad example of an earlier paracetamol predecessor, Plusprin of Lamedica Laboratories, which was launched a few years ago and flopped miserably. Or perhaps they had the brighter example of Johnson and Johnson's analgesic Tylenol in the US, which used precisely the same run-aspirin-down strategy to become top dog in the US market. But as the subsequent quarrel has proved, it was ill-advised and will most likely take more than a pill to cure.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

TCIL

Smart Moves

Shukla (left) and Aggarwal

QUESTION: Why is a public sector consultancy company toying with the manufacture of telecommunication cables, computers and related equipment? Possible answer: hedging against the oil price crunch.

The company in question is the high-flying Telecommunication Consultants India Ltd (TCIL), one of the country's premier consultancy outfits. The Rs 24-crore-turnover public sector firm's profit graphs have almost consistently climbed, and it has paid a 25 per cent dividend annually for the past three or four years. Last fortnight, however, it looked as if the happy days were drawing to a close. For the first time TCIL was heading for a drop in profits (*see chart*).

That would have rung alarm bells in most boardrooms, but TCIL has been readying for precisely this turn of fortune's wheel. It has got into a host of activities ranging from establishing a model telephone exchange in the capital to computerising both public and private sector factories. And it has a package of ambitious schemes up its sleeve: paging systems, a mobile telephone service and a "yellow page" section in telephone directories to list professional and commercial services.

The company is clearly shooting high, but its plans are no pie in the sky. The firm has tied up with the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO) to turn out jelly-filled telecommunication cables which it can use in turnkey jobs overseas, and it has floated a joint venture with the Delhi State Industrial Development Corporation to manufacture computers and related equipment.

The company is also talking to Bell South International of the US for the proposed paging and mobile phone systems. A ready customer for these gadgets is likely to be found in the newly-formed telephone corporation for Delhi and Bombay: TCIL's Chairman M.P. Shukla took over as the new corporation's chairman last fortnight. Said Shukla, who will continue as TCIL's chairman: "The mobile phones and paging systems schemes will take shape in Bombay in 18 months."

Says acting Managing Director Y.L. Agarwal: "We realise that our conventional markets abroad are drying up." The final justification for the domestic thrust—the firm has the cash to splurge, and technical expertise which can be used to advantage.

There are those who argue that if the company has not looked back till now, it is largely because its overseas wage bills, though high by Indian standards, are lower than those of foreign competitors. (TCIL has on its rolls around 1,200 staffers, but draws on the department of communications for additional staff for foreign projects.) A senior executive in the telecommunications business also said: "The company has faced no competition from Indian private firms abroad since none had telecom know-how."

Whatever the case, the public sector's showpiece is sitting fairly pretty, profit drop or not. With accumulated reserves of Rs 22 crore and comfortably full order books (new business in hand is worth Rs 60 crore), it has more than an adequate cushion to absorb shocks. And if the new projects go on stream quickly enough, happy times may be round the corner once again.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

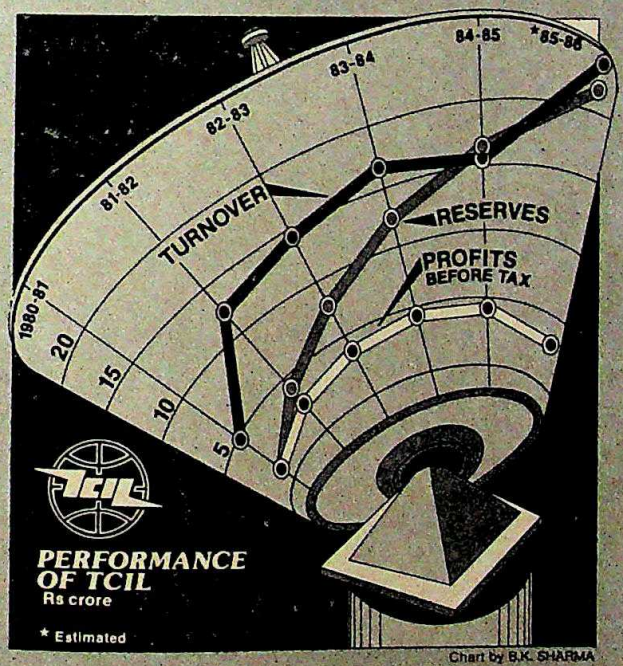

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

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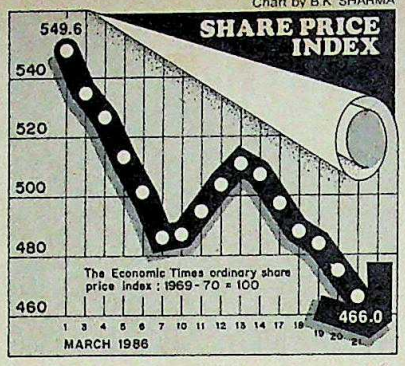
THE MARKETS

Sharp Setbacks



RARELY has the stock-market registered such sharp setbacks as it did last fortnight. The market's response to the budget was almost uniformly negative, and almost every share lost ground rapidly. There was some steadying of the mood after Finance Minister V.P. Singh clarified that he would take a fresh look at some of the taxation proposals that have come in for strong criticism at the hands of industry and business, but this did little to repair the damage. The result was that between March 1 and March 21, the stock-market index dropped precipitously from 549.6 to 466: a drop of more than 15 per cent, which is virtually unprecedented for such a short period.

Almost every major trading counter saw a sharp downswing. Associated Cement fell by Rs 105 to Rs 240, Bajaj Auto by Rs 300 to Rs 2,200, Baroda Rayon fell by Rs 60 to Rs 330, Bayer lost Rs 100 to close at Rs 500, Century Spinning fell by Rs 235 to Rs 1,230, and Indrol crashed from Rs 210 to Rs 140.

Some of the high-fliers on the market were equally affected by the general mood. J.K. Synthetics at Rs 93 had lost Rs 22, Kinetic Engineering at Rs 240 had lost Rs 42.50, Lohia Machines fell by Rs 6 to Rs 46, National Organic shed Rs 130 and close at Rs 575, and Tata Steel fell by Rs 240 to Rs 1,100. TELCO did no better, losing Rs 155 and closing at Rs 590.

It was a minor achievement that, despite the market's collapse, all payments were made on the settlement day, and the kind of payments crisis associated with market turbulence was avoided. But the key question was whether the market had levelled out of its dive and would begin to recover some of the lost ground. Certainly, the finance minister's comments in Parliament and to FICCI indicated that his tax proposals would be modified to help trading sentiment. But with the precise amendments on key issues like withdrawal of tax concession on inter-corporate dividends and the refund of investment allowance being effective retro-actively from as far back as 1974 not known, the future remained rather uncertain.

Some companies showed a distinct lack of confidence in the immediate future. For while National Organic, Hind Dorr-Oliver and Associated Bearings fulfilled market expectations with their bonus issue announcements, others like Wimco, Flakt India and Zuari Agro Chemicals seem to have had second thoughts on their bonus proposals. And India Photographic felt compelled by a squeeze on profits to cut its dividend rate.

The overriding message, therefore, was crystal clear: if the 1985 budget had sparked off a sustained and unprecedented boom on the share market, its 1986 sequel had brought about a quite opposite response.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1986 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 21.3.86	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	26.00	30.75	6.75 –
Associated Cement	389.00	236.00	240.00	105.00 –
Atlas Copco	92.50	72.00	73.00	8.00 –
Associated Bearings	990.00	740.00	740.00	150.00 –
Avery India	146.00	103.00	114.00	10.00 –
Bajaj Auto	2775.00	1950.00	2200.00	300.00 –
Baroda Rayon	490.00	315.00	330.00	60.00 –
Bata India	82.50	65.50	68.00	2.00 –
Bayer	680.00	445.00	500.00	100.00 –
Bharat Forge	86.00	48.00	58.00	3.00 –
Birla Jute	97.00	42.90	43.25	4.25 –
Blow Plast	160.00	98.00	98.00	18.00 –
Blue Star	110.00	75.00	75.00	17.50 –
Bombay Dyeing	120.00	77.00	79.00	11.50 –
Brooke Bond	95.50	74.00	84.00	2.00 –
Ceat Tyres	520.00	240.00	400.00	nill
Century Spinning	1690.00	1220.00	1230.00	235.00 –
Chloride India	122.00	91.00	95.00	3.00 –
Citurgia	65.00	43.00	46.00	1.00 –
Colgate	262.50	200.00	205.00	15.00 –
Cyanamid	100.00	70.00	80.00	7.50 –
DCM	58.50	36.00	39.00	2.00 +
Dunlop	74.50	49.75	64.50	nil
Elecon Engg.	117.50	82.50	86.00	9.00 –
Escorts	94.00	69.00	76.00	5.00 +
Food Specialities	285.00	215.00	215.00	27.50 –
Garware Nylon	61.50	36.00	37.00	3.50 –
Glaxo	87.00	62.00	65.50	8.50 –
G.E. Shipping	36.00	22.50	24.00	1.00 –
Gujarat St Fertilisers	1700.00	925.00	1235.00	150.00 –
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	58.00	61.00	13.50 –
Hindustan Lever	163.00	124.00	128.00	11.00 –
Hindustan Motors	128.50	99.00	102.00	14.50 –
Hind.Dorr	505.00	380.00	390.00	35.00 –
Indian Explosives	84.50	64.50	66.00	6.00 –
Indian Hotels	157.00	115.00	120.00	15.00 –
Indian Organic	90.00	63.00	65.00	10.00 –
Indian Rayon	151.00	100.00	103.00	13.00 –
Indrol	390.00	200.00	210.00	140.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	480.00	360.00	392.50	22.50 –
ITC	76.50	53.00	63.50	4.50 –
J.K. Synthetics	132.00	90.00	93.00	22.00 –
Kinetic Engineering	325.00	220.00	240.00	42.50 –
Kirloskar Cummins	715.00	547.50	547.50	32.50 –
Lakme	195.00	120.00	127.50	7.50 –
Larsen & Toubro	204.00	157.00	162.00	13.00 –
Lipton	69.00	46.50	59.00	nil
Lohia Machines	70.00	44.00	46.00	6.00 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	52.00	54.00	12.00 –
Motor Industries	910.00	605.00	610.00	70.00 –
National Organic	777.50	530.00	575.00	130.00 –
Nirlon	77.00	49.00	55.00	nil
Orkay Silk Mills	167.00	120.00	129.00	14.00 –
Peico Electronics	104.50	58.25	58.25	3.75 –
Premier Auto	745.00	555.00	575.00	80.00 –
Ranbaxy	160.00	105.00	105.00	30.00 –
Raymond	97.00	72.00	75.00	7.00 –
Reliance Industries	367.00	226.00	302.00	29.00 –
Sandoz	88.00	62.00	75.00	8.00 –
Shriram Fibres	88.00	62.50	62.50	9.50 –
SPIC	184.00	129.50	132.00	22.00 –
Tata Steel	1440.00	1090.00	1100.00	240.00 –
Telco	910.00	575.00	590.00	155.00 –
Vulcan Laval	162.50	85.00	107.50	2.50 +
Wimco	98.00	54.00	56.00	3.00 –
Zuari Agro	124.00	87.00	87.00	19.00 –

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.7492	8.6683
Austria	Schilling	100	78.0093	77.2611
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.0813	33.0000
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.0013	41.9739
Canada	Dollar	1	8.8209	8.7412
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.4828	1.4718
Egypt	Pound	1	14.9130	14.9018
France	Franc	1	1.8030	1.7935
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5694	1.5575
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1132	1.0978
Iran	Rial	100	15.3257	15.1351
Italy	Lira	100	0.8010	0.7930
Japan	Yen	100	6.9924	6.9237
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7630	0.7591
Kuwait	Dinar	1	42.9100	42.7330
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.8392	4.7944
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9030	0.8921
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5930	0.5881
Netherlands	Guilder	1	4.8418	4.8033
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7810	0.7673
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.6716	5.6218
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0732	0.0701
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4330	0.4118
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.7123	1.6984
Switzerland	Franc	1	6.5183	6.4617
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7560	0.7430
Thailand	Baht	100	47.7331	46.5330
UK	Pound	1	18.3166	18.1950
USA	Dollar	1	12.2700	12.1578
UAE	Dirham	1	3.3850	3.3560
USSR	Rouble	1	17.5730	17.4019
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	5.5340	5.3868

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 21.3.86.

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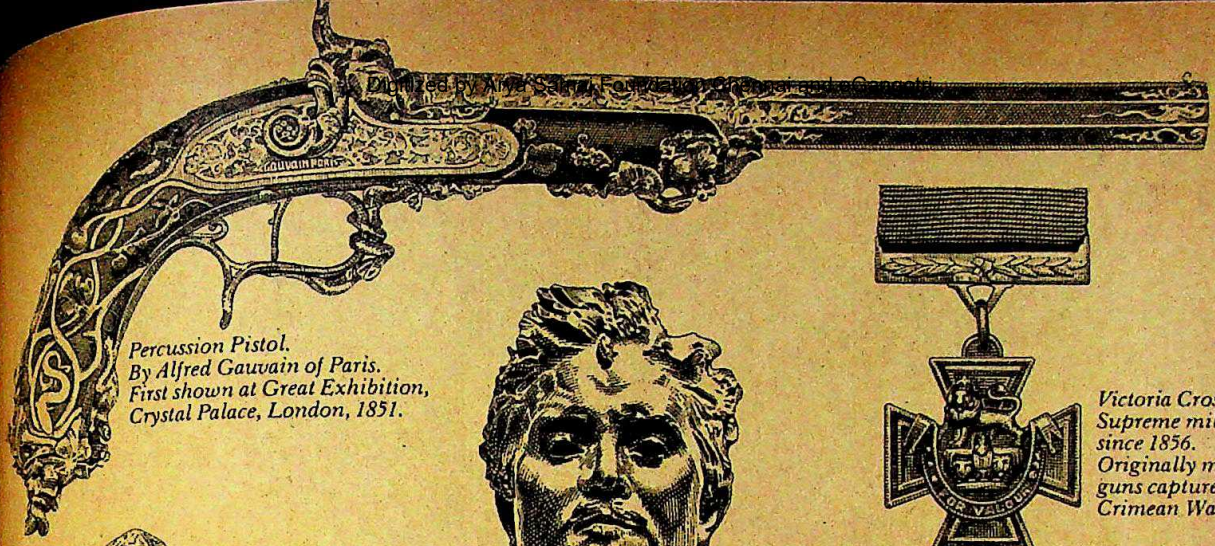
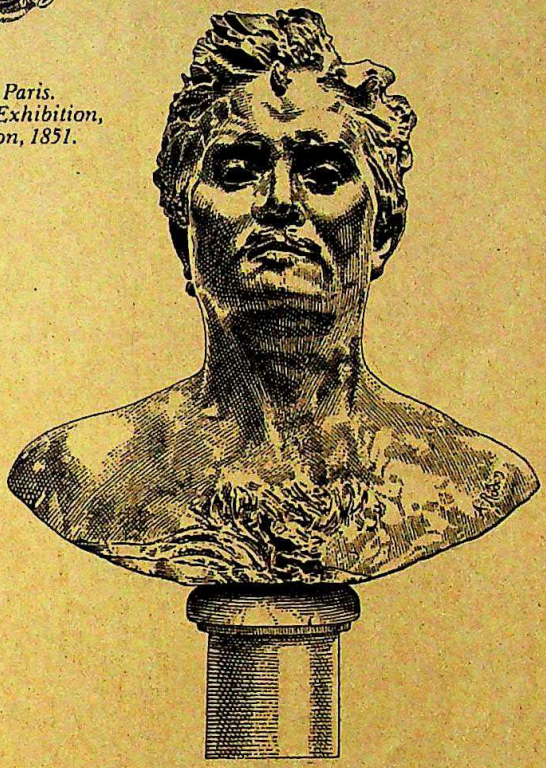


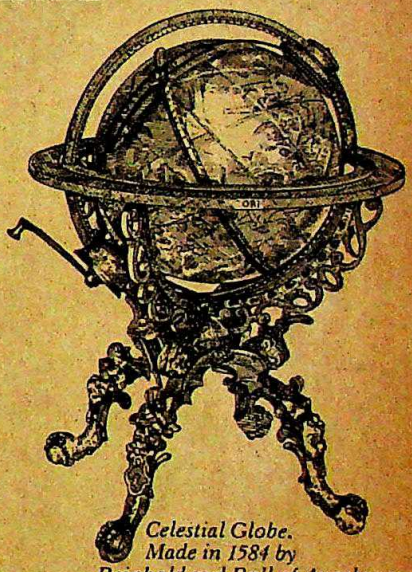
Percussion Pistol.
By Alfred Gauvain of Paris.
First shown at Great Exhibition, Crystal Palace, London, 1851.

Victoria Cross.
Supreme military honour since 1856.
Originally made from guns captured in Crimean War.



Head of Balzac.
Study in bronze by Auguste Rodin, 1840-1917.

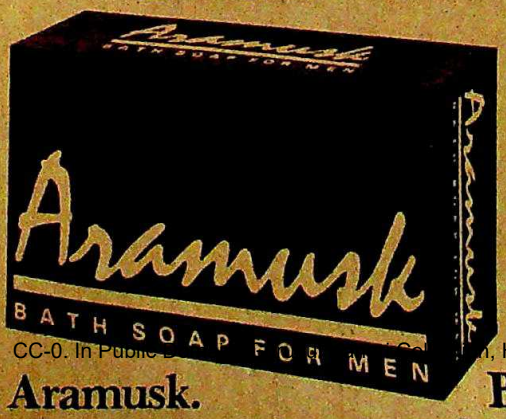
Waterford Decanter.
Classic full lead crystal brought to life by the breath of a master glassmaker.



Celestial Globe.
Made in 1584 by Reinhold and Roll of Augsburg.
Almost certainly sold in 1854 to Emperor Rudolph II, Prague.

Another certain something that's extravagantly male.

Danish Freehand.
Completely hand sculpted and finished to bring out the exquisite grain.



Aramusk. A bathing experience that pleasures the senses.
Capturing the timeless aroma of musk, said to be rarer and costlier than gold.
From Shaw Wallace.

Now available at select stores in Delhi only

Introducing Aramusk. Bath Soap For Men.

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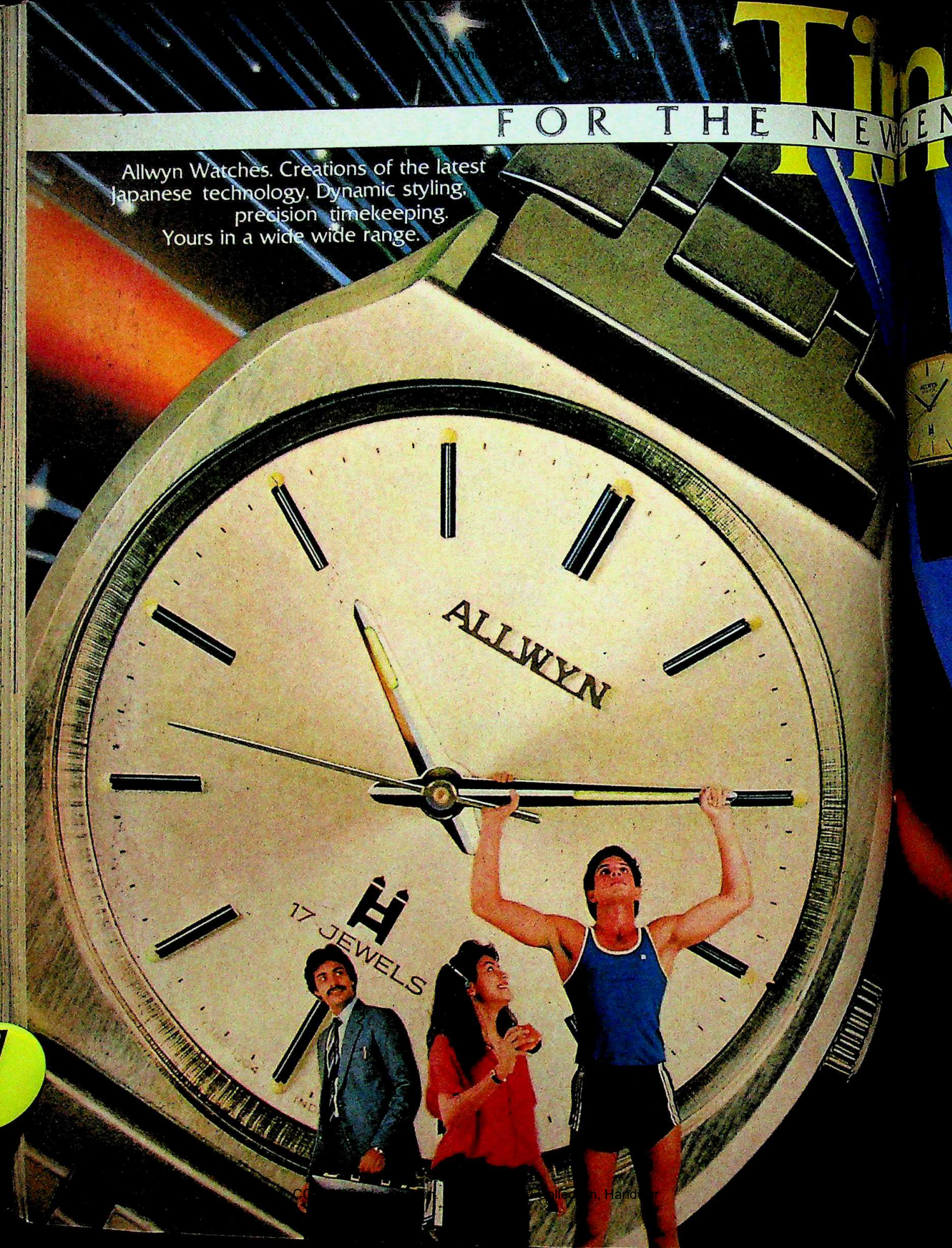
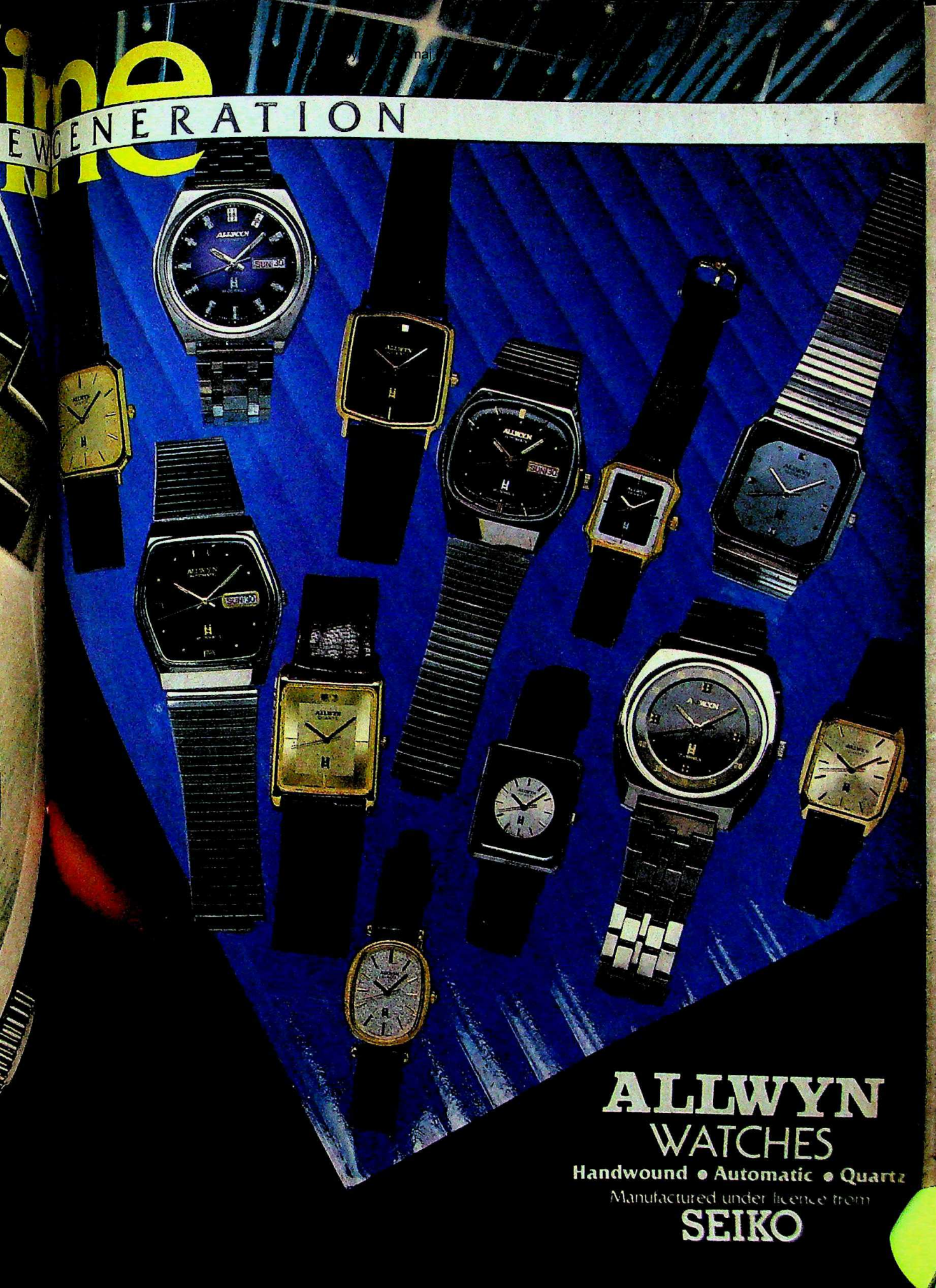

FOR THE NEW GEN
Allwyn Watches. Creations of the latest Japanese technology. Dynamic styling, precision timekeeping. Yours in a wide wide range.
ALLWYN
17 JEWELS


E WGENERATION
ALLWYN
WATCHES
Handwound • Automatic • Quartz
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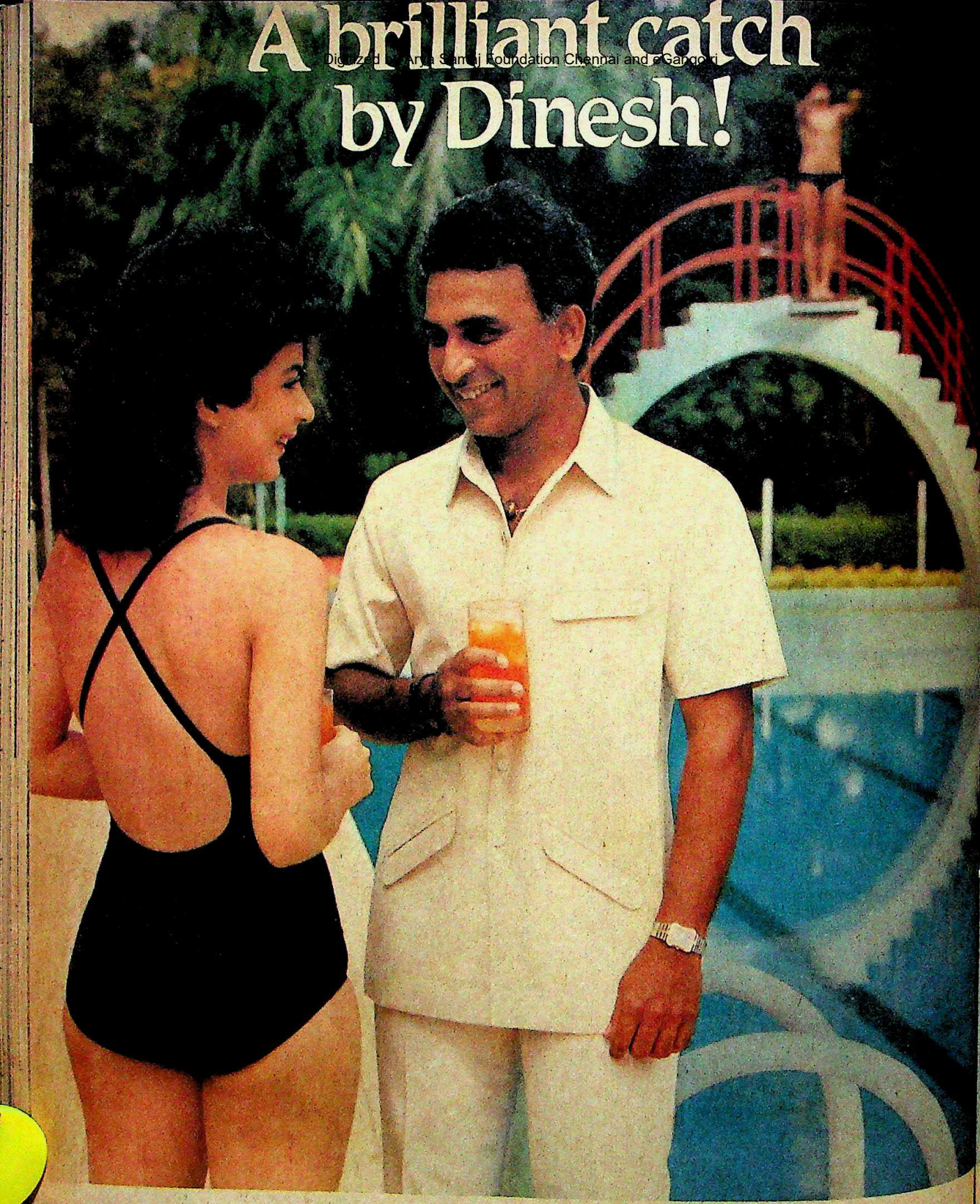

Crisp, lightweight Dinesh Safaris have caught even Sunil Gavaskar's eye. Because Dinesh Safaris are perfect complements for people with a cool composure and class.

Dinesh Safaris. In a repertoire of shades that are just right for Sunny days!

dinesh Safaris

Give you a distinct identity.

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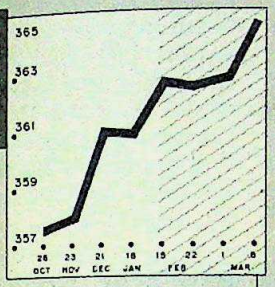
BOTH wholesale and consumer prices are rising steadily. As usual, money supply remains steady after adjustments in bank credit. Though the foreign trade situation is bleak, exports have shown a marginally better increase because of a jump in exports. The stock market went through minor hiccoughs in the post-Budgetary slump, and gold continues to be on the wane.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trend is computed on the basis of the last six months data to which a regression is fitted.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
7.0% p.a.

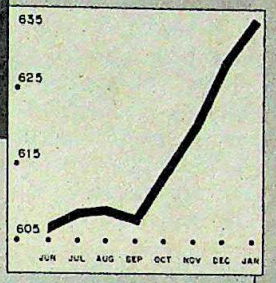


Between 22 February and 8 March, the index jumped by 0.6%. From an impressive zero rate of growth not so long ago, WPI is now near 7%.

Consumer Price Index

1960 = 100

Current Trend
10.8% p.a.

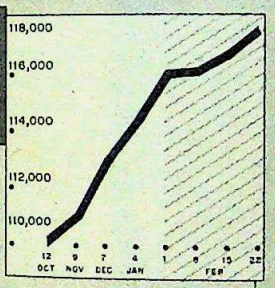


Between November 1985 and January 1986 the index rose by 2.3%, which was 26% higher than the long run trend.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.6% p.a.

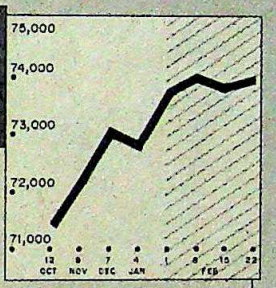


Money supply eased marginally in the month of February, but continued to expand at its steady rate of slightly over 17 per cent.

Commerical Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
9.0% p.a.

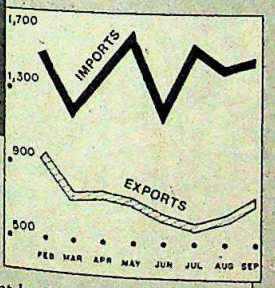


Bank credit is growing relatively slowly and the Government may be applying the squeeze here to keep over-all money supply under control.

Foreign Trade

Rs Crore

Current Trend
-21.3% p.a.
EXPORTS
4.1% p.a.
IMPORTS

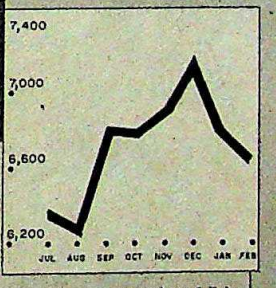


An export sprint by 23.5% between July and September could not reverse the fall. The trade gap in September alone was Rs 799 crore.

Foreign Exchange Reserves

Rs Crore

Current Trend
–5.2% p.a.

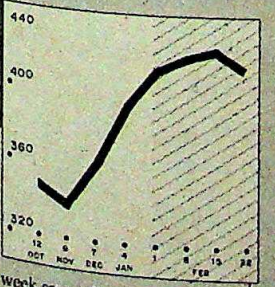


Foreign exchange reserves continued to fall by 7.4% between December and February. Inevitably, the Government has cut down on imports.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
45.2% p.a.

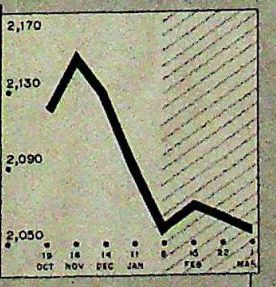


The pre-Budget week saw a 2.5% drop in share values—the usual "bourse-blues". And shares took a nosedive after the Budget.

Closing Gold Price

Rs per 10 gms.

Current Trend
–9.0% p.a.



In line with the past three months, gold has continued to drop though February went through mild peaks and troughs.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of Items February, 1986

	% Growth
Onions	26.58
Nitrogenous Fertilizer	11.25
Betel-Nuts	10.49
Phosphatic Fertilizer	10.18
Khandsari	9.22
Raw Tobacco	8.77
Masoor	7.18
Petrol	5.35
Wheat	5.23
Kerosene	4.97
Eggs	4.82
Coconut Oil	4.39
Rape & Mustard Seed	3.95
Electricity	3.88
Fish	3.35
Copra	3.31
Mustard Oil	2.87
Linseed Oil	2.85
Vanaspati	2.71
Coal	2.59
Sugar	2.42
Arhar	2.14
Trucks	2.11
Crude, Petroleum & Natural Gas	2.10
Cotton Cloth	2.08
Gram	1.92
Bajra	1.66
Copper & Alloys	1.38
Maida	1.26
Diesel Oil	1.18
Barley	1.09
Gingelly Seed	1.07
Ball-Bearings	1.05
Tapioca	1.02
Mustard Oilcake	0.97
Transformers	0.96
Aluminium	0.95
Cables & Wires	0.94
Meat	0.94
Machine Tools	0.92
Tubes	0.90
Butter	0.85
Pesticides & Insecticides	0.83
Jute Textile Machinery	0.81
Rubber	0.80

Of the 139 series considered, 89 of them with a total weight of 59.971 had a positive growth and 49 of them with a total weight of 26.593 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1986	1985
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, February	15951	14287
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, February	691	650
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, February	2685	2426
Crude Petroleum		
Thousand Tonnes, February	2562	2453
Call Money Rate		
Per cent, February	10.0	10.0

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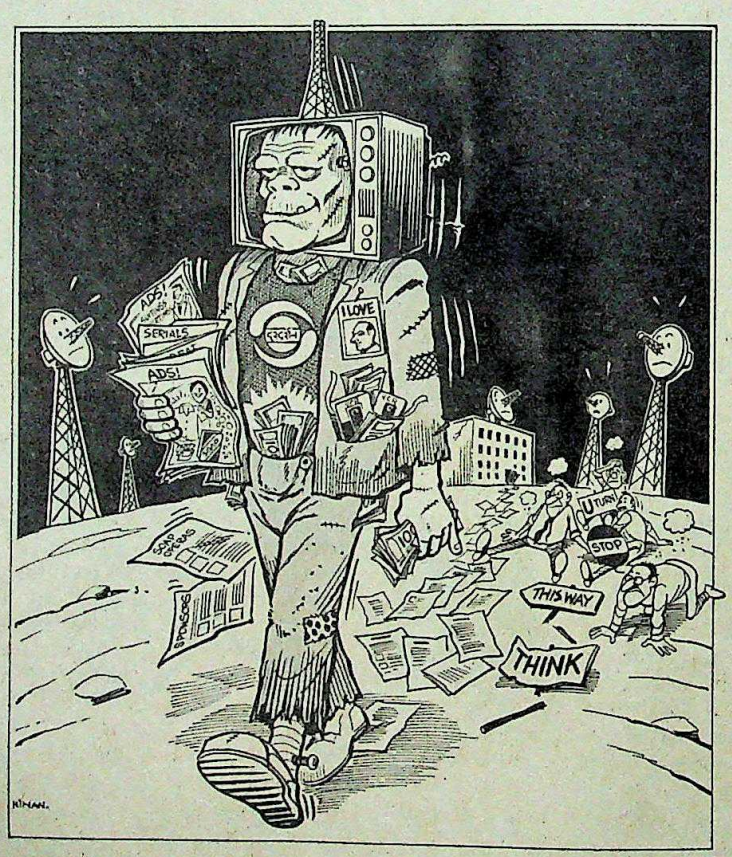
DOORDARSHAN

The Money Machine

THE WINDS of change wafting through Doordarshan appear to be hurried along by a flurry of bank notes—in more ways than one. Increased commercialisation and revenue have transformed the dowdy damsel that was the pre-sponsored programme era into an alluring siren beckoning a new and affluent breed of clients. Overnight, Doordarshan has become a money machine: an expected Rs 60 crore revenue in 1986; and much more in 1987 when the sponsorship rates are revised in November. The problem is that the money also seems to be turning up in peculiar places.

If the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) March 19 raid on the Ramakrishnapuram house of S.C. Garg, former controller of programmes (commercial) and executive producer of *Hum Log*, is any indication, something is rotten in the state of Doordarshan. The CBI sleuths allegedly uncovered "illegal" transactions to the tune of Rs 2.5 lakh. His friends insist he has been made a scapegoat and will take others down with him if it comes to the crunch. Following the raid, the name of Doordarshan's headquarters, Mandi House, has acquired a mockingly ironic ring.



There has always been hushed talk about corruption in the corridors of Mandi House. Those in the know claim that the going rate for getting a television serial approved for telecasting used to be Rs 5,000 to Rs 20,000 per episode, and the more affluent or desperate producers could end up paying as much as Rs 2.60 lakh under the proverbial table for a 13-part serial. "There is rampant corruption," insists a senior executive of a blue chip advertising agency. "A pilot rejected by Doordarshan was brought back to us by the producer who said he could get the approval on his own, but that the price per episode would be up by Rs 12,000." Other agencies narrate similar experiences.

However, the extent and scope of the corruption had been difficult to establish. Former information and broadcasting (I&B) secretary S.S. Gill says he received many complaints about money changing hands in Doordarshan. "Even the (I&B) minister was suspicious and I discussed the matter with the director-general. I used to tell these complaining people that I was prepared to lay a trap. I said I would sign bank notes and let somebody come forward and try to bribe an official. But nobody did." Obviously, word of the planned ploy had got around.

Many frustrated producers and private television companies charge that there is ample proof of corruption in the arbitrary manner in which serials are selected, and that this corruption has created a new breed of agents derisively referred to as 'Boeing touts'—air-time seekers who jet in from Bombay, head for Mandi House and return by the evening flight, often brandishing freshly-signed letters of approval. Says a senior official: "We used to get a call from the ministry telling us to issue letters of approval by 4 p.m. so that the producer could catch the evening flight to Bombay."

Given this kind of role played by the ministry, it would be facile to blame Doordarshan alone for the sorry state of TV. There has been ministerial interference almost on a daily basis and a senior official complaind: "We had to stand by and silently watch the emasculation of Doordarshan..." At one stage, meetings were held every Wednesday where ministry officials told Doordarshan what to do. As if that weren't enough, there were at least a couple of instances when officials in the Prime Minister's Secretariat passed on orders on what should be cleared. Clearly, Doordarshan often had little control over what it was doing or showing.

Certainly, there seems little consistency or established standards under which serials are selected. Some programmes are suddenly taken off the air while bad pennies keep turning up. Shobha Doctor's *Titliyan* was thrown out by Gill but aired as soon as he retired. *Ajube*, the Moliere adaptation by P. Kumar Vasudev made it despite objections, while *India Alive*, rejected initially by Doordarshan surfaced nevertheless, as did Vyjantimala's embarrassing four-part ballet on national integration, *Ekta*. "She made life miserable for everybody. She kept going to the minister until one day the secretary finally called Mudra and asked them to make it," said a senior official.

The charge of arbitrariness in allotting TV-time will continue as long as demand for it exceeds supply. According to George John, head of the Delhi branch of the advertising agency Ulka, the demand is 200 times greater than the availability. Nikhil Nehru, vice-president of Hindustan Thompson Associates (HTA), pegs it even higher: "If we were to get most of the air time for sponsored programmes, we would still want more." The task of selection thus becomes for-

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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

"Even the I&B minister was suspicious and I discussed the corruption with the director-general. I was prepared to lay a trap. I would sign bank notes and let somebody come forward and try to bribe an official".

S.S. Gill
former I&B secretary

...ailable. Says Director-General (DG) Harish Khanna: "The demand is so large. But this is not like the Civil Supplies Department where if somebody comes and asks for sugar you give them at least half a kilo."

And the deluge continues; proposals pour in at the rate of eight a day. At last count nearly 1,300 proposals for sponsored programmes had been received, of which only 169 were approved, and a few hundred "disposed of". Until lately, a producer would be informed about the fate of his proposal within three weeks of its submission. Today it takes at least three months. Some producers who handed in proposals in January have yet to even get a serial number informing them at what stage the proposal is.

How do the bosses at Doordarshan sift through this mountain of proposals? The committee of three entrusted with the job, with DG Khanna, additional DG Shiv Sharma, and Controller of Programmes (Commercial) M.P. Lele, is hierarchical in nature and the DG has the final say—provided the mandarins of the I&B Ministry or other fountain-heads of power do not intervene. But some producers seem to be more equal than others and their names keep cropping up again and again. Says a senior Doordarshan official: "If you sift through the proposals coming up, many of them seem to be Mudra or Ms Doctor." The latter has two companies: Time and Space and Concept Communications. Mudra, owned by tycoon Dhirubhai Ambani, and Shobha Doctor are eager to grab programmes from producers, assuring them guaranteed air-time.

OF THE 42 sponsored programmes aired between April 1, 1985 and March 1, 1986, seven were produced or aired by the indefatigable Mudra: *Spiderman, It's a Woman's World, Rajani, Hot Tracks, India 2001, Krishnavtar* and *Azadi ki Kahani*. No fewer than six involve Doctor, the new czarina of Indian television: *Hum Log, Titliyan, Jaane-Alam, Natkat Narad, Idhar-Udhar* (awaiting revival) and *Ajube*. And when the seven episodes of *Live Aid*, the concert in London in aid of Ethiopia, were to be aired, several sponsors were mentioned. But in the end, it was a Mudra show. Solo.

Livid when asked how Mudra and she managed to corner most of the sponsored programmes, Doctor says: "Friends say that I have a fox-eye for good programmes. I run an agency and have to make sure that I get the best for my clients. The reason why my agency and Mudra do better than Lintas or HTA is because they have to take collective decisions which take time, whereas we can take quick decisions." And Sashi Kumar, general manager of Mudra's Video Tech, said: "We have a lot of air-time because we are on our toes. This is a competitive field and we have an edge over the competition because we were one of the pioneers."

Now, with Doordarshan taking an epic-related turn the movie moghuls from Bombay are moving in with guaranteed air-time, almost like five-year plans. The concept of B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharata* has been approved though the pilot is yet to come since he says it would not be worth his while to build sets worth Rs 20 lakh for a pilot which may end up in the rejection bin. Ramanand Sagar has moved in with *Ramayana*, and not to be left behind, G.P. Sippy is preparing a 104-part saga of Punjabi refugees called *Buniyad*.

In fact, few producers seem to be worried about quality. Getting air-time has become a matter of prestige. Says a senior advertising executive: "Ad men are not worried about programmes. It does not bother them if they are trash, as long as there is a letter of approval. Viewership is the name of the game."

Apart from new-rich producers, the sponsored-programmes bonanza has created a breed of small and aggressive ad agencies which are muscling the giants out. Since obtaining air-time has become the new efficiency indicator, a frown of disapproval from a Doordarshan boss can break an established agency. Advertisers want air-time and will go to whoever makes it available; thus the bigger agencies often have the clients but not the time, and the smaller ones the time, but few clients. Also, producers tend to go directly to the advertisers. The larger advertising agencies now are losing their billing; eventually they might lose their clients as well. HTA stands to lose business worth Rs 3 crore. The agency had booked Rs 8.5 crore worth of air-time but got only Rs 52 lakh worth, and this has to be shared by its five branches, each with 10 clients. Ulka might lose Rs 70 lakh to 80 lakh.

Except for the fortunate few, however, producers and advertising agencies are at the mercy of Doordarshan or the Information and Broadcasting Ministry's whims, no matter how good, or bad, their offerings. As things stand, the aptly-named Mandi House has created its own *'Khandaan'*. The worry is whether commercialisation and the taint of corruption have created a money-making monster.

—MADHU JAIN

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

"The reason why my agency and Mudra do better than Lintas or HTA is because they have to take collective decisions which take time; whereas we can take quick decisions."

SHOBHA DOCTOR

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CHARLES SOBHRAJ

The Escape Scandal

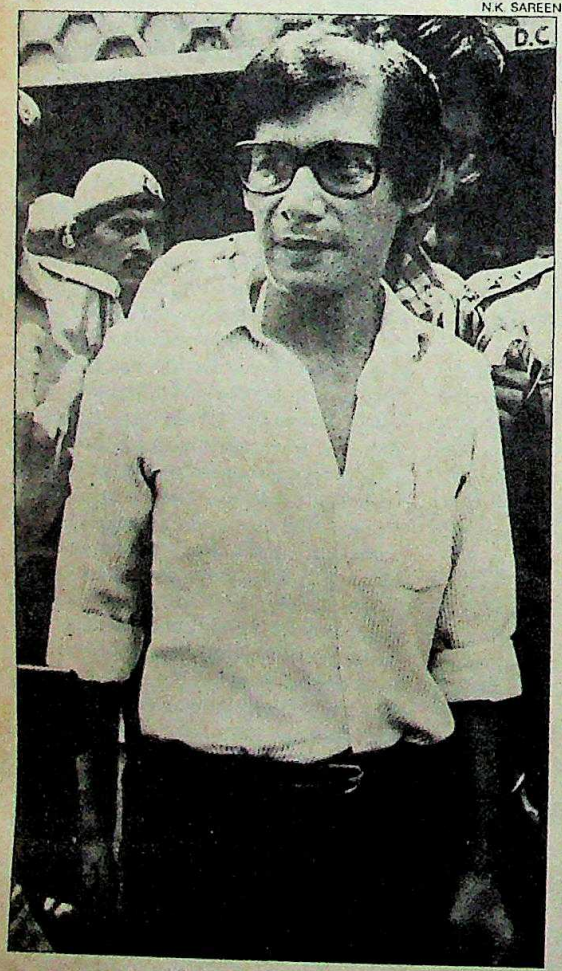
THREE weeks ago, an unusual event went almost unnoticed in the massive, 271-acre Tihar Central Jail complex on the outskirts of Delhi. In jail No. 3, some of the prisoners discovered a cat lying unconscious in a corner. It was still breathing. Some sympathetic warders tended it and on the third day the animal began to walk somewhat uncertainly. On the fourth day, it was perfectly normal though slightly weak from the strange ailment.

Last week, the cat's ordeal was a hotly discussed topic among the Tihar jail staff as there were no doubts left as to what exactly had happened to it. Charles Sobhraj, equal parts Svengali and Houdini and one of the most wanted criminals in the world today, was taking no chances this time. The master of the drug-rob-kill art had used the cat as a guinea pig to test the efficacy of the new sedative that his friends had just smuggled to him in jail. More vitally, he wanted to decide on the right dosage. The two earlier occasions when he had miscalculated the dose—once on his way to Teheran from Kabul when he drugged a Pakistani taxi-driver to death and the second time at Delhi's Vikram Hotel where the drug acted too quickly for him to make a getaway—had nearly written off his career. There was going to be no mistake this time.

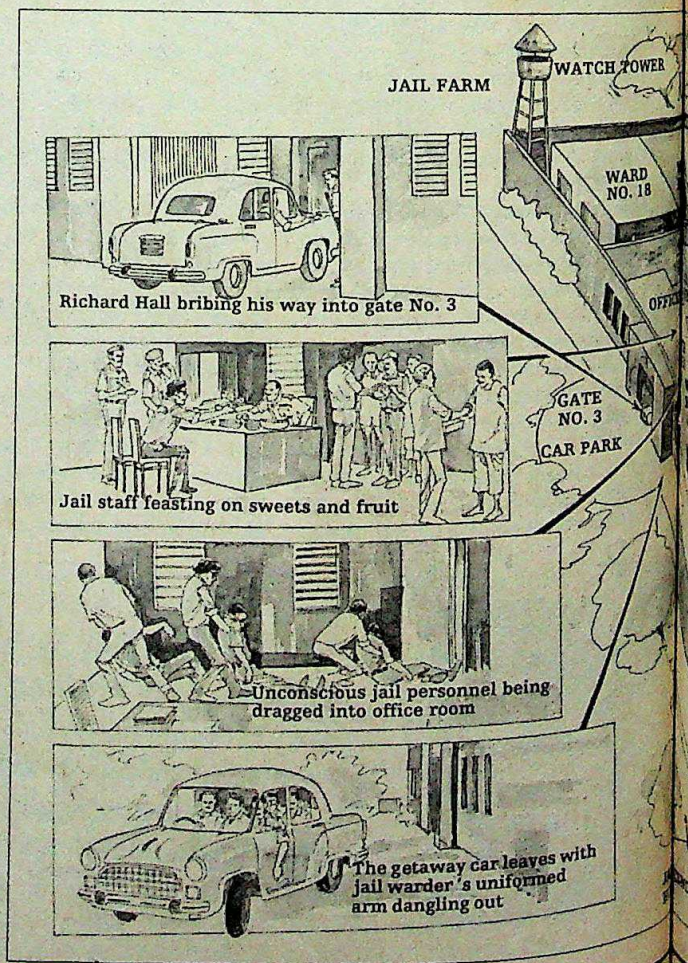
Last fortnight, as millions of people the world over woke up to screaming newspaper headlines announcing the escape of Charles Gurmukh Sobhraj, the reaction was not one of disbelief. The 42-year-old master criminal who had left law-enforcement agencies dazed and bewildered in a dozen countries, left at least 16 men and women (mainly innocent tourists) dead and scores drugged and robbed, and whose exploits had launched two internationally best-selling biographies, *Serpentine* and *Life and Crimes of Charles Sobhraj*, had disappeared from a top-security prison for the sixth time in his life.

"The inevitability of it had never been lost on any of us. I am only surprised it took so long coming," said Narendra Nath Tuli, the retired superintendent of the Delhi Police who, after years of painstaking search, had finally nabbed Sobhraj in Delhi's Vikram Hotel in 1976—an arrest that forced Sobhraj to spend almost a decade in jail, the longest jail-term of his eventful life. Widespread commotion followed his escape, with the Opposition in Parliament and the major national dailies calling the escape a national shame. Said the Hong Kong-based *Asiaweek* editorially: "Dr No, Goldfinger, Professor Moriarty, move over: Charles Sobhraj has you beat," and then added a dash of sarcasm: "Anyone can be slippery where there are greasy palms." And if history is

N.K. SAREEN



Sobhraj: slippery as an eel



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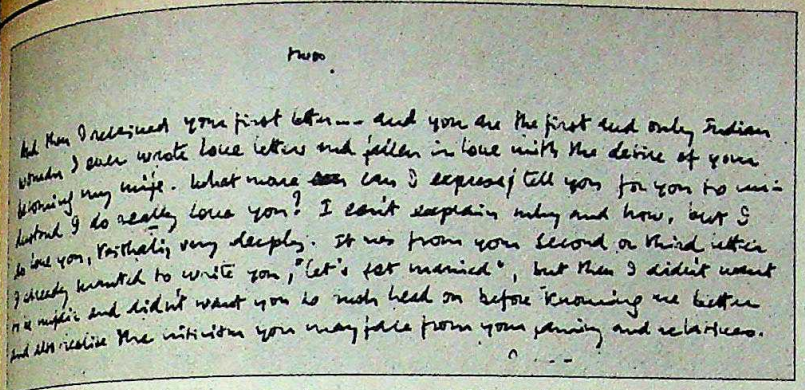


Sobhraj's love letter to Reddy

spy guide *(see box)*, Tihar has never been short of greasy palms.

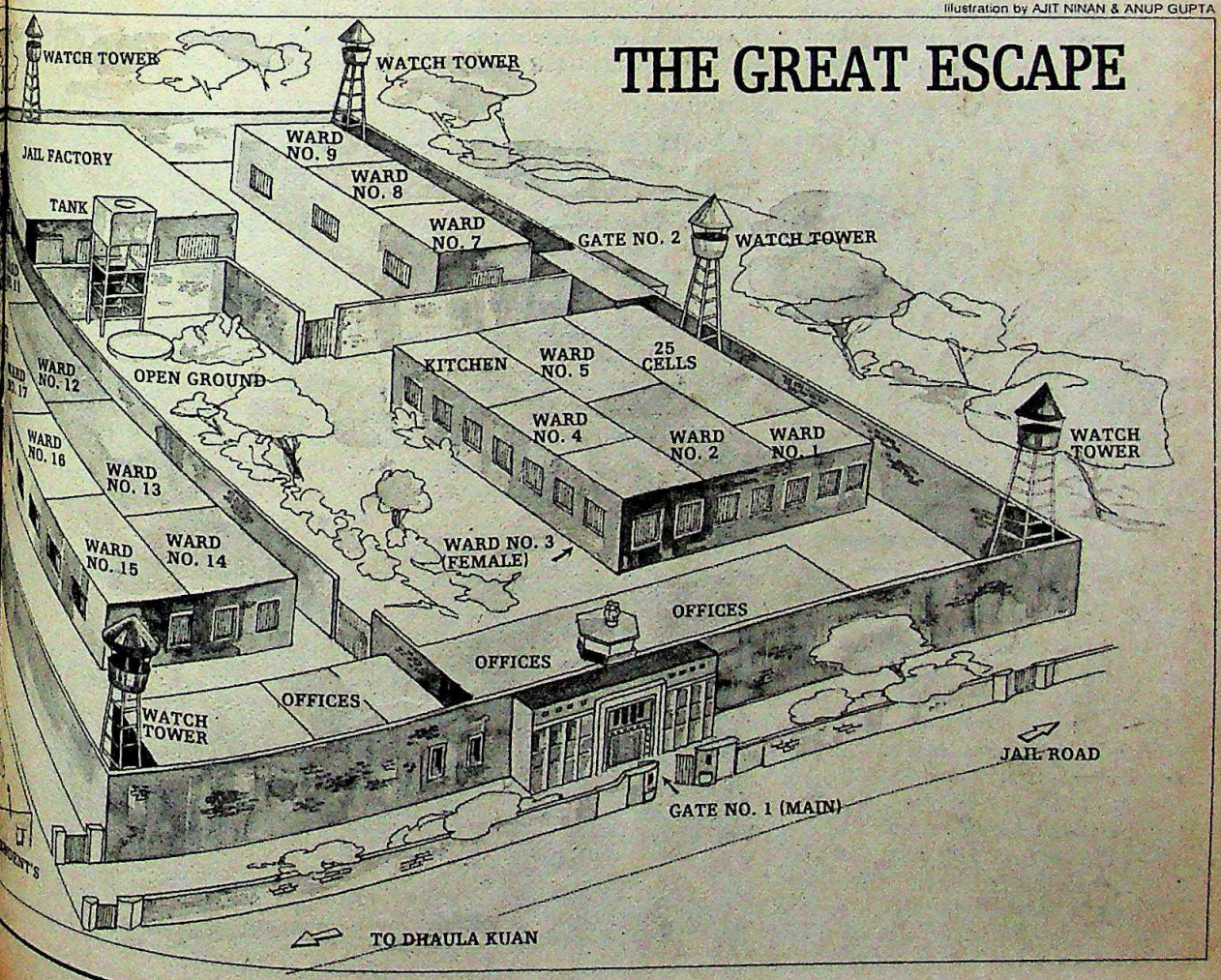
All along his chequered career in crime, Sobhraj had left behind him scores of surprised, drugged, and stupefied men and women. As did those on a lazy Sunday morning last fortnight. There were the two Tamil Nadu Special Police sentries sprawled on their bellies outside gate No. 3 of the prison, their .303 rifles lying impotently beside them, six jail officials lying inside the compound in a drugged stupor and, most telling of all, warder Anand Swarup collapsed half a kilometre away with scotch-tape stuck across his mouth. "The scene", a prison official recalled later, "was very comic and I could have died laughing had its consequences not been so tragic for all of us."

Contrary to what the jail officials initially leaked to the press, the first alarm was sounded not by a petty pick-pocket but by warder Anand Swarup, who came to nearly an hour after Sobhraj and his accomplices had dumped him on the road. The dazed warder made a dash for the house of V.D. Pushkarna, deputy superintendent of the jail, who went straight for the panic button.

By the end of the fortnight, after a series of grilling interrogation sessions, the police had finally begun to piece together the sequence of events that led to the flight of "Charles saab", as the don of Tihar was addressed even by prison officials. It was also becoming increasingly clear that his escape was not exactly the consequence of a conspiracy with the jail staff. It was, indeed, a tribute to the petty corruption, inefficiency and stupidity that has been associated with the jail's staff for many years now.

Corruption enabled Richard Hall, the British drug-runner, to drive into the jail on Sunday by passing across just one hundred rupee note to the sentry at the gate along with a basket of goodies—grapes, apples, chocolates, custard pudding, *burfi* and *petha*, all spiked with just the right amount of sedatives. Stupidity made the more senior jail officers inside

Illustration by AJIT NINAN & ANUP GUPTA



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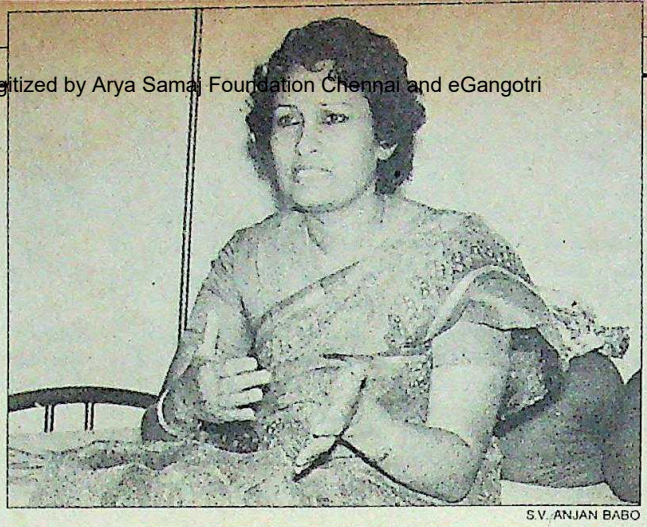
believe he was celebrating his birthday—when his birthday falls on April 6—and they swallowed the drugged bait, forgetting Sobhraj's past where he had invariably committed crimes by mixing sedatives in his victims' food or drink. And finally it was the incompetence of the armed guards on the nearby watch-tower that let him go unchallenged.

Sobhraj had left nothing to chance. He had bundled Anand Swarup, the drugged warder, into the car and as he drove away, let his uniformed arm hang loosely out of the window, making the sentries believe that nothing was wrong since prison officials were in the car as well.

For many months now, Sobhraj had been rehearsing and preparing for this, perhaps the most significant escape of his life after the brilliant getaway from a Spandau-like Greek island prison *(see box)*. His desperation to flee now was not without reason. He had already lost his appeal in the Delhi High Court against the chief metropolitan magistrate's order extraditing him to Thailand, and Sobhraj realised that once in Bangkok he would end up facing a firing squad after a short trial. "He realised that the charges against him in Thailand were of premeditated murder and not just manslaughter. And Thailand has not inherited a cumbersome, liberal legal system like India's," said Richard Neville, co-author of *Life and Crimes of Charles Sobhraj*, disclosing that Sobhraj had written to him in April 1985, saying that if the extradition case seemed to be going against him, he would "use the Greek method", referring to his other desperate jail-break in Greece.



S.V. ANJAN BABO

Reddy: charmed by the master criminal

But for breaking out of Tihar, Sobhraj did not need to do something as innovative as setting a prison van on fire. Over a decade earlier, to free his first wife Chantal from Kabul jail, he had tried to get Marilyn, his daughter's British nurse, into the jail on a minor drug charge to help his escape plan. It did not work out then. But now Richard Hall happily ended up in Tihar for two months on a minor and presumably deliberate drug offence. By the time he got out on bail two months later, in January, the contours of the plan had been perfected. "This was in keeping with his past record," says Tuli, now working as a security officer in the Delhi-based Jay Engineering Works, adding that "Even when I was in service, we had had at least three cases of his foreign accomplices deliberately getting themselves arrested to join him in jail. Each time we had

TIHAR CENTRAL JAIL

Open House

ON THE south-west fringe of Delhi, near the sprawling Janakpuri colony, lies Tihar Central Jail. Tihar draws its prominence not from the invincibility of a Spandau or the hopelessness of the cellular prison in the Andamans. It is one of the most inefficient jails in the country, where money and muscle can get anything, from alcohol to heroin, guns, girls—even boys.

Nothing—neither the exposures by reporters nor the criticism by several inquiry committees—has been able to reform Tihar. "It is shocking, shameful and unbelievable," that is how Zail Singh had reacted while on a visit to the jail in 1981. He had barely walked in when a prisoner walked up to him to offer him a glass of liquor.

Charles Sobhraj could hardly have asked for an easier playground. He was the don, manipulating the system through bribe and bullying. In July 1981, Ved Prakash Garg, an idealistic young officer wrote a strong letter to his superiors complaining of this. A probationer then, he was promptly sacked for "leaking" his letter to the press. Jobless for five years, he was feeling vindicated last fortnight. Said Garg: "His *dadagiri* was the *dadagiri* of money, and he used to boast that he would buy anyone."

Jail officials admit that Sobhraj drew his enormous power from his unlimited reserves of money. But there is no clear answer as to where the money came from. Sobhraj claimed that his two biographies fetched him quite a packet. But the authors of *Life and Crimes of Charles Sobhraj* assert that they did not pay "even a penny" to Sobhraj and he, indeed, had a long litigation with the author of *Serpentine*. He was hoping to make some money through the third book on his life being written by Kumkum Chadha, a Delhi-based journalist who had signed a comprehensive contract with him on sharing the royalties. Jail officials, however, say that Sobhraj made money by winning the confidence of foreign tourists, scores of whom end up in Tihar.

Gate No. 3: open sesame

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Jail officials Bahadur and Pushkarna in custody: grapes of wrath

...ve them thrown out ...ckly."

That vigil was not being maintained any longer in spite of reports that Sobhraj had come to be known as the biggest *dada* in the prison, with close links with Raju Bhatnagar—the dreaded Madhya Pradesh dacoit—and his gang, which included Brij Mohan and Laxmi Narain, two of the men who escaped with Sobhraj. The first step was to secure the release of Bhatnagar, who was bailed out mysteriously one morning in December last year.

More than anything else, it is the most outrageously scandalous manner in which Bhatnagar escaped that underlines Sobhraj's mesmeric control over the Tihar jail staff. Bhatnagar, accused in dozens of cases of murder, robbery and kidnapping, had already spent about four years in the jail awaiting trial when his bail application came up before the chief metropolitan magistrate in Delhi. Turning down the bail application the magistrate clearly ordered: "Bail not accepted."

But contrary to the order, the very next day Bhatnagar had been set free on bail, which he promptly jumped. He now carries a reward of Rs 25,000 on his head. The police have no doubt that he was the man who worked behind the scenes and coordinated the master-plan with Hall and Sobhraj. His bonus: the release of his two chief accomplices.

How exactly Bhatnagar managed to get himself freed despite the judge's orders to the contrary is a mystery that the police and the Delhi Administration's Law Department are trying desperately to crack. And there are no convenient answers. Bhatnagar's release did not become a controversial matter though the Home Departments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh promptly wrote to Delhi protesting against it. But now, with his suspected involvement in Sobhraj's escape, the situation has changed.

According to highly placed sources, a magisterial investigation has ruled that the release was a result of the court staff "not reading the order correctly". But the police find this explanation too simplistic. "We have heard of criminals being released on false bail orders, but this is a rare case of one who was bailed out against court orders," said a Crime Branch officer. A fresh, high-level investigation has been ordered into the lapse and police indicate that they are likely to arrest some more prison officials who may have been responsible for his getting away.

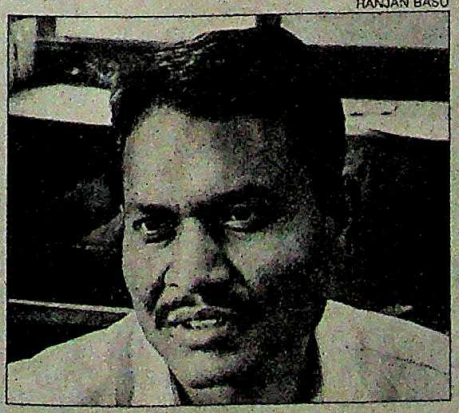
If money was Sobhraj's ammunition, his strategy was his enormous charm. "He was extremely polite, almost to the extent of being disarmingly reverential to everyone around," recalls Gopal Singh, a Delhi college teacher and Akali activist who often met Sobhraj during his brief jail terms. Sobhraj was extremely close to Rajendra Sethia whom he promised a million rupees from a publisher for his autobiography. He often used his influence to fix Sethia's out-of turn interviews with newsmen. In fact, he had such a cushy time at Tihar that he was miserable when compelled to spend a few months at the relatively strict Naini jail in Allahabad. He was serving a sentence of hard labour but had been assigned the relatively easy task of gardening. And he did little more than keep a look-out over the fence.

Now under attack, the jail staff point out that they also have some peculiar problems running the jail. For one, any well-known prisoner lodged here promptly gets media mention and succeeds in planting stories sympathetic to himself. An example was Sobhraj himself while he was fighting his case for the removal of chains and shackles. Proximity to the seat of power also brings into play pressures on behalf of powerful prisoners. This is compounded by the problem of perpetual overcrowding. There were over 3,000 prisoners in the jail last fortnight, as against a total planned capacity of less than 1,300: Jail No. 1, which houses convicts, had 1,250; jail No. 2 which has lifers and others serving long sentences, 400; and jail No. 3 which has a mix of convicts and undertrials, about 750. Besides there were about 650 in the camp jail which houses demonstrators.

Prisons all over the country are similarly overcrowded. Yet none matches Tihar's infamous record. Officials, including Delhi's Lieutenant-Governor H.L. Kapur, blame the state of affairs on the in-breeding within the small prison official cadre which makes frequent transfers impossible. But that again is a problem they have to live with and for once now, jolted and shamed, officials seem determined to bring about lasting improvement. Said Kapur firmly: "There has obviously been a slip-up. But this is not going to be repeated."

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

RANJAN BASU



"His *dadagiri* was the *dadagiri* of money, and he used to boast that he would buy anyone."

VED PRAKASH GARG
former Tihar official

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But while what made the criminals get away is scandalous in the extreme, what is currently on the minds of the Delhi Police is not the witch-hunt but the whereabouts of Sobhraj. "We want to find these people quickly. They are pathological murderers and could commit another crime any day," says Delhi Police Commissioner Ved Marwah. And 100 members of a special task force under the Crime Branch are carefully scouring all possible hide-outs in Delhi and other cities, microscopically examining each lead. And the trails they are following are familiar to those who know Sobhraj and his style.

In a way, his escape has only put the clock back—returning Sobhraj to his familiar world. "You look at his entire criminal history and not once has he escaped or committed a major crime without the help of a woman accomplice," said a senior crime branch official. Sure enough, his men had spent over 10 days in Delhi and Jhansi district of Uttar Pradesh looking for Sneha Sangar, a young law graduate who disappeared

THE ESCAPES

Nuts and Bolts

CHARLES Gurmukh Sobhraj learnt to break out of captivity young. Noi, his Vietnamese mother, knew only one way of restraining her resentful and violent eight-year-old: tying him with rope to his bed. But sooner or later he escaped, only to return to captivity again.

His career in crime is a reflection of his unusual childhood, only more dramatised and romanticised. His escape saga began when he slipped out of a French prison where he had been held for a car theft, to be re-arrested shortly afterwards.

True to form, however, he was arrested again in India as he shifted to Asia. And in November 1971, he played the first of his master moves, faking appendicitis. He was taken to the Willingdon Hospital and was operated upon. A week later, he used his French wife Chantal to keep the guards in the hospital busy in conversation and cleverly slipped his arm into his pyjama leg while the guards were locking the shackles round it. A moment later, he manoeuvred his arm free and walked out, casting aside the loose shackles. Hours later he was caught at Delhi Railway Station, still in his pyjamas. He was back in the jail again, this time with his wife. Given bail two months later they promptly jumped it and fled to Kabul.

After spending several days in the Intercontinental Hotel, Sobhraj decided it was time to leave: without paying the bill and stealing a car. They were caught on the Afghanistan-Iran border, brought to Kabul and jailed. And yet again Sobhraj acted his way into the hospital. Within hours of being admitted to the Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital, he had poured large doses of the drug *largactyl* into the guards' tea. He walked out while the guards dozed. The next to be drugged was none else than his mother-in-law in Paris. He invited her to his hotel suite, spiked her coffee with sedative and disappeared with his daughter who had, meanwhile, been sent to Paris from Kabul by the French Embassy.

He now began to plan a getaway for his wife and decided to drive to Kabul in a car that he commandeered in Rawalpindi after drugging its driver to death. His ingenuity, however, took him to Teheran where he expected help from the anti-Shah underground, whom he had been supplying guns and stolen passports. He was caught red-handed by the Iranian secret police, the SAVAK. But he was still too cunning to die. He revealed the identities of two key Iranian underground leaders and the SAVAK gratefully deported him to Turkey.

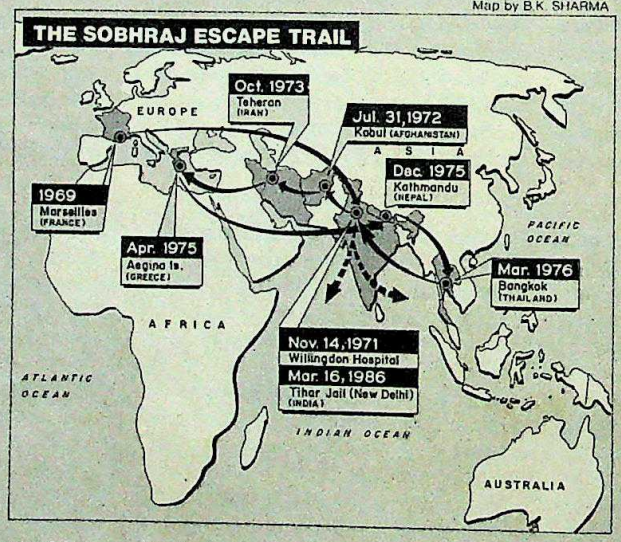
His next experience in prison was longer and perhaps the toughest of all. His brother Guy and he were put in a highly secure prison in Athens, and when his favourite ploy of vomiting blood failed to impress prison officials, he dug a tunnel but was caught while escaping. That did not stop him from repeating the tunnelling operation, leading to his capture once again and transfer to a fortress-like prison on Aegina Island which no one had ever broken. But Sobhraj promptly drafted Mary Allen Eather, an Australian nurse, who smuggled in a can of fruit juice—after carefully draining the juice out with a hypodermic syringe and filling it with petrol. She brought him an iron-cutting wire wrapped as bread and a Spanish pistol in butter.

A few days later, while being transported in a prison van, he succeeded in spilling the petrol from the can and set the van on fire. He escaped while the confused guards were still putting out the fire. The next time he had a close brush with the law was in Bangkok where, from a building called Kanit House, he ran an eerie empire of death and drug-running. While his house was being raided, he escaped claiming to be someone whom he had murdered in Hong Kong a few months earlier.

But the next time he got caught in New Delhi's Vikram Hotel, he took a decade getting out. In the background of his past, the only surprise is, why did he not break out earlier? The answer comes from his biographers: he always believed he could get out of Indian prisons through legal means. But the thought of the firing squad that would be waiting for him in Bangkok set him on the run again.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

Map by B.K. SHARMA



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(Indian Medical Gazette 118 223, 1984)

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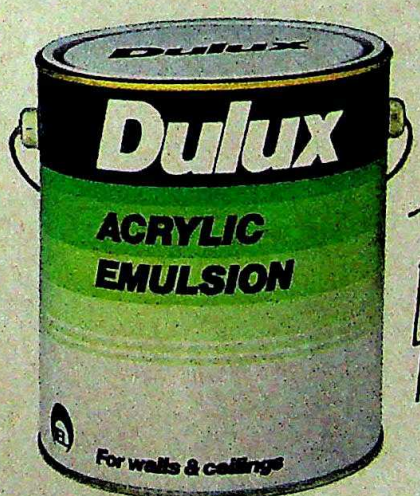

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Old Spice the mark of a man

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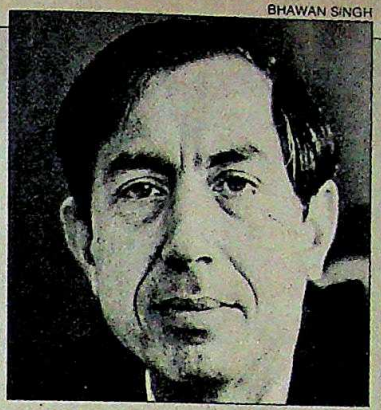
from the Delhi University's post-graduate women's hostel around the same time as Sobhraj did. Sneha had for a long time been helping Sobhraj in drafting his court petitions. Her hostel-mates also recall that she use to talk fondly of Sobhraj.

BUT LATE last fortnight, when the police finally caught up with her in her home town of Lalitpur near Jhansi, it soon became clear that the best she could offer was an insight into Sobhraj's mind. She apparently had no information as to his whereabouts or intentions, but confessed that Sobhraj had had a mesmeric effect on her. He had begun teaching her psychology, and in the process, had acquired almost complete control over her mind.

She, however, was not the only one. In their search for another such woman, the Delhi Police had to go all the way south, to Hyderabad. Under interrogation, one of the prison officials had stated that Charles was planning to marry Vaishali Reddy, a 46-year-old Hyderabad divorcee. In terms of her value to the investigation, she proved to be a red herring. But statements and documents recovered from her throw significant light on Sobhraj's personality, his pseudo-sentimental style of operation and even something about what was going on in his mind in the months before his escape. Making light of her two broken marriages and now the disappearance of the man she claimed to be in love with, Vaishali Reddy, mother of three grown-up children, spoke with remarkable candour to INDIA TODAY in Hyderabad.

Her acquaintance with Sobhraj began with an article on him in a pictorial magazine in May 1985, and she immediately developed interest in him. She first wrote to him in July last year. She says: "I felt he was a family pathological case who always craved for affection and family life. He seemed to have a father obsession and was rebellious and impulsive. It is then that I felt we could get married." Letters recovered from her residence by the police make intriguing reading. There are long discourses on esoteric subjects such as handwriting analysis, psychology, philosophy and law, all laced with mundane love messages. "That is how," she says, "our life and our relationship grew. And when he suggested that I meet his lawyer to work out our marriage details, I flew to Delhi and stayed there at his expense." There is little doubt that Sobhraj was generous with the expense, for when she visited Delhi on January 30 this year, he put her up in the expensive Maurya Sheraton hotel.

BHAWAN SINGH



"We want to find these people quickly. They are pathological murderers and could commit another crime any day."

VED MARWAH
Delhi Police Commissioner

On her return to Hyderabad, she says, she felt that Sobhraj was not likely to change his ways and wrote back to him turning down the marriage offer. "That depressed him and he said he had taken to sedatives. He was the kind of man who can never take no from a woman," says Vaishali, in a candid appreciation of Sobhraj's life-long weakness. "Charles' ambition," she says, "was to get married and settle down in the Bahamas to lead a quiet life, writing books."

But those who know Sobhraj and his style better say that all through his life, he hardly ever meant what he said. And that applied particularly to what he said to women. So, in their current search, the Delhi Police are looking at different angles. "According to information we have gathered from other people in the jail and Sobhraj's contacts, it appears that he had been reading a lot of teach-yourself-Spanish books," said a Crime Branch officer, suggesting that Sobhraj may have been planning to head for South America, where he is not a wanted man and the law is lax. But that, police officers think, will at best be a temporary abode for Sobhraj because he is the kind of person who cannot survive without crime and action. Even Richard Neville, his biographer, finds it hard to believe that Charles will suddenly disappear into oblivion after his escape now. "He told us that when he escapes he will change his face and lie low for 15 years," Neville told INDIA TODAY on the telephone from his New South Wales residence, adding: "But I do not believe that. That is not his style. He will lie for another 15 years but not lie low." Neville, like many Delhi Police men, suspects that Sobhraj could still be in India, in disguise and with a stolen passport.

Police officers on the Sobhraj trail are also following Sobhraj's drug mafia connection. They point out that he escaped with the help of a known drug courier. He also had a history of carrying out contract work and even cold-blooded killings for drug mafias. In fact, during his bloody depredations in Bangkok, he had often told his friends that he had been hired by a Hong Kong- based drug syndicate to "discourage" amateurs from getting into the drug business. "The whole thing has a serious connection with drug-running," says Delhi Police Commissioner Ved Marwah, who suspects that a man like him could be used by a drug mafia for carrying out contract jobs. Emphasised Marwah: "We worry because he is a cold-blooded killer who can murder people without any motive."

But, last fortnight, as the police floundered desperately in a sea of confusion and leads that turned out to be red herrings with monotonous regularity, there was still a belief among police veterans that Sobhraj will be caught again some day. His biographers, Neville and Julie Clarke, had once asked him why his career graph showed such a persistent history of capture and Sobhraj had replied with characteristic abandon: "That's because as soon as I get out I work again." Said a Delhi police officer familiar with his ways: "He is overconfident, adventurous and plain reckless. He can only live off crime and will surface soon enough."

The crucial question, however, is how soon is soon enough. With Sobhraj out on the streets, it won't be long before he strikes again. Tourists will get robbed, some drug-runners will find a new comrade and some, a new, fearsome enemy. And till he makes a mistake again and unwittingly walks into some police trap, there will be no stopping the spread of the macabre legends that mark the serpentine life of the man who is acknowledged as one of the most diabolical murderers of our times.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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VARANASI THE DUESO

THE RICKETY boat, built perhaps half a century ago and springing several leaks in its patchwork bottom, bobs lazily at anchor close to shore while the afternoon sun bronzes the naked back of the wizened old *mallah* who stares vacantly into the Ganga while stuffing a wad of crude Banarasi *zarda* inside his lower lip. From the boat Shamshaan Ghat, Varanasi's fabled cremation ground where Hindus of all castes burn their dead in the belief that the deceased will obtain instant *mukti* from rebirth, is but a few feet away. The ghat's giant stone steps, emerging hundreds of feet away from within a maze of temple spires and serpentine lanes, cascade down to a river bank black with charcoal, dung, and decomposing sewage flecked with golden marigolds. Nearby, a waterfall of a sewer empties the city's refuse into the river. The stench of putrid garbage mixes with waves of hot, acrid fumes from the burning flesh of corpses blackening atop blazing wooden funeral pyres laid out in rows a few feet apart. Occasionally, from within the city, tied into endless knots by the delicate weaves of narrow lanes, aromas of incense, of cooking, flow into the ghat of death.

Ram naam satya hai, Ram naam satya hai. The pall bearers chant their testament to universal truth as they carry a shrouded corpse of an old man tied to a crude bamboo stretcher down the steps of the ghat to the blackened river in which they will immerse it for a few moments. They have carried their dead for miles from within the city, or, if they live in surrounding villages, in a special bus called the Swarglok Express which

A body immersed in the Ganga at Shamshaan Ghat

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ESOF DEATH

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plies the area, picking up the dead and their relatives, stopping finally at a depot a few minutes away from the ghat. After immersion in the Ganga, the relatives leave the body on its stretcher on the bank of the river.

They have now entered the empire of the Dom Raja, Yamdoot on earth, the wealthy traditional owner of the ghat, king of the lowest sub-caste among the Harijans, keeper of the torch that lights the funeral pyres, supplier of the holy flame from an incandescent pit of fire which, according to legend, has burned, unextinguished, for thousands of years.

THEY must now leave the body on the bank and negotiate with the Dom Raja or his minions the price they must pay—in cash or in kind—for the funeral wood and, more importantly, for the sacred fire which can come only from the Dom's pit, that will ignite the pyre. In the Dom's domain, where the bodies of knaves, kings, Brahmins, and beggars crumble into dust, everything is sacred and nothing is sacred. Everything is excess and nothing is wasted. The lines that divide the living from the dead, the old from the young, human from beast, fantasy from reality wither away. The cycle of life, played out day after day, around the pyres of death in Shamshaan Ghat, is brutal in its simplicity.

The bodies of two women, freshly immersed, draped in red and bedecked with garlands of marigolds lie on stretchers on the bank of the ghat. The relatives are negotiating a price with the Dom Raja—26-year-old Ranjit Choudhury—who sits in a room above the ghat with his two little children, dressed like ragged little urchins. His recently widowed mother handles a bag of cash stuffed with hundred-rupee notes. The children stare at the burning bodies below through a large opening in the room. It is late afternoon. They have already been there since sunrise and will stay there until the evening. A huge, shaggy ram, a beast resembling a yak, winds its way slowly and with menacing authority down the steps. People make way for him. He approaches the bodies of the two women, frightening off with a threatening gesture of his horned head, a relative who tries to deflect him. He straddles both bodies. Then starting with the feet of each corpse he begins to chew, in large mouthfuls, the marigold flowers from the garlands. When he has cleaned both bodies of all

The hereditary Dom Raja, Ranjit Chowdhury: living among the dead

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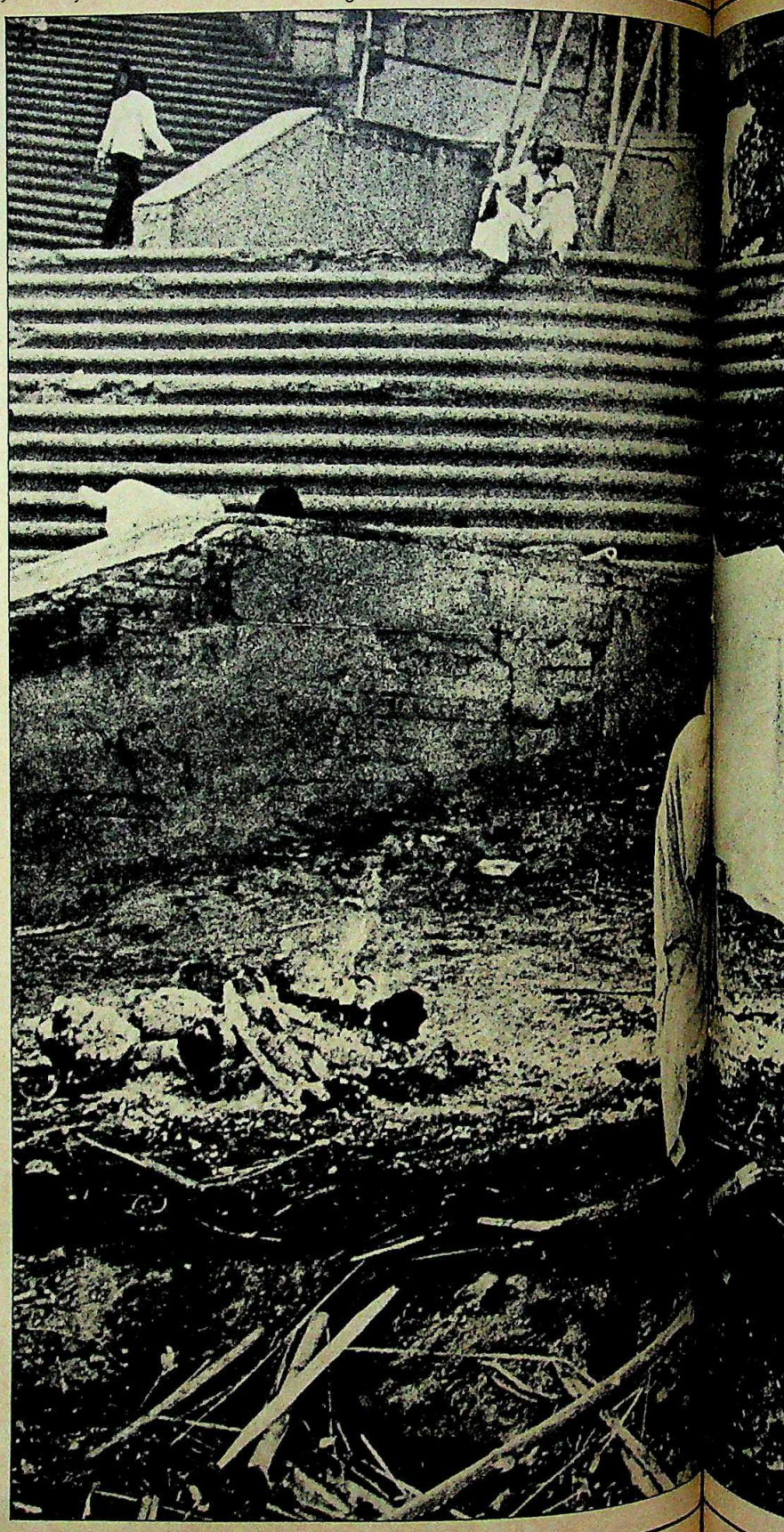
garlands he walks regally up the steps and disappears somewhere into the spires and temple bells of Varanasi.

Other families, who have paid their dues to the Dom, are now plastering the bodies of their deceased with glistening ghee. A servant of the Dom lights the pyre. On each burning pyre, relatives place dozens of propitious coconuts. As the heat from the blaze intensifies, the relatives and the *pujaris* move back. But little children, emerging as if from nowhere, and trained to withstand the heat, move in with little sticks and deftly remove the coconuts from the burning pyres. Gleefully, they break them open and begin eating them.

THE PYRES burn. And now they have another use. Ordinary residents of the city who have been bathing nearby or washing their shirts and dhotis approach the flames. Nonchalantly they stand around the pyres and dry their clothes with the heat from the flames which are still ferociously consuming the corpses. In an hour or so, the Dom's servants poke the remains of the bodies with huge poles. They dig into the burning wood for unburned portions of the body, lance them with their poles and hurl them into the shallow river banks where they cool with a steaming hiss.

Dozens of dogs, reared since they were pups on a diet of human flesh attack the discarded remains, some of which float out into the river to provide food for circling kites which skim the water. The unburned wood is thrown into the river and then collected by the Dom's servants in boats which ferry the funereal lumber to the Dom's house for his cooking needs. And as the embers from the pyre begin to lose their glow, little children with earthenware pots collect the coal for cooking, and ganja smokers gather to stuff burning embers into their *chillums*. The next day, the Dom's servants will sift the ashes for any gold or silver jewellery which the corpses had worn.

It is late at night. The sound of a violent quarrel can be heard inside the Dom's room above the ghat. Villagers from a distant village are screaming at his servant that they have been charged too much. The servant protests that the Dom does not exploit the poor. "According to our *dharma*," he says, "everybody must pay something. But we let people pay according to their own desires." Down below, at the cremation ground, two



About 200 bodies are burned in this area each day

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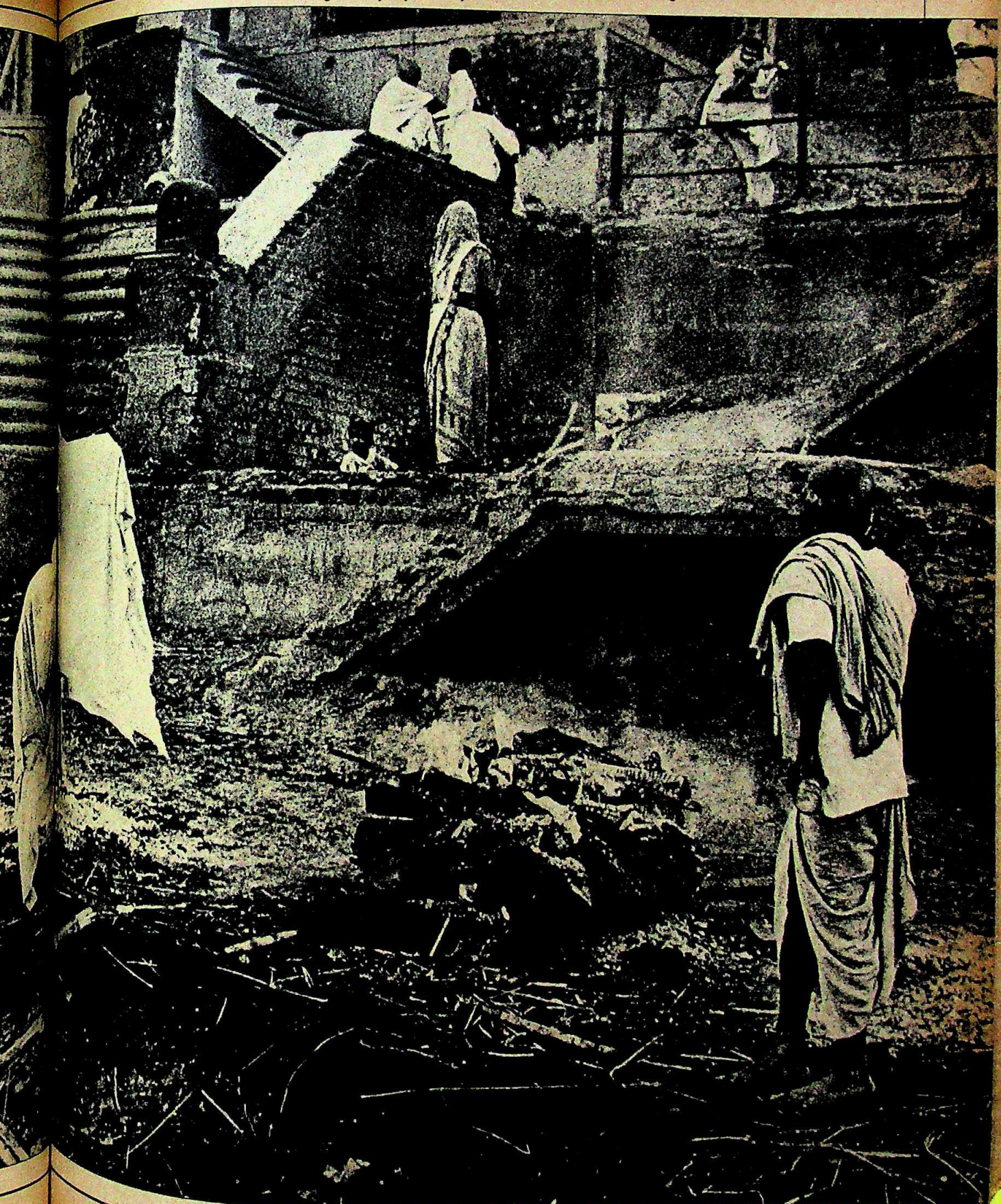

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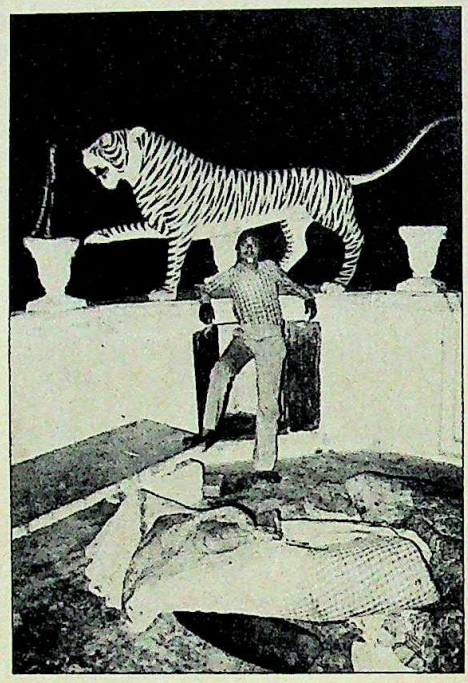
peasants from Sherwan village near Bhadoi have been waiting two hours for a flame for the pyre of a dead relative. They have already paid for 40 kg of wood for the funeral. "And now," says Bir Pratap, one of the relatives, "they are asking us to pay Rs 150 along with a quintal of wheat. We can't afford this."

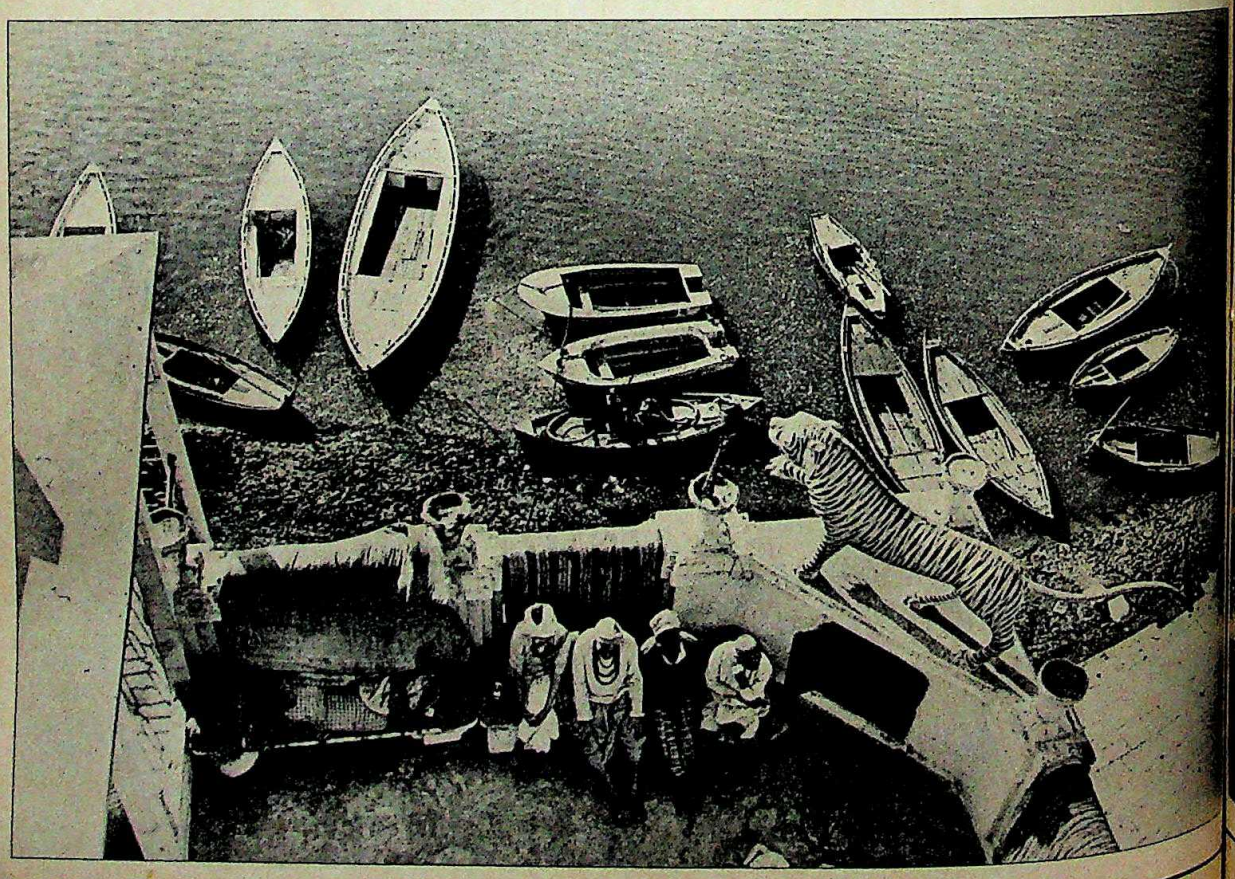
A HALF hour later, the negotiation ends with the family agreeing to pay Rs 125 plus the demanded weight in wheat. A close friend of the Dom says that at least 200 corpses are burned at the ghat each day. "People surrender titles to their land. One man even gifted a jeep. The Dom can demand what he wants because his torch carries the power of *mukti*." It is widely known in Varanasi that a hundred years ago or so, a wealthy trader, Kasmiri Mal, on the demand of the Dom covered the funeral pyre with diamonds and other gems as the price of a single cremation.

Shamshaan Ghat is also known as Manakarinika Ghat. Legend has it that the Doms were once a family of high caste Brahmins but fell from grace. After Parvati died and different parts of her body were flung to different places in India, her earring fell at the present ghat. A member of this Brahmin family picked it up and kept it. When Shiva discovered this he cursed the family and decreed that they become the lowest of the untouchables—the Doms. The man who had found the earring pleaded for mercy on the ground that he was a *bhakt* and that he had sought to return the piece to Shiva. Unable to recant the curse, Shiva was nonetheless able to modify it by gifting them the ghat and giving them a sacred fire, cremation by which would provide *mukti* to all who were burned there. The Dom Rajas, including Ranjit, are said to be the direct descendants of this family.



The fire from which the funeral pyres are lit is kept burning day and night. But the Dom Raja and his family—reputed to be possessed of fabulous wealth—are Varanasi's most untouchable of untouchables. A recent income tax raid on his house unearthed about Rs 10 lakh in assets. And he has been assessed for Rs 17 lakh. Yet the Dom cannot enter anybody's house. He cannot enter a temple. He can worship at the Vishwanath temple only from outside. And Ranjit's father, Kailash, used to walk through the gullies of Varanasi with a gold-tipped *trishul*, politely asking people to move away from him.

Dom Raja Ranjit lives in a palatial



Dom Raja's *haveli* (left); and ram eating flowers off shrouded corpses

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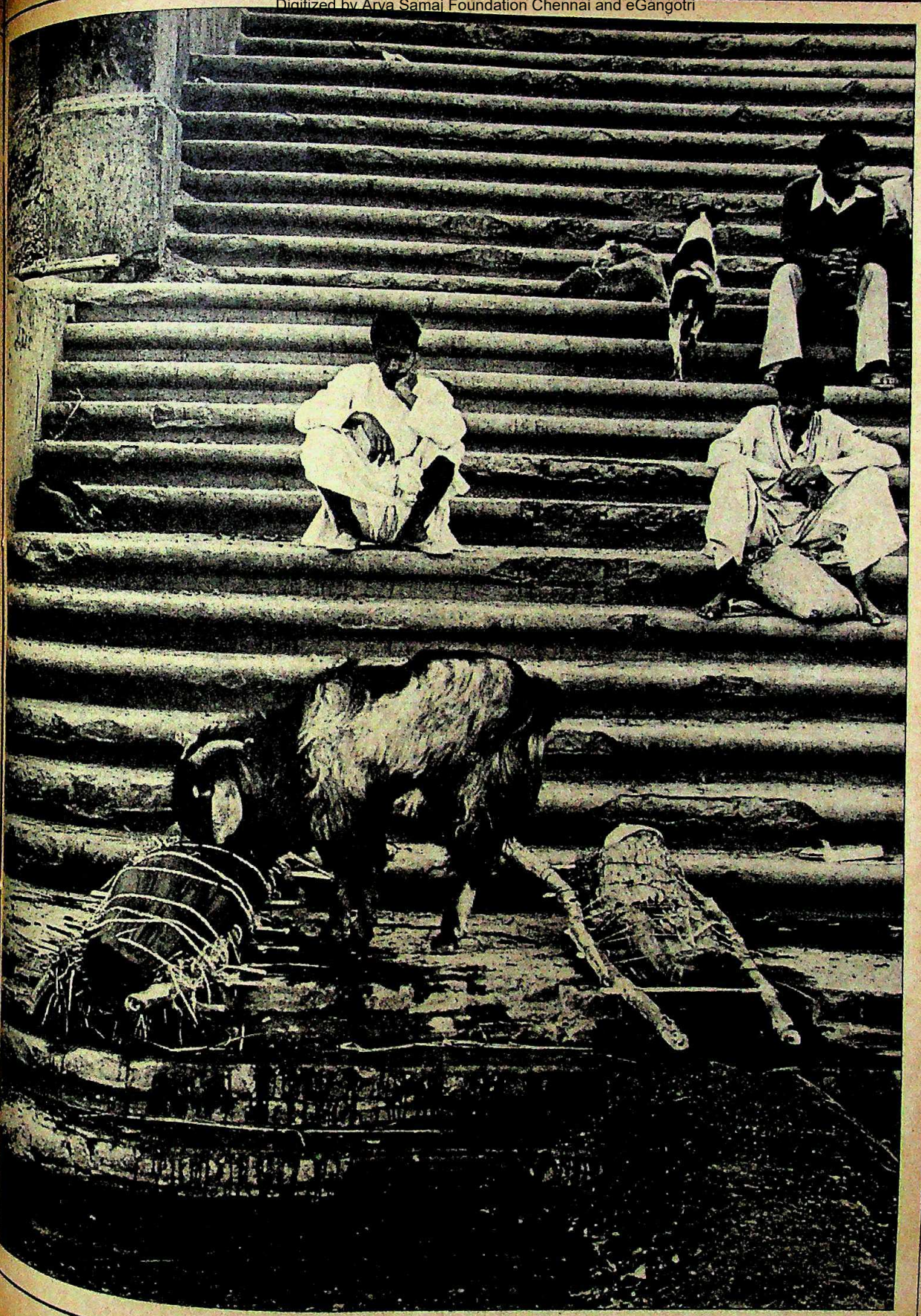

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haveli-like mansion on the banks of the Ganga on Manmandir Ghat. The three-storey dwelling has its own Rama-Sita temple with two large stone tigers atop a parapet snarling at the Ganga. He dresses in a lungi and vest and has a smattering of an education. It is night. Ranjit is reeking of cheap country liquor. His knee and chin are bandaged from an encounter with a bull in a gully the previous day.

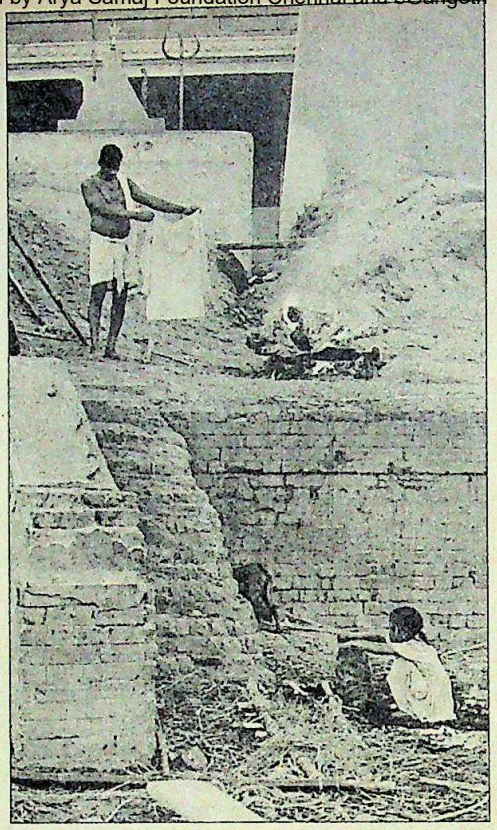
DO YOU know what I want?" he says. "I want *mukti* from here, from this job. I'm tired of this life. I have to take, take, take from people all the time. This is my *dharma*. I live on this *najaiz* business. I earn from the wages of sadness and death." He is emotional and defiant. "I will die. You will die. But people won't drink water from my hands. I have the same blood as you. I feel the same pain. You've seen those funeral pyres. Do you see any differences between the corpses? But I'm *achhoot*. People shoo me off. They call me a *neech* and a Dom."

He would liked to have studied, he says, to speak English "and to mix in society. I may have a lot of money but what use is it? I hate this work, but my family has to eat. I have to maintain 45 servants and a huge family. I have 18 suits. But I never get to wear them. I work day and night, I sleep three hours. I hardly get time to play with my children."

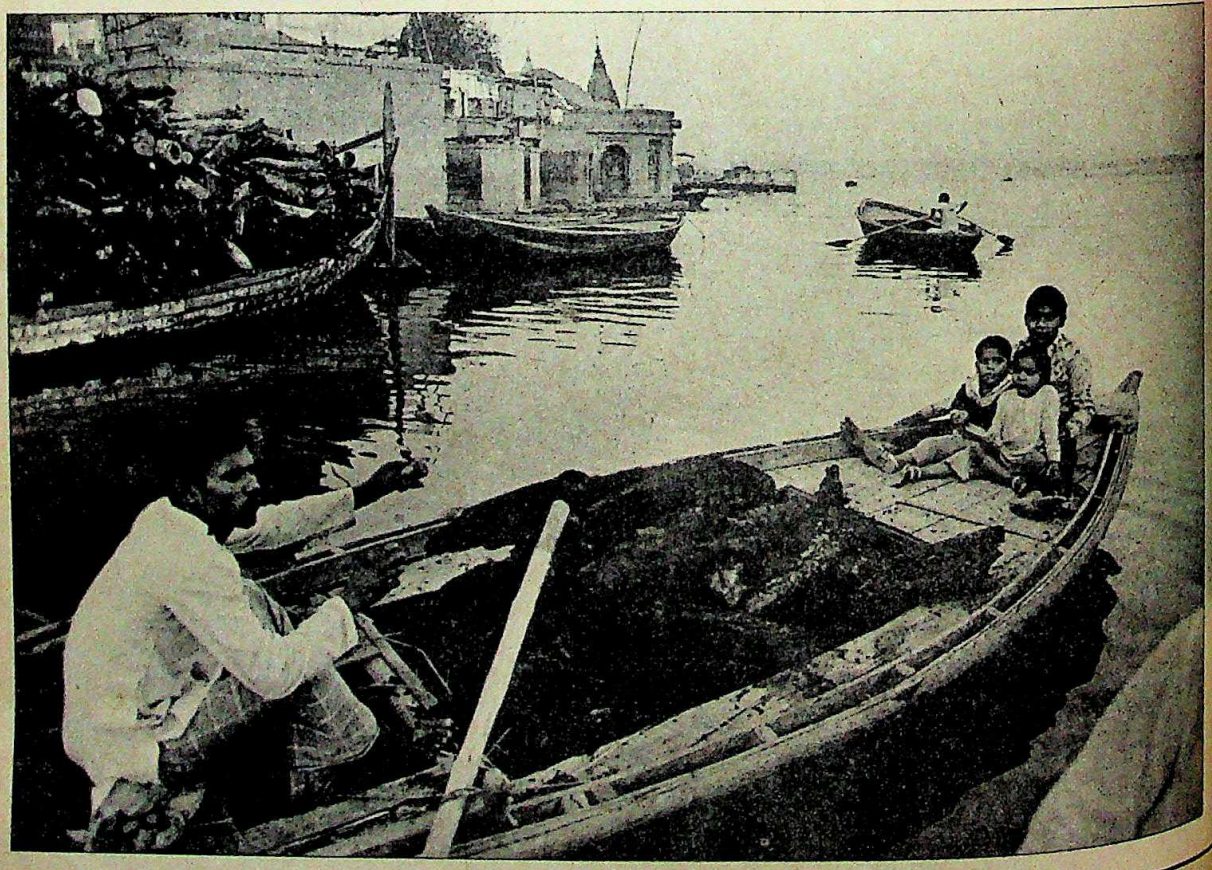
But, he says he cannot get away from this "*murdon ki kamai* (earning from the dead). It is my fate. It is my prison. What else can I do? If I open up a shop or a business who will come there? Who will buy from me?" He drinks, he says, because he must forget his life.

He gets used to the death. But sometimes, he says, "I cannot banish the smell of death, of rotting corpses I have to pick up off the streets, from my mind. I don't fear death but I keep thinking of these bodies, bodies all the time even when I sleep. And sometimes when I eat I think of the corpses, of the smell. I cannot even swallow."

—INDERJIT BADHWAR in Varanasi



Pyres provide heat for drying clothes (right); Dom's children in the boat taking unburned wood



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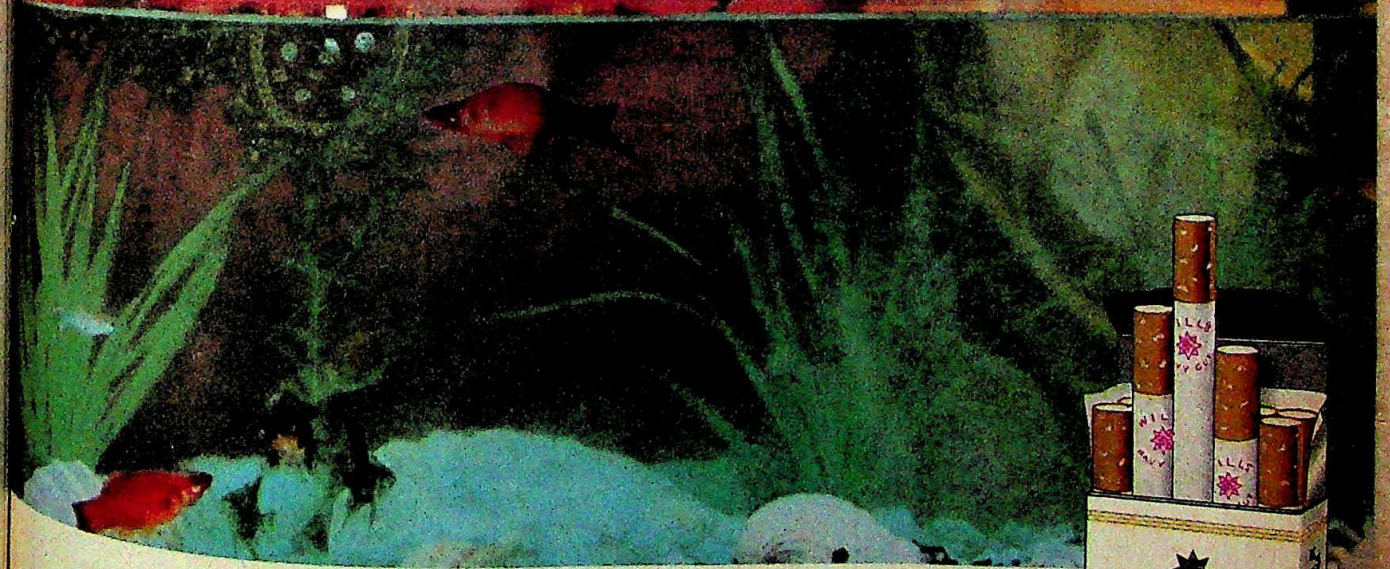

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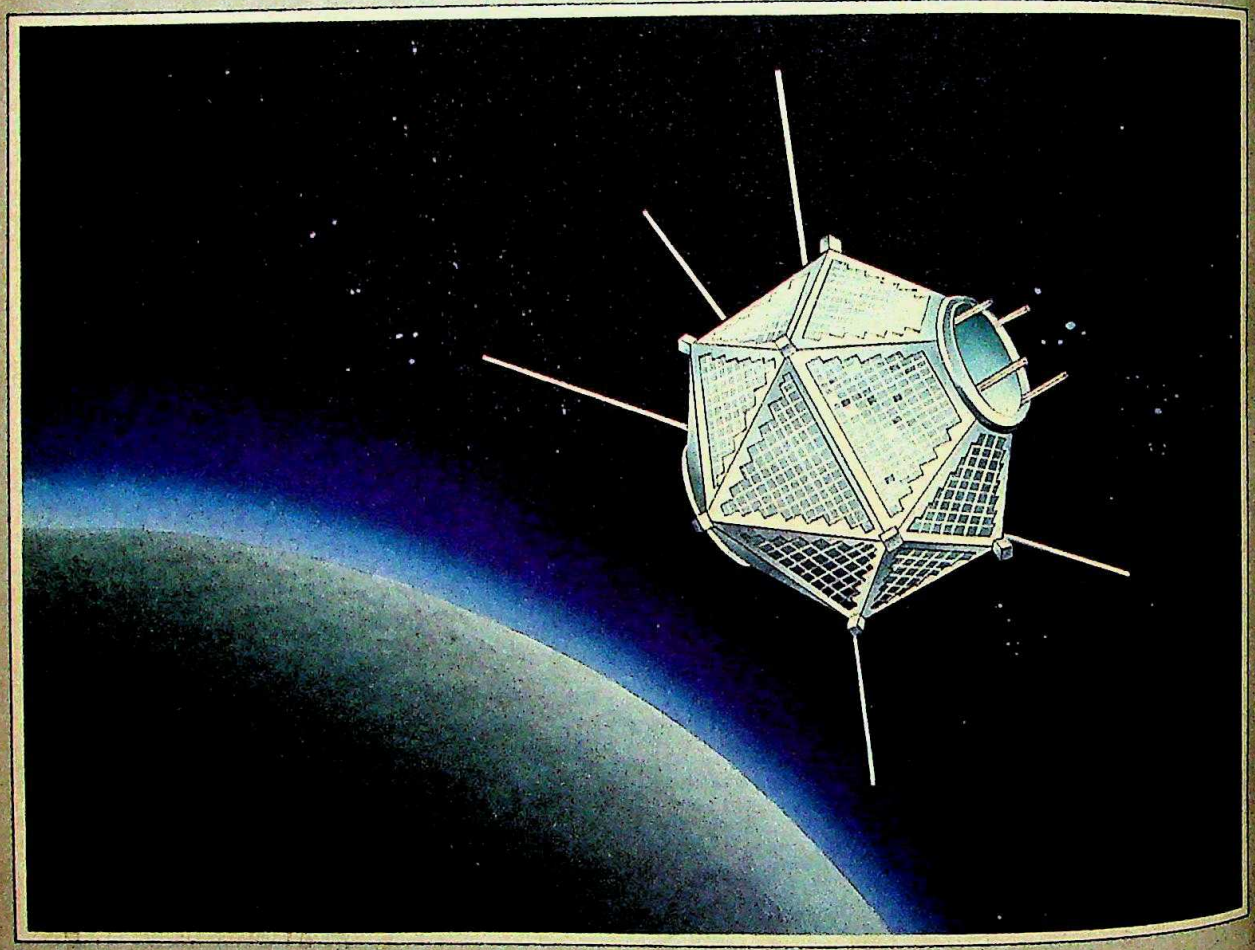

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Most people get taken in when buying a television set. Taken in by high-flying technical jargon. Or they get their heads turned by a good looking cabinet and dazzling full-colour life style. But a TV set has nothing to do with frills. Or with claims. It's only as good as its heart. And the heart of a television set is high technology.

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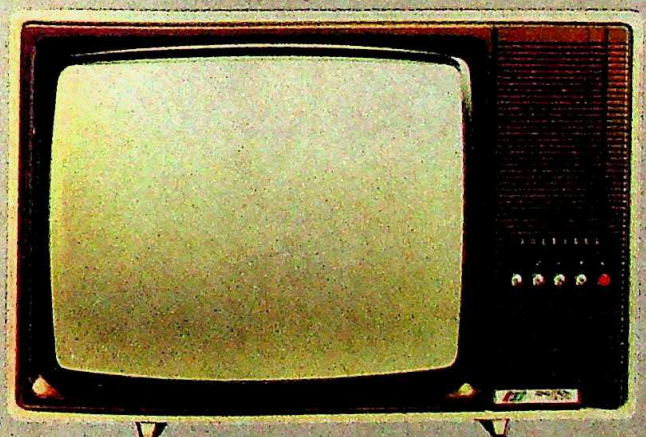

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Alex Kirby (right) directing Fred Treves (left) at Gurney House while Jackie looks on

JIM CORBETT

Reliving the Legend

JIM CORBETT is alive and well and stalking man-eaters in the hills of Kumaon. Well, almost. Forty years since the day Corbett and his elder sister, Maggie, quietly and suddenly disappeared from Kaladhungi and India as the last few pages of the closing chapter of the British Raj were being enacted, that legendary figure has been brought back to celluloid life. In the villages of Kumaon, where ancient men and women had almost forgotten the brave white hunter who shot man-eaters terrorising their villages, "Carpet sahib" as he is known in these hills, has come vividly back into their lives as the once-familiar safari-suited figure enters his bungalow in Kaladhungi (converted into a scrappy, nondescript museum) or stalks man-eaters on the trails he made famous in his best-selling books.

Corbett's return to the hills he loved is thanks to the BBC natural history film unit which is currently filming its 75-minute dramatised documentary, *Corbett of Kumaon*, being directed by Emmy award-winner Alex Kirby. And, for those who still remember the man, the legend has almost literally come alive. "When I first saw the actor who plays Corbett, I thought that Corbett had been reincarnated...you cannot imagine my emotions," says B.S. Negi, a Life Insurance Corporation employee in Naini Tal who, as a boy, knew Corbett well. Negi's father, J.S. Negi, worked for Corbett when the latter was an estate agent in Naini Tal and the family actually lived with Jim Corbett and his sister Maggie in their summer home, Gurney House on Ayarpata Hill in Naini Tal.

Corbett (Treves) in his bungalow

Negi has been made almost an unofficial adviser on the sets of the film especially to Fred Treves (the gentle Colonel Layton in *Jewel in the Crown*) who plays the brave soldier-hunter with the heart of gold. Negi's recollections of Jim Corbett doling out *diwali* sweets, kites and affection to him and other children have worked themselves into the script of Martin Booth and John Elliot. "Freddie" even worked out Corbett's mannerisms with the rather reticent Negi, to the extent that it is even being said that the actor has begun to walk and talk like Corbett when the cameras stop rolling. When film

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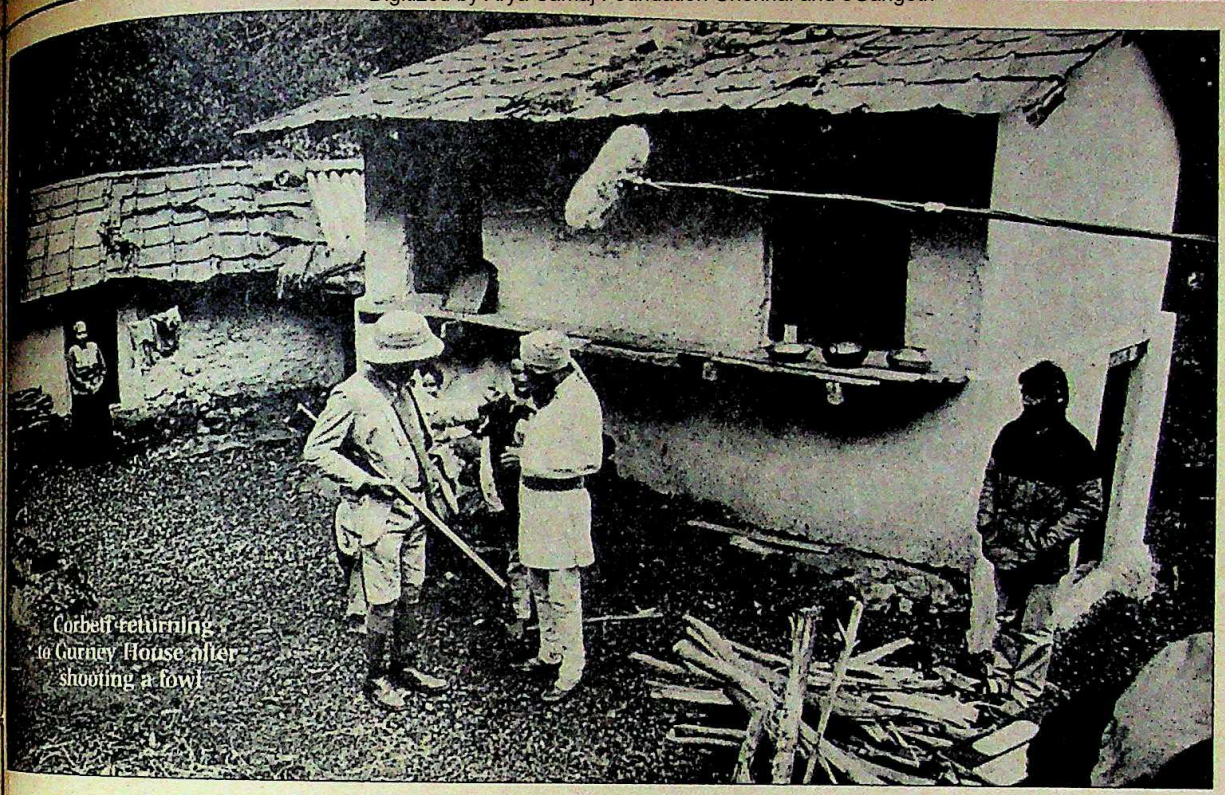
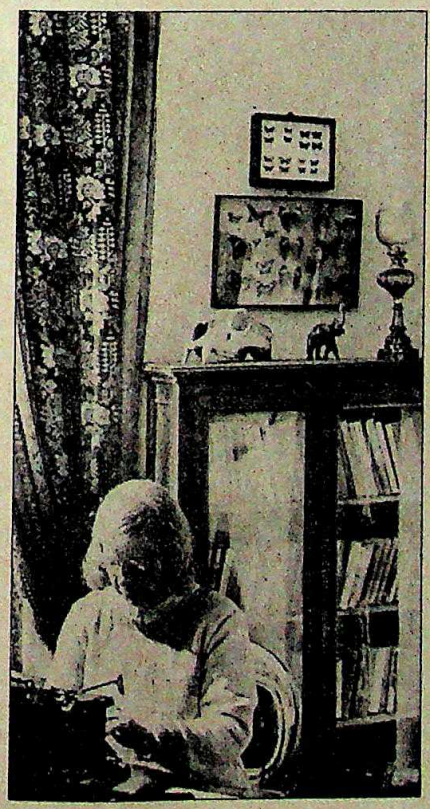


Corbett returning to Gurney House after shooting a fowl

...taking place in Kaladhungi, Corbett's ...ther home, villagers from as far as 100 ...came to see "Carpet sahib", and sang ...songs in which the heroic and gener... deeds of Corbett had been woven— ...Corbett who killed the man-eaters of ...saprayag, Thak and the bachelor of ...garh so that terrified villagers could ...merge out of their homes; the Corbett ...distributed red and white medicine ...which made colds disappear and fevers ...away, the Corbett who distributed ...and money to the Kumaon villagers.

THE BBC, in its first feature film in India, was stalking swiftly through Corbettland last fortnight, filming ...the actual bungalows and houses in ...which the Corbetts and some of their friends lived during the six year (1929-36) ...when of Jim Corbett's life which the film covers. Says director Kirby: "This is a ...feature, not a cradle-to-grave biography... ...more interested in the change in Corbett ...from a hunter to a conservationist to a ...protector of the Indian people. The film is ...on one level a celebration of one man's ...awareness of conservation. Corbett was a ...pioneer in this, one of the first to become ...aware of the desecration of wild life."

So now there is a celluloid Corbett, ...slightly thinning on top, knees slightly bent, a ...saddened hunter asked by the governor to



Maggie in the Burney Hall sitting room

organise a "European shoot" when man and tiger do not meet each other eye to eye. The change of heart has already taken place in Jim Corbett; and, in the film, he is mostly portrayed not as a hunter but as the hunted. Much like an old, ailing tiger forced to kill for his food, this rather reluctant *shikari* is forced to stalk his last tigress—the man-eating marauder at Thak to protect the villagers. At the end of which he tells his friend, Kunwar Singh (Zul Vellani): "You see? It is not a *shaitan*. Only an animal."

Much of the script (Martin Booth has spent 10 years researching for a biography he is writing) skims the surface of Corbett's life. The film is clearly heavy with its message for conservation; but there are occasional penetrating insights into Corbett the man. The scenes at Gurney House show him and his sister living in a kind of no-man's land. Rejected by the upper class British because they are "domiciled Indians", the Corbetts draw closer to one other. Caught in that area of loneliness between upper class British civil servants—in which world Maggie, with her "dowdy", unsmart clothes, stands out like a sore thumb—and the world of the villagers whom they love (but into which they cannot be absorbed) the brother and sister live insulated lives.

Ironically, for the two protagonists, Jim and Maggie Corbett (Ann Cropper, who played the bitchy Aunty in *Jewel in the Crown*), *Corbett* offers an opportunity to play the reverse of the *pucca sahib* and *memsahib* of the British Raj they portrayed in *Jewel*. Says Cropper, who resembles the real Maggie: "I prayed for the opportunity

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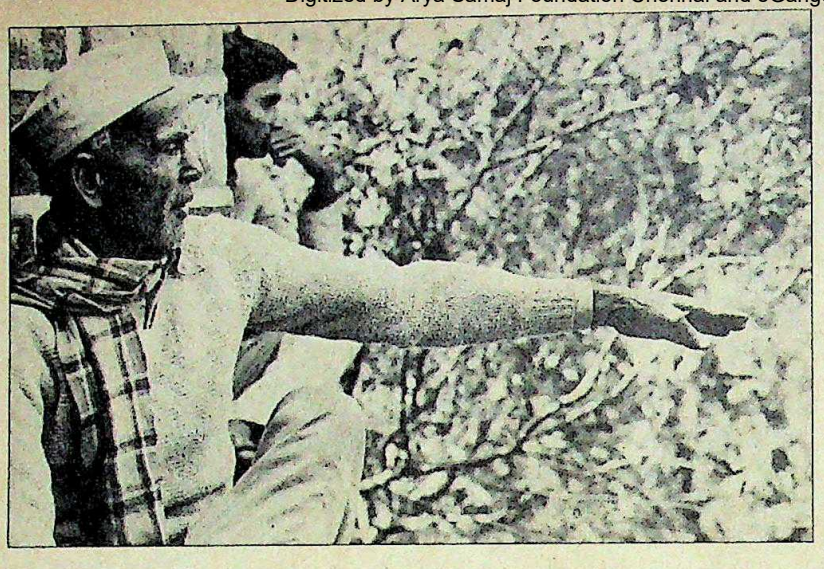

Khyoraj Singh (left) and Negi: reliving the past

to show the other side; after playing that awful snooty sort of lady in *Jewel* it was a joy to play the opposite."

THE INTENSE and somewhat cloistered relationship between Jim and Maggie Corbett is a significant part of this film, almost as crucial as is the relationship between Corbett, the jungle and his tigers. Corbett never married and both his mother Mary Jane and his sister were extremely possessive about him. Kirby describes the brother-sister relationship as a "classic example of British Victorian relationships in large families in which the head of the family dies."

Legends sprout easily in these hills. Martin Booth in his search of the real Jim Corbett seems to have unearthed more than one Corbett. There are as many stories and differing perceptions of Jim Corbett the man as there are people who tell them. One thing the BBC has done is spark off the memory and imagination of the people of Naini Tal about him. Most of the speculation is about Jim Corbett and women. As Treves puts it: "Yes, you go along from people to people and the stories change. Some true, some false. I have even heard that Corbett was homosexual. What rubbish!"

There are also tales, tall or true, about a Norwegian woman, still alive, whom Corbett loved. There is the mysterious Helen to whom he is supposed to have proposed and then taken back his proposal when his mother objected. There are even letters of proposals from women all over the world after he became a best-selling author, letters which, says Negi, Maggie burned—with the exception of one—after his death.

The BBC have not only dug up old myths and facts about this pioneer of the hills, but have left behind a few new ones as well. Legend has been mixed irrevocably with fact in Corbett territory—the past merged with the present. For Khyoraj Singh, 68, present sarpanch of Ghatgarh, a village 24 kilometres from Naini Tal on the way to Kaladhungi, and a boy of 15 when he used to help "Carpet Sahib" carry the slain tigers or watch him skin them, the film sequences of Treves killing the man-eaters or curing his dying friend, Kunwar Singh, or of terrorised villagers, are now more vivid than his own recollections of the man.

In his tea-shop in Ghatgarh, after the crew had left, Khyoraj Singh appeared rather bored with his own memories of Corbett and was more willing to retell

The mysterious Helen: myths

the Corbett of Martin Booth and John Elliot's script. In his breast pocket, he still kept the maps and instructions of producer Rani Dube (of *Gandhi* fame) to make two little temples for the film before which "Carpet Sahib" himself used to join his hands in prayer, or leave flowers.

Distance in these hills is measured subjectively: Ghatgarh is variously four, eight, 24 km, depending on how long it takes the person you ask to cover the distance from Naini Tal. Jim Corbett is "measured" in equally subjective terms. From a white demi-god in the village (a kind of St George slaying the dragons) dispensing medicine, largesse, money and land to the poor, planting miraculous banana trees, Corbett is transformed in Naini Tal into an eccentric hunter and shrewd businessman (railway contractor, estate agent) and best-seller author whose books might "just have been ghosted", whose English might just have been a little off, whose "brahmachari" characteristics (Khyoraj Singh described both brother and sister as brahmacharis) dissolve into somewhat of a man-about-town. Truth lies in the eye of the beholder here.

Corbett of Kumaon, which incorporates original movie footage of Corbett on an elephant drive, will be shown on British television this winter and on Doordarshan, in a slightly longer Hindi version at the same time. It will also be televised in the US in spring next year on the TV channel run by the magazine *National Geographic*. *Corbett of Kumaon* is probably as apt a title as there could be. As Kirby says: "Corbett was Kumaon. He was not British, nor India but Kumaon—this is the secret of him."

—MADHU JAIN in Kumaon

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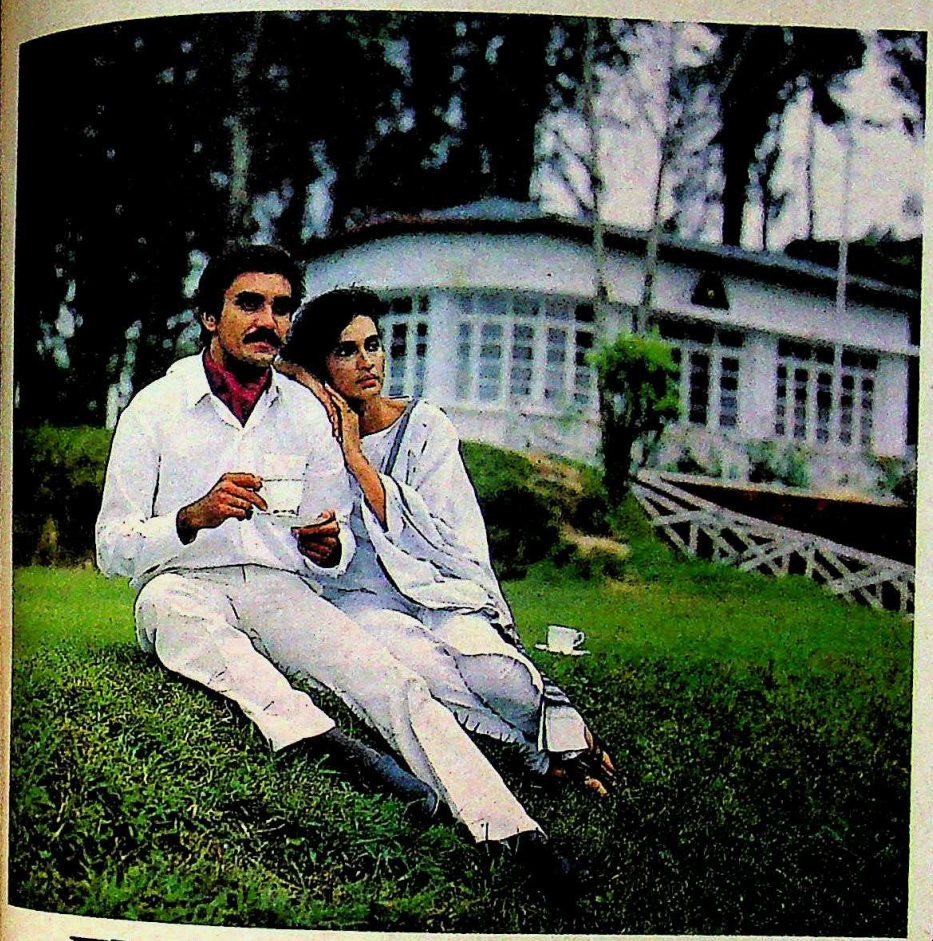

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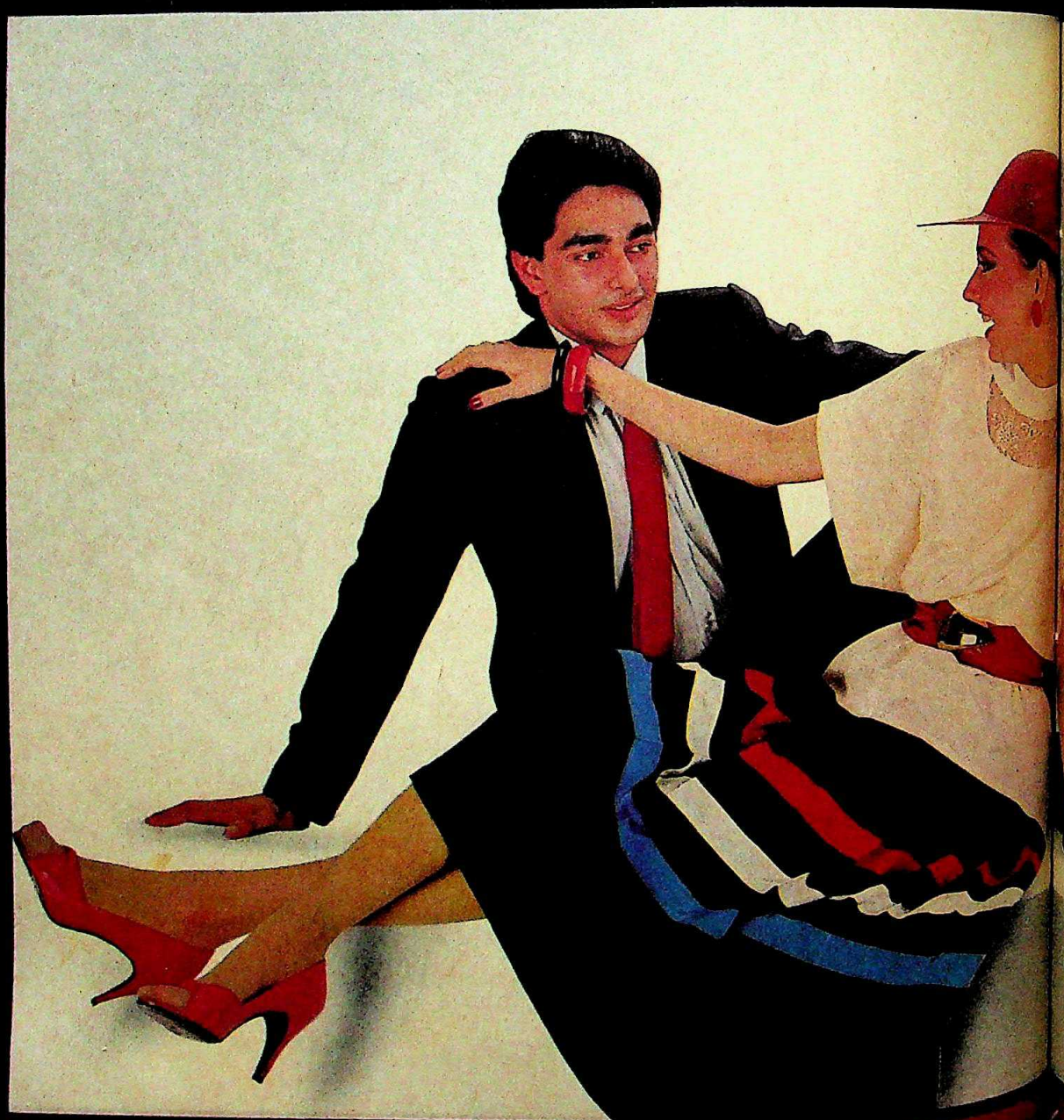

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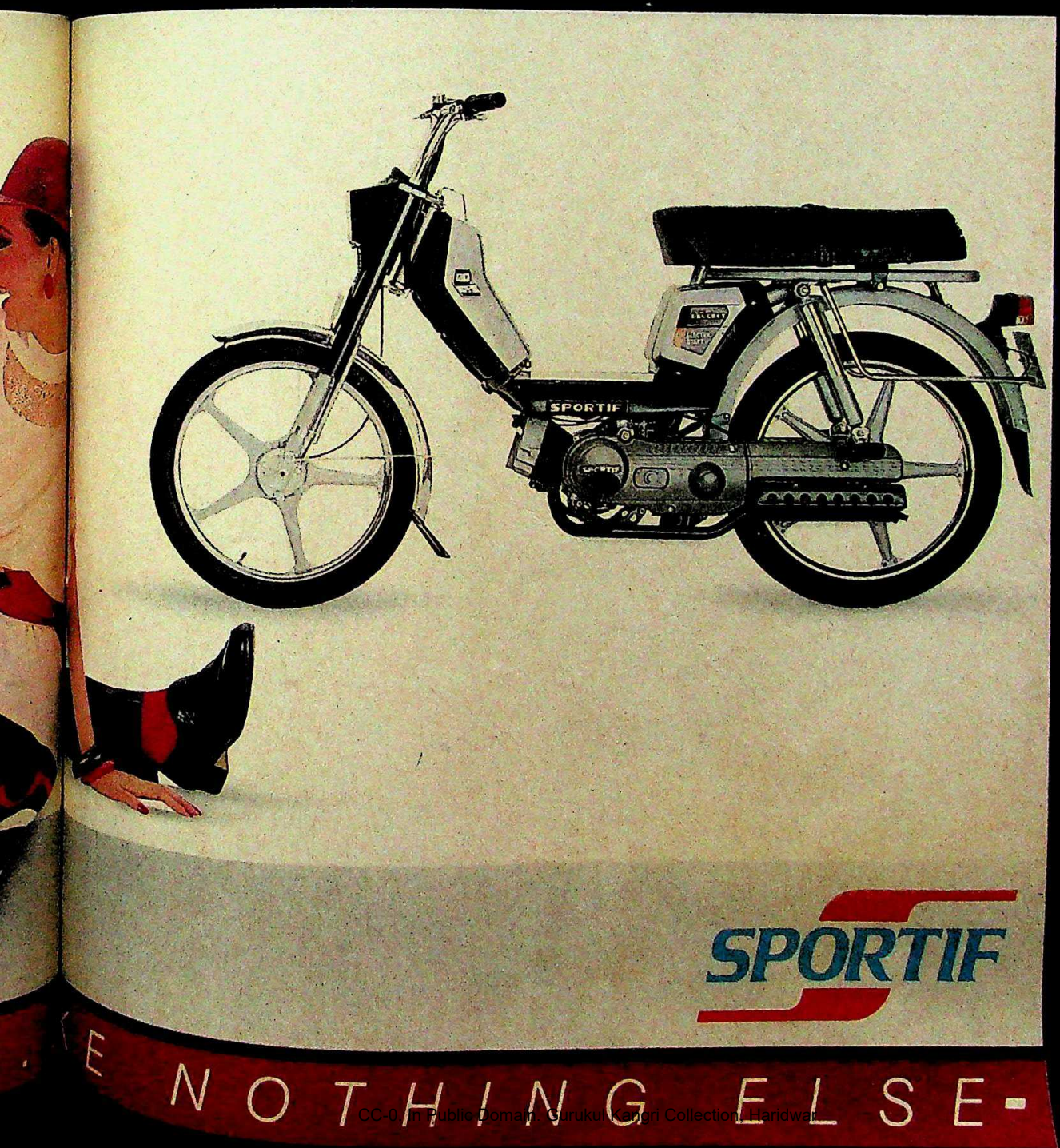

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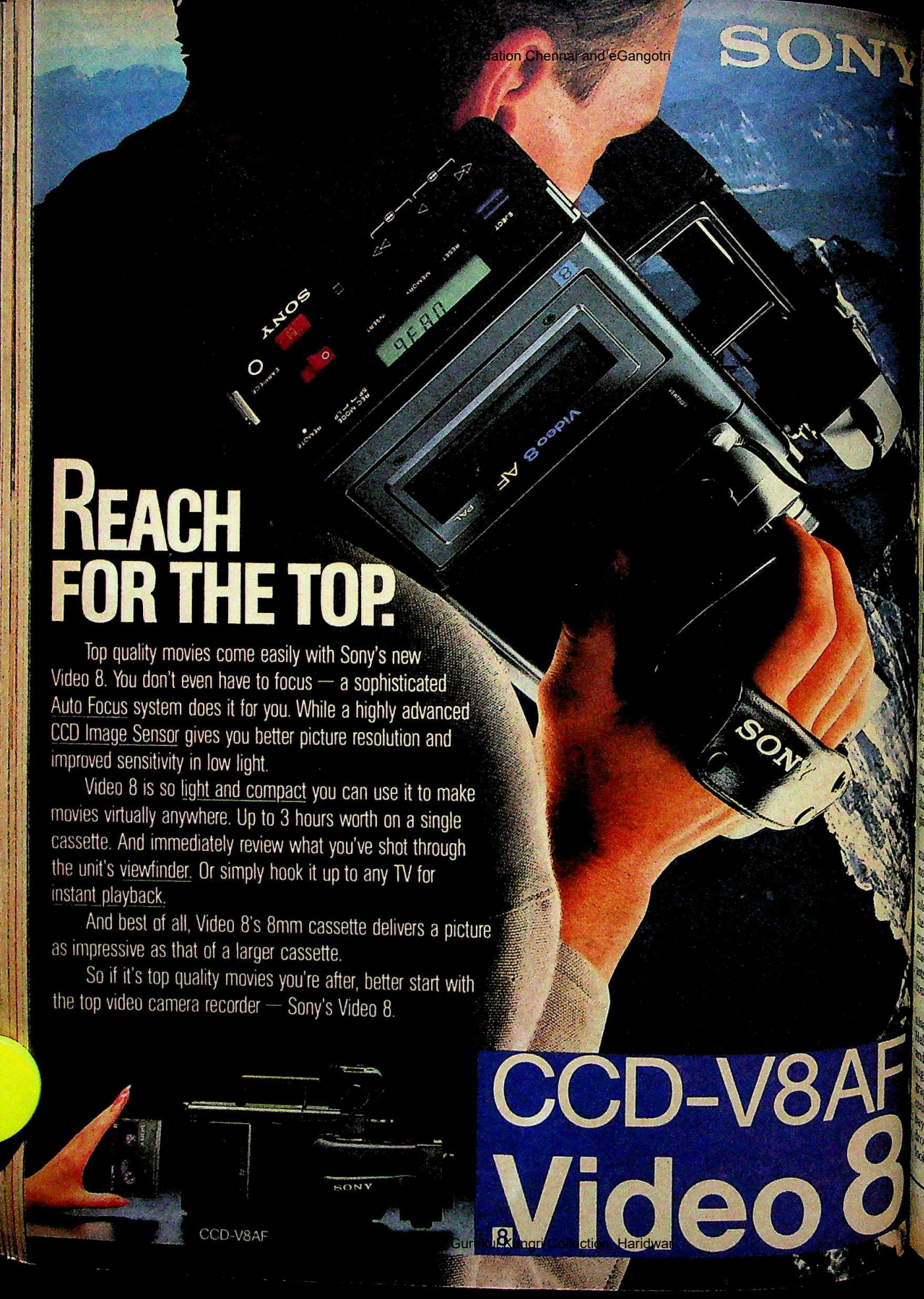

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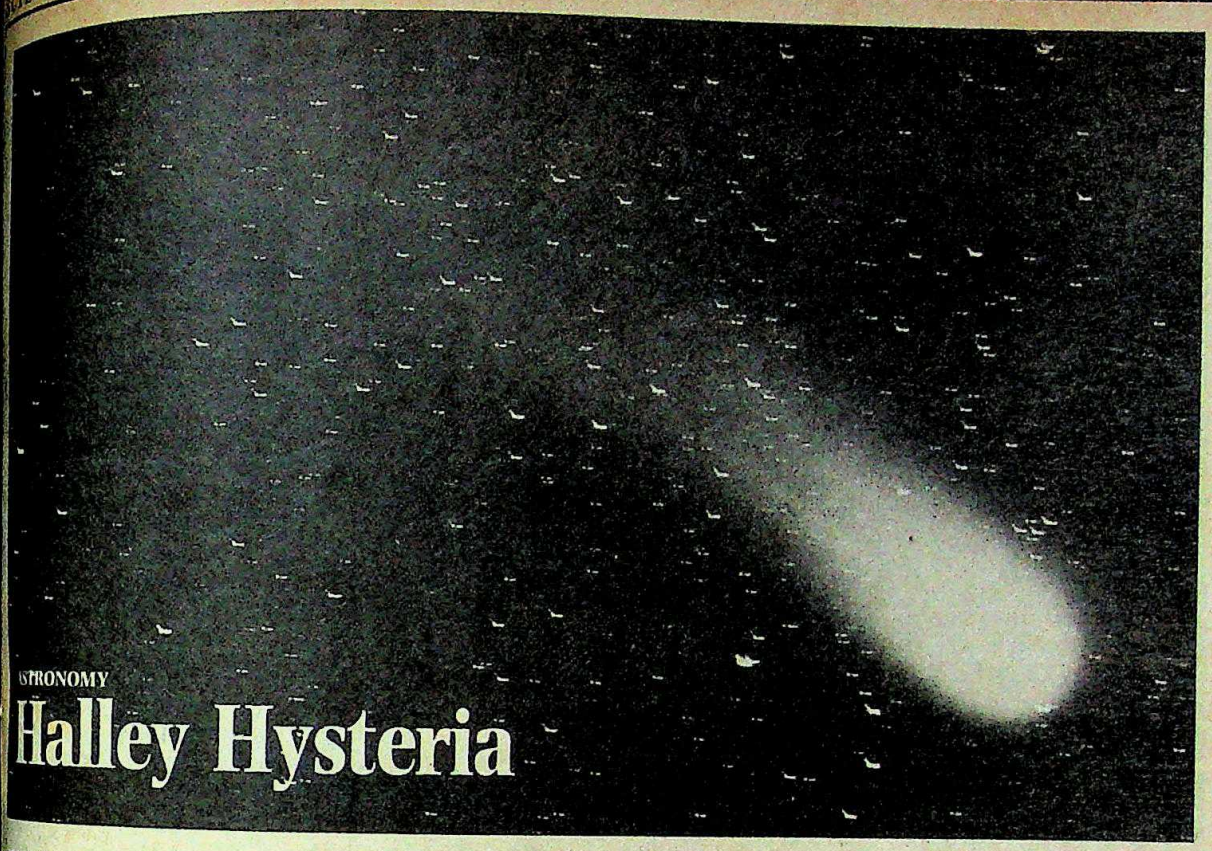

ASTRONOMY

Halley Hysteria

IT HAS acted as some sort of cosmic clock that tolls once in 76 years. But at no time has this object of awe been the cause of such excited attention as in recent weeks when it allowed the world a pre-dawn glimpse of its fuzzy bright tail streaking across the sky. This fortnight, the once-in-a-lifespan show called Comet Halley swings in closest to the earth on April 11 during its 28th recorded visit in the course of its egg-shaped long celestial journey in interplanetary space.

For astro-scientists it marks the culmination of years of wait and nine months of watch in their effort to solve the riddles about comets, if not the early solar system. For the casual and curious, the Halley watch is the most exciting event since the launch of the first India-made satellite named after the ancient astronomer Aryabhatta heralded the country's entry into the space age.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) brought out bulletins for Halley watchers giving details of how and where to look for the comet and suggesting ways to take good photographs. Even politicians joined in the country-wide pre-dawn watch. In Bombay, Congress(S) chief Sharad Pawar drove to the Nehru Planetarium to take a look through one of the three telescopes

Halley's Comet as seen last fortnight

rigged up for the event. On hearing about Pawar's plans, a bleary-eyed Farooq Abdullah sprang a surprise by joining him. In Hyderabad, with two telescopes in his backyard at the Birla Planetarium, Andhra Pradesh Labour Minister P. Indra Reddy made sure he was not left out of the proceedings.

Predictably the commercial aspect was not ignored. Apart from brisk sales of film rolls, binoculars and telescopes reported from all over the country, in Bangalore, the state-owned Priyadarshini Handlooms announced a "comet sale" by giving a further 5 per cent cut, raising the rebate for all buys from 30 to 35 per cent between March 1 and March 11. It's educational prize scheme offered the book *Comet* by Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan to each of 20 prize-winning families. And the fortunate winners are to take a luxury coach drive from Bangalore down to the Kavalur Observatory in Tamil Nadu to see the comet during the best viewing time between April 5 and 15.

To astro-scientists, comets are like an archeological excavation in the sky, preserving not only the material from which the solar system was born but, more important perhaps, the story of how it was born. Comets are believed to be leftovers from the materials from which the sun and planets were formed about 4.6 billion years ago. Halley's periodic visit offers astronomers an unprecedented opportunity. Of the 1,000-odd known comets, Halley offers the best choice for study. It is a short-period comet, one that returns every 75 or 76 years, and is the brightest of all the known comets that appear on a regular basis. Halley's route and schedule are predictable and unlike burnt-out comets, it still displays the pyrotechnics that reveal its anatomy. Using space probes and telescopes undreamt of at the time of the comet's earlier visits, researchers will be able to test theories of what comets are, where they come from and what role they have played in the history of the cosmos.

Ancient philosophers like Aristotle held that comets were atmospheric phenomena and not objects moving in space. Isaac Newton later proved that heavenly objects do move under the universal law of gravitation he propounded. Edmund Halley, an English astronomer and a friend of Newton's, applied these principles to the brilliant comet he saw in 1682. The 1682 comet, he believed, was the same comet that had appeared in 1607 and 1531 and he

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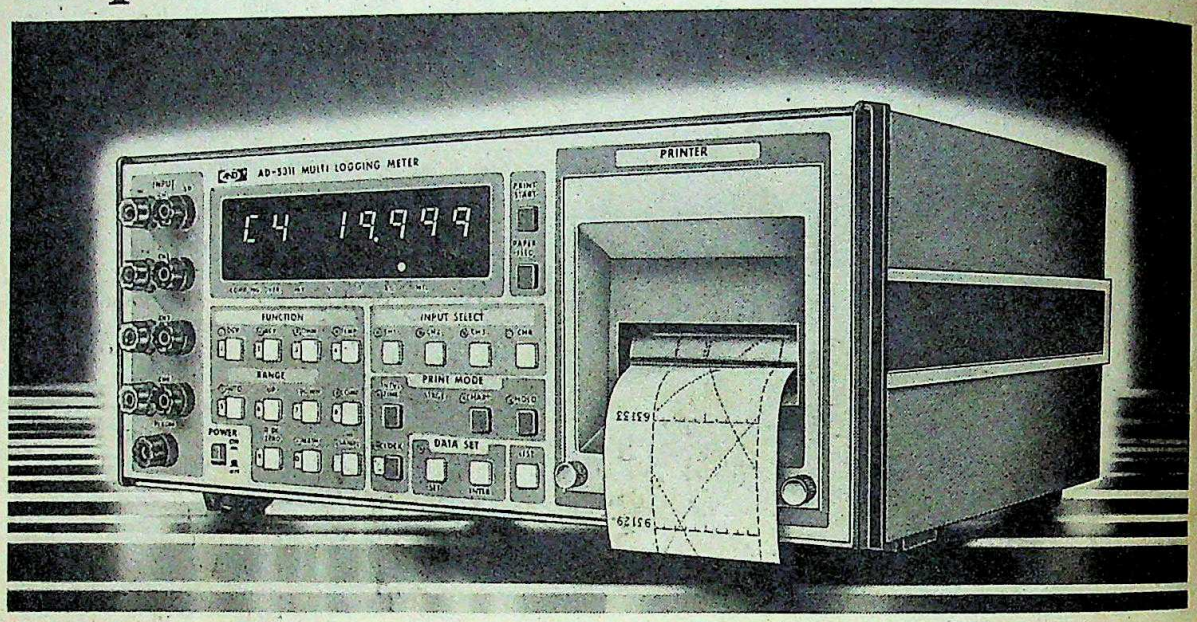

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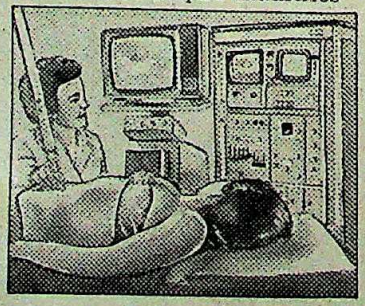

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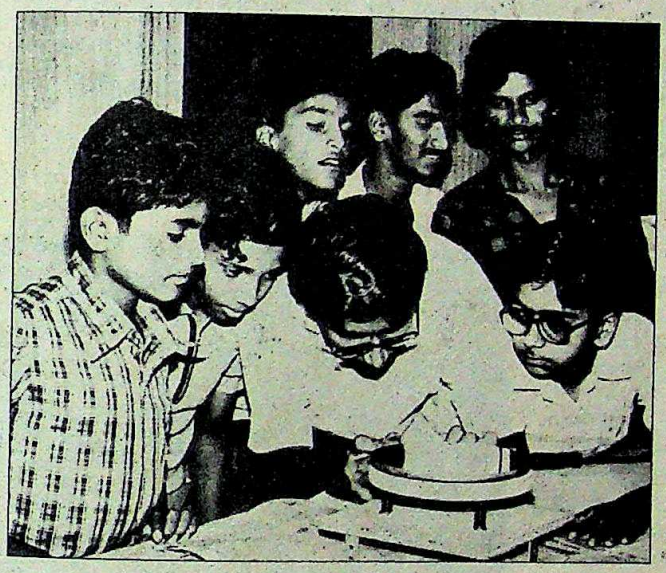
predicted that it would return again in 1758. It did and Halley passed into astronomical immortality. A comet, in a sense, is a gigantic optical illusion whose nucleus or solid core may be as small as three miles across. The nucleus is surrounded by the highly visible 'coma' or cloud of gas and dust that in Halley's case may stretch 100,000 miles.

The comet sent astro-scientists into an ecstatic tailspin last month when the most sophisticated of the five unmanned space probes, *Giotto*, beamed back breath-taking pictures and data of the comet's nucleus from its closest approach so far of less than 1000 km from the comet's centre. During the March 13 fly-by, *Giotto*'s sponsors, the European Space Agency described the close-up view of the nucleus as "two peas in a pod".

Other pictures sent back by the Vega 1 and 2 probes inspired Russian scientists to comment that the comet looked like a potato". Since August last year, ground-based and balloon-borne telescopes, part of the International Halley Watch (IHW), not only took photographs but also gave scientists enough data to correct the course of space probes on their journey to the comet to study the exact track and composition of Halley's Comet.

IN THE vanguard of the Halley watch in India is the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Bangalore. Explained Professor K.R. Sivaraman of IIA and chairman of the Halley watch in India: "Essentially all observations are to better our understanding about comets and to find out whether the close-up look may provide clues about the early solar system." For this, scientists at 10 locations including the major optical observatories at Kavalur in Tamil Nadu, Nainital in Uttar Pradesh and Japalli Kangapur in Andhra Pradesh, have been tracking the comet and taking photographs. But as Sivaraman emphasised: "The comet has already kindled general interest in astronomy and astrophysics."

The growing interest in space sciences and stellar objects put pressure on the planetaria to run special Halley's comet sky shows, install telescopes for comet watching and organise lectures on comets and other planetary phenomena. The Sardar Patel Planetarium, Baroda, led by its Director Dr A.G. Kulkarni, trained teachers to use small telescopes and tell schoolchildren more about the comet and the sky. In Hyderabad Dr B.G. Siddarth, director, Birla Planetarium, has planned a 25-session course spread over three months from April for space buffs and enrolled 60 students after interviewing 300 applicants. Said Siddarth: "The profile of those interested in space studies is amazing. There are travel agents and doctors besides teachers and students." And the planetarium which opened only seven months ago has recorded its 200,000th visitor.



Making telescopes in school: new interest

Clearly the new interest is more than the craze to chase the comet. The Bangalore Amateur Astronomers Association has published a 70-page book on building a telescope, written by its President P.N. Shankar. Said Shankar, a scientist at the National Aeronautical Laboratory: "With the book in hand amateurs can make a six or eight inch telescope for Rs 1,000 and in case of doubt, talk to the Visveswaraya Industrial and Technological Museum." The Department of Science and Technology also decided to cash in on the Halley mania by subsidised sale of telescopes by amateur groups. The ISRO prepared the design and the Central Scientific Instruments Organisation, Chandigarh, is mass producing this three-inch refractor telescope and selling it for Rs 3,000 along with a set of seven books on elementary and observational astronomy.

In an ambitious programme to increase the involvement of amateur astronomers and popularise space sciences, the ISRO has coordinated their Halley watch by circulating information through specially prepared bulletins. Clearly, Indian astro-scientists are elated that Halley-watching could spark off a major interest in space.

But there is still scope for scepticism. The Advisory Committee for Space Sciences has discovered the country's efforts in astronomy have not been competitive when compared with the world situation. It has travelled along traditional lines and for frontline research, like extra-galactic studies, the existing telescopes and the instrumentation has to be updated. Observed Dr V.R. Venugopal of the Ooty Radio Astronomy Centre, of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research: "We have built all our optical and radio astronomy facilities indigenously, even though there may be a few weak spots. The real test is coming when we have to build the giant metre wavelength radio telescope (GMRT) costing over Rs 20 crore by the turn of the decade." The GMRT is to be located either near Pune or Indore and is to be used for understanding galaxies and galaxy clusters, besides studying pulsars.

Researchers feel the facilities will be better used only if a large crop of students interested in space sciences come out of the universities. Says Dr B.K. Sanwal of the Centre of Advanced Study in Astronomy (CASA), Osmania University: "Astronomy should be part of the study for the B.Sc degree. It is only with a wider popular base that better researchers can be found than from 40-odd students admitted to the M.Sc astronomy course in Hyderabad and Patiala." Observed Dr K.D. Abhyankar of CASA: "Our professional Astronomical Society of India also gives fellowships to four amateurs a year to pursue their studies at the observatories. But that is not enough. If physicists are prepared to treat astronomy on an equal footing with physics we will be able to produce a clutch of good astronomers." But for the moment at least, Halley hysteria offers the brightest ray of hope for the growth of space sciences.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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SONE CANAL

Course of Tragedy

ONE OF the most fertile and productive parts of Bihar is in danger of becoming a barren wasteland because of the inability of the Central and state governments to implement a crash programme to rebuild a life-giving irrigation network which has nourished the area for over a century.

Since the 1860s, Rohtas, Bhojpur, Aurangabad, Gaya and Patna in north-west Bihar have been served by the Sone river and its canals. As a result, this area emerged as an island of prosperity. But during the last decade, rice production in this region has plummeted by a staggering 40 per cent. The summer paddy crop which once covered a lush 48,000 hectares has shrunk to an area of 18,000 hectares. And the 559,000 hectares covered 10 years ago by multiple-cropping have now dwindled to half their original size.

Predicts Brijlal Singh of Panditpura village in Bhojpur: "This once affluent region will soon become as dry and barren as the southern hilly regions." Dinanath, a farmer belonging to Ramnagar Bangla and a government-appointed caretaker of a canal which flows through his area, says that the canal system has so deteriorated that "people are fed up and are now irrigating their once water-fed areas with tubewells".

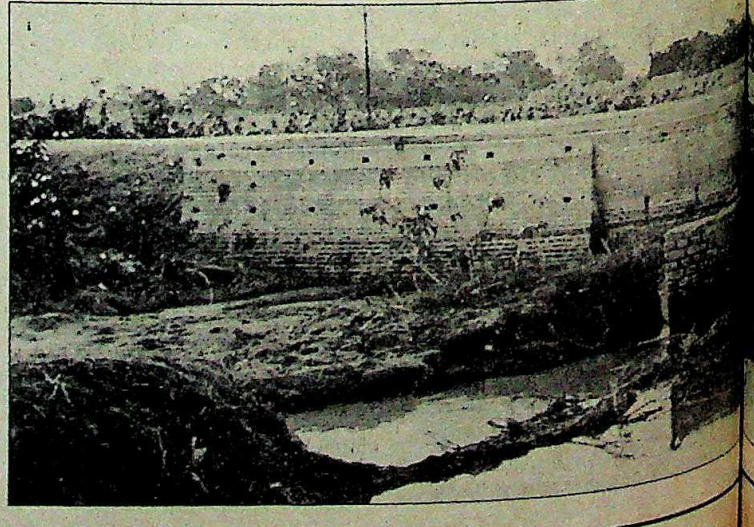
The main reason for this agricultural tragedy in the making is the slow but steady collapse of the once exemplary Sone irrigation network. Even though the state and Centre have drawn up and discussed modernisation plans for the system for several years nothing so far has been accomplished. The total cost of the resuscitation effort is estimated at about Rs 1,300 crore from a combination of funds provided by the World Bank, the Centre and the state. The state had been asked to provide at least Rs 2 crore to keep the canal project included in the list of national subjects. But the state has failed to come up with the finance.

As a result, the Centre's Department of Economic Affairs informed the state administration that the modernisation plan would have to be removed from the World Bank pipeline. Fearful that the entire plan would have to be scrapped for lack of funds Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey approached Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who, Dubey claims, "has assured us that the Centre will get the work done through the World Bank." But so far the Department of Economic Affairs has given indication of any change in attitude.

The main reason for this agricultural tragedy is the steady collapse of the once Sone irrigation network, because of the inability of the Central and state governments to implement a crash programme.

Experts point out that if modernisation plan is taken out of World Bank pipeline it will be effectively shelved for another decade and the system will then be beyond salvaging. Official reports as well as on-site research paint a dismal picture:

- The canals are badly damaged during paddy irrigation, the canal water flows above the water level. The machinery needed to regulate water flows is unworkable.
- There are only a few regulators in the system capable of diverting the flow into off-take channels or into the downstream reaches. And only 2% cent of the outlets leading water into the fields are permanent



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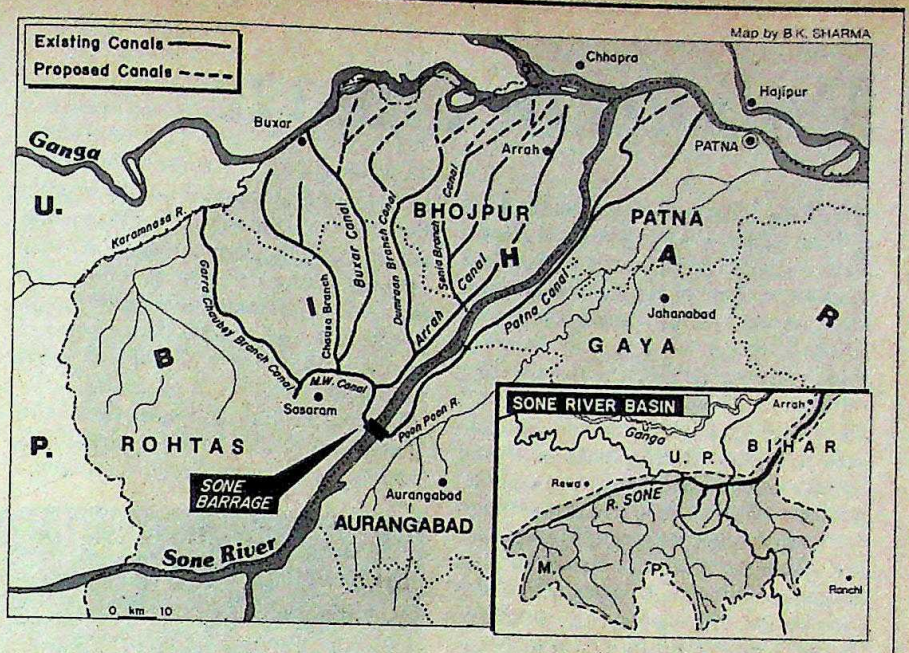
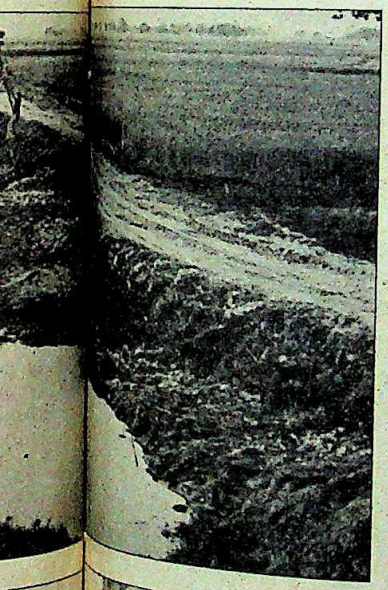


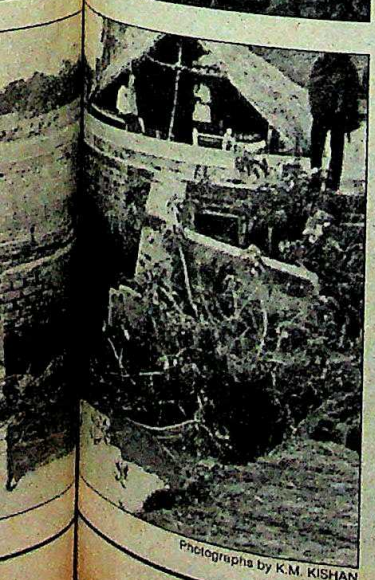
...ast quantities of water from the ...l are lost because of unrepaired or ...urable seepages. In many ways, the ...l system has become a threat to the ...ers because of problems of overflows, ...logging and sedimentation.

...Canal overseer Jagdish Prasad Gupta ...ated that in one block alone, more ... 4,000 acres of land has turned ...ne during the last few years because ...e failure of the canal system. In ...l areas farmers have tried to repair ...ing walls and embankments of the ...t but no sooner do they prop one up ...er side collapses.

...e original canal system was de...to irrigate only Rabi crops in a nine ...re area. But as farmers realised its ...n watering Kharif crops as well

...ss of the decaying canal system: plummeting harvests





Photographs by K.M. KISHAN

they began using its capabilities intensively. Impressed with the system's potential, the Government first began to plan an expansion and modernisation plan in 1960. A barrage, intended to double the system's capacity, was constructed at Inderpuri at a cost of Rs 14 crore in 1968. Though the irrigation capacity increased the area benefiting from the new barrage was only 12 lakh acres because the canals downstream were in miserable shape.

In view of this, the state Government began thinking of modernising the entire system in the sixth plan but could achieve little or nothing because state and Central bureaucrats could not agree on how much money was to be spent.

The final nail in the coffin was the Bihar Government which has never been able to produce its share of the money needed for the project. The World Bank had agreed to finance 60 per cent of the cost of the total project for the seventh plan but the Centre informed the Bihar Government that it would provide the state only 60 per cent of what it receives from the bank, and that too in graduated phases. This means that the state Government would get about Rs 468 crore and would have to mobilise an additional Rs 832 crore. This is clearly an impossible task since this sum involved exceeds the total outlay for irrigation projects in the state in any five-year plan.

In addition, experts point out that the Rs 1,300 crore estimated for modernisation was based on 1981 price levels. They estimate that costs have since escalated by at least 15 per cent. And by the time the project is completed the costs are expected to double.

Some experts have begun to wonder whether the whole modernisation scheme will not be a wasted effort in view of what one of them described as "past mistakes." He was referring to the flow of waters in the Sone river system being choked at various points in the upper reaches of the system as well as downstream. The Bihar Government has had to battle other state governments—particularly Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh—to work out domestic water treaties to ensure the flow of the Sone waters into Bihar's agricultural lands. Their flow had been threatened in the past by construction of the Rihand Dam in Uttar Pradesh and water storage schemes in Bansnagar, Madhya Pradesh, which threatened the Sone canal system in Bihar. But having fought its way out of these concrete thickets impeding the Sone system the Bihar Government has created some of its own. The state has begun constructing multipurpose dams at North Koe, Auranga, Amanat and Katku which, when complete, will also block the flow of water in the Sone system.

Unavoidably the collapse of the Sone canal system has become a political issue with opposition leaders threatening to launch a satyagraha designed to force the Central Government to take immediate action to save the irrigation network. But while engineers, theoreticians, planners, and economists argue about merits and demerits, and while politicians plan dharnas and bandhs, the Sone system which once created an island of prosperity, is rushing towards an ocean of disaster.

—FARZAND AHMED

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DANCE

Motions of Change

INDIAN dance audiences have for long been subjected to the spectacle of love-lorn *nayikas* pining away into endless moonlit nights, of Radha stealing Krishna's flute or of Draupadi being stripped by the Kauravas. But not any longer, if some enthusiastic dancers and choreographers, who have been daring to experiment with form, style and content, succeed in their attempts to make Indian classical and contemporary dance more relevant and identifiable with the times.

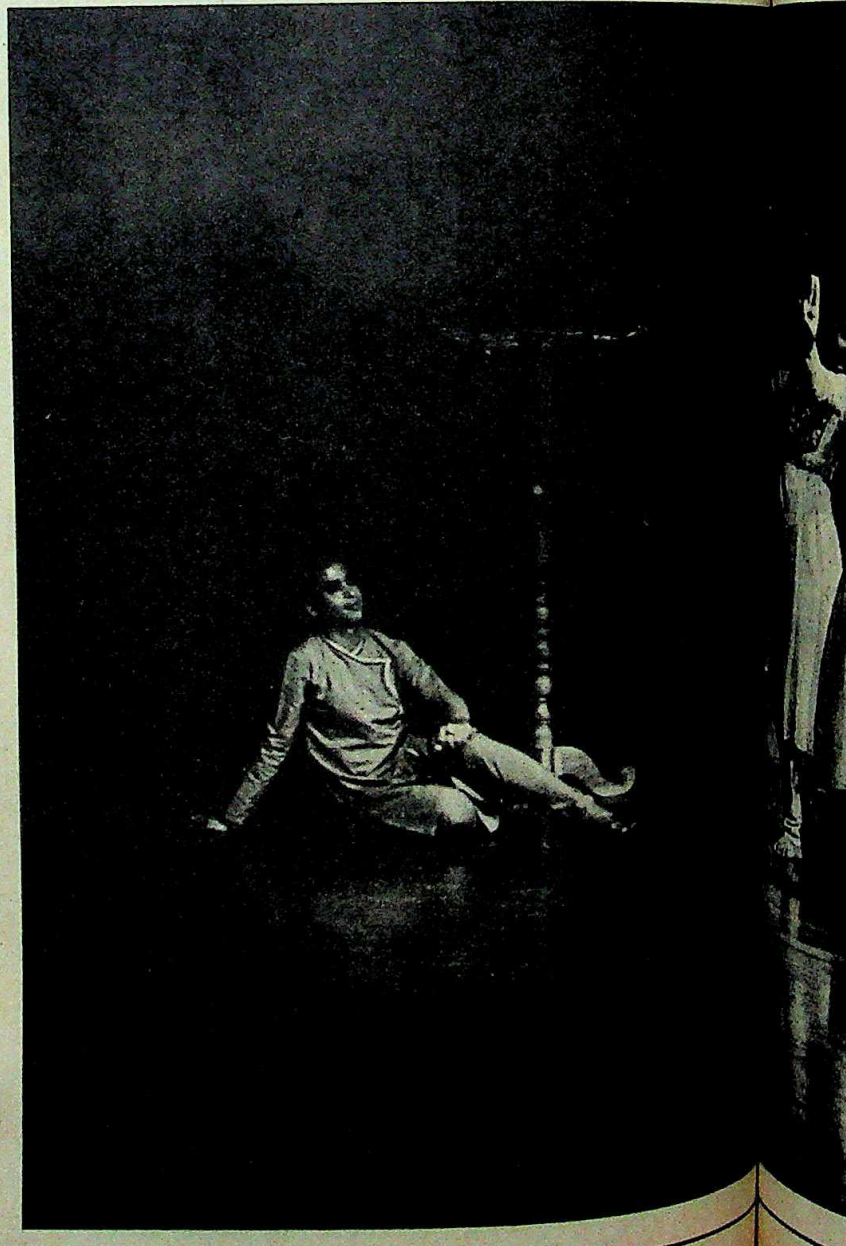
That change in the air was in evidence last fortnight when the Anamika Kala Sangam of Calcutta, in collaboration with the Dance Department of Rabindra Bharati University and the West Bengal State Sangeet Natak Akademi, organised a three-day festival in Calcutta with the aim of chronicling the significant new trends in Indian dance.

Sponsored by the University Grants Commission, the festival included a seminar on the need for innovation in Indian classical dance and demonstrations of newly evolved and evolving styles by such progressive performers and choreographers as Mrinalini Sarabhai, Kumudini Lakhia, Chandralekha and Manjusri Chaki Sircar. Apart from reaffirming the need for experiment and innovation, the lively lecture-demonstrations proved that Indian dance has moved a long way ahead of the early fusion and evolution of Uday Shankar and Tagore and is poised at a new and exciting crossroad.

The ever-innovative Chandralekha, who has worked out a successful integration of Bharata Natyam, Yoga and the Kalaripayattu martial art of Kerala in her *Angika*, showed how the physical traditions in dance can be exploited to fit modern-day perspectives. Rejecting the divine origin of dance, she emphasised the need for constant interrelation between different fields like dance, graphics, architecture, painting and literature. "The body falls victim to two limiting notions—one which sees it as a subversive appendage of the spirit and the other which sees it as an object, commodified and linked to the market through glamour and escapist entertainment," she said.

Mrinalini Sarabhai, an alumnus of Santiniketan, however, insisted that the strength of dance lay in tradition. One could be contemporary even with traditional dance techniques. It was these techniques that enabled one to express the most contemporary of problems and issues through dance. As proof, her Darpana troupe demonstrated how themes on dowry, suicide and pollution could be effectively presented in dance forms as ancient as Bharata Natyam and Kathakali.

It was Kathak danseuse Kumudini Lakhia, however, who drove Mrinalini's point home more effectively. With simple group compositions of traditional Kath items like *todas*, *tukdas* and *aamads*. Kadamba troupe showed how it is possi to turn classical heritage to innova advantage. The symmetry, finesse a technical excellence of her creations w traditional but the content was v much contemporary and modern— much-flogged Radha-Krishna theme conspicuous by its absence. This marr of the traditional and the contempo was amply borne out by *The Coat*, innovative piece based on Sarvesh Dayal Saxena's famous Hindi poem.



Lakhia's dance version of *The Coat*, contemporary classical

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showed what a gifted choreographer
do with classical forms in modern
without compromising on the basic
mar of the dance.

HIS was in keeping with the new
concern for conveying everyday
problems through dance. At the
Natika Festival in Delhi in Novem-
last year, the Jawaharlal Nehru Mani-
ance Academy had also shown this
rend when it conveyed its concern
such a pressing modern problem as
tection of wildlife. Using the old
Lamjao technique of Manipuri, the
s made an impassioned plea for the
ervation of the brow-antlered deer of
Manipur's hills.

It is not only content that is changing. More and more young dancers are daring to experiment with forms too, and with positive results. Enthusiastic and imaginative performers like Bharat Sharma, Astad Deboo, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, Sheila Raj and Ileana Citaristi have been trying to evolve styles that would be more cosmopolitan and universal. Bharat Sharma—whose father Narendra Sharma, a known innovator, had a long association with Uday Shankar—gave proof of his search for a more contemporary dance expression at the seminar. His very original composition, *Mukhowte* (masks), performed by his Bhumika troupe—dealt with the cosmopolitan problem of identity and concluded that the masks grow on the wearers and become one with them. Leaning heavily on his Mayurbhanj Chhau background and training in modern dance under Alwyn Nicolai in the US, Sharma revealed the immense scope in Indian dance as he explored the close relationship between dance, mime and movement.

The lively lecture—demonstrations proved that Indian dance is poised at a new and exciting crossroad.

RAGHU RAI

This yearning for change has also affected the related effects like music and lighting. All through the festival, lights wizard Tapas Sen proved that the current emphasis on change can be effectively brought to bear upon stage-lighting as well, hitherto a largely neglected area in dance. His imaginative lighting and superb special effects amply complemented each new style and composition.

Ileana Citaristi, an Italian learning Mayurbhanj Chhau and Odissi dance forms in India, had the advantage of an outsider's perspective on the old and the new. "Krishna or Godot?" she asked meaningfully. Citaristi is convinced that if dancers work together, animated by the same honesty and commitment for this search, a universal form of dance could well emerge, taking in the old and the new, the East and the West, the discipline of the body and the freedom of the mind.

That may be wishful thinking but a beginning has already been made. There is a definite shift in attitudes that is bound to leave jaded old forms and traditionalists behind. Staunch traditionalists have dismissed the new trends as just so much gimmickry and nonsense. But that has not deterred the young dancers from questioning the flogged themes of Radha and Krishna, the repetition of the *nayak-nayika* syntax, the outmoded values and compositions not related to reality.

The change, though still in its nascent stages, is doubtless very definitive. And despite shocked protests from the die-hards, it seems that contemporary classical dance, if it can be called that, is here to stay. Blasphemous though it may sound, the *Natyashastra* is certainly not the last word on Indian dance any more.

—SUNIL KOTHARI

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KARNATAKA

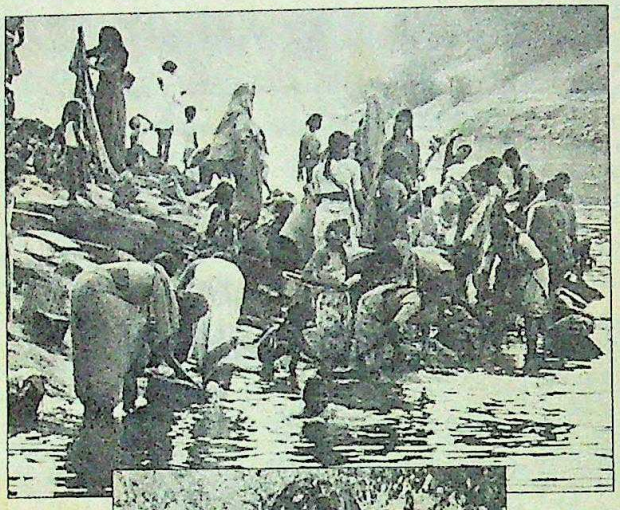
A Naked Defiance

THE KARNATAKA Government discovered to its discomfiture last fortnight that all the state's machinery cannot end a centuries-old custom that is now thought to be indecent and barbaric. The Government's attempts to stop the annual *bettele seve*—religious festival where devotees offer prayers in the nude to Goddess Renukamba—in tiny Chandragutti village in Shimoga district ended dramatically and in complete confusion. Reacting violently to the interference, the devotees stripped policemen, policewomen and social workers and forced them to parade naked. Immediately afterwards, attempting to assuage hurt feelings on all sides, the state Government ordered a magisterial inquiry into the violence.

From time immemorial on certain days in March some one lakh devotees from different parts of the state have converged on the granite-rich village of Chandragutti to take a holy dip in the River Varada and then trek 4 km in the nude to the hill-top temple of Goddess Renukamba to offer prayers. The origin of this three-day *jathra* of nude worship is a legend. It is believed that Sage Jamadagni discovered by telepathy that his wife Renukamba, while taking water from the Varada, was attracted by a man bathing in the river. Angry that his wife should even be thinking of another man, Jamadagni ordered his son Parasurama to behead her. Renukamba, while fleeing for her life pursued by her son, dropped all her clothes. Completely naked, she escaped into a nearby cave and merged herself with the God there.

Shielded from the outside world by the dense forests surrounding it, the little village continued its annual festival of nude worship without interference. But three years ago, the Dalit Sangharsh Samithi (DSS) moved in and called a halt to the practice saying that it was mainly Dalits who were offering nude worship. However, the public campaign remained low-key, confined to press statements made soon after the festival and forgotten thereafter.

Meanwhile, opponents of nude worship had turned their flak on the Government forcing it to take action. Two weeks before the *jathra*, suitable measures were worked out at a meeting of officials and DSS leaders. The meeting concluded that although nudity in public places is an offence, the law cannot be invoked in the case of religion and so the custom would have to be stopped by persuasion and education. Immediately afterwards, the departments of social welfare, information, police, and Kannada culture organisations pitched in with the DSS to conduct a 10-day noisy campaign against nude worship.



Women taking a holy dip (top) and semi-clad devotee: anti-climax

But as the *jathra* began last fortnight it became clear that the devotees had not been moved by the impassioned campigning of the preceding days. Shortly before sunrise on the first day, pilgrims began bathing in the Varada River under the eagle eyes of officials, journalists and the police. DSS volunteers sang songs imploring the pilgrims not to disrobe. Unmoved some believers walked away from the river in their clothes, stripped on the way and then ran in the nude to Goddess Renukamba's temple on the top of the 850-metre high hill.

However, much to the satisfaction of those campaigning against the custom the number of nude-worshippers on the first day were far less than the numbers that usually congregated at the festival. "We have almost succeeded . I'm sure this practice will gradually fade away in a few years," an excited Krishnappa declared. The optimism was short-lived, for all hell broke lose on the second day of the *jathra* when larger numbers had congregated.

The trouble began when DSS volunteers confronted by the men, women and children disrobing in front of them tried to physically prevent some of them. Infuriated, the pilgrims turned their wrath on the outsiders. Ten policemen, including two policewomen, were stripped and paraded naked on the banks of the river. Two women journalists were assaulted and their cameras taken away. Outnumbered the police saw that retreat was their best defence and took to their heels. The melee was brought under control only after police reinforcements were rushed in.

The battle on the second day seemed to have decided the issue of *bettele seve* this year. Festivities on the third day, the *jathra* went off uninterrupted. An overjoyed devotees participated in the *haram* by offering to the goddess their equal weights in tomatoes, coconuts or whatever their fields produced. The naked defiance clearly showed that converting believers is a prickly problem.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD in Chandragutti

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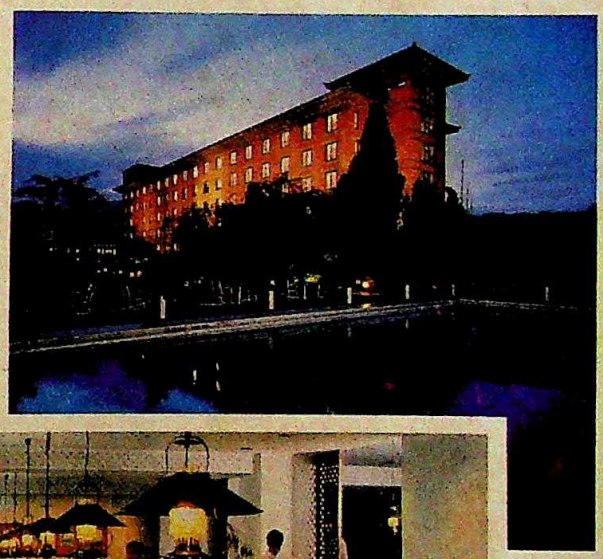

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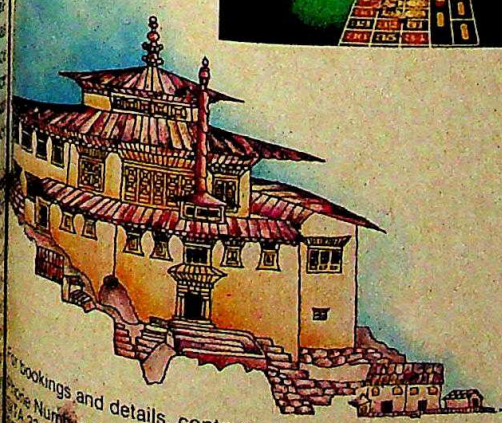

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A manager is as good as the decisions he makes. But often, decision making is an unenviable task. Especially when the odds for success and failure are even. And logic...research...even space-age computers can't guarantee fool-proof analysis. So how are fool-proof decisions made?

Decision is essentially a choice between alternatives.

The choice can be made in three different ways: by tradition, by random selection or by analysis.

Tradition chooses one way and is blind to all other ways.

Random selection gives equal weightage to all possible ways.

Analysis considers the advantages and disadvantages of the various possibilities and logically selects the best.

Logical decisions

To analyse the advantages and disadvantages, information is necessary. Where all relevant information is readily available, the cost/benefit analysis is purely logical. In management, such information is available only in relatively minor decisions – which can be termed as "postage stamp" decisions. Once the postal rates and the weight of the article are known, a single correct decision is possible. It becomes a pure exercise of "logic".

Use of intuition

However, in the case of important decisions, full information is rarely available. The distance between the office and the airport is known and the speed at which a vehicle is capable of being driven at, is known. However, the time taken to reach the airport from the office also depends on the traffic conditions. This information has to be "estimated" on the basis of past experience and intuition.

The use of intuition, assumptions or "created information" plays a greater and greater role as the importance of the decision increases. In operational decisions like sales forecasting, production scheduling, inventory control, etc. the collected information plays a large role. However, a certain amount of "created information" is also used.

In strategic decisions, the collected information can be used to narrow down the number of choices. However, in making the final decision, "created information" plays the vital role. Examples of such decisions are: choice of location, technology, product-mix and capacity. Take, for example, the selection of an aeroplane for Indian Airlines. Collected data regarding the efficacy of various aeroplanes under Indian conditions narrows down the choice to three or four aeroplanes. Thereafter the decision depends essentially on the expected price of fuel and the expected traffic density – in the future. Since the aeroplanes will be supplied three to five years thereafter, the decision has to use "created information" about fuel prices and traffic density 5 to 15 years from the date of the decision.

To create such an information, experience is not always adequate. Experience refers to the past but the future is not always a projection of the past. So intuition has to be used.

And this is what makes decision an art!

This also means that managers who have been successful in taking largely logical decisions at junior and middle management levels may fail at the senior and top management levels unless they master the art of decision-making, through effective use of intuition.

Success of a decision

The success of a decision often depends on the commitment

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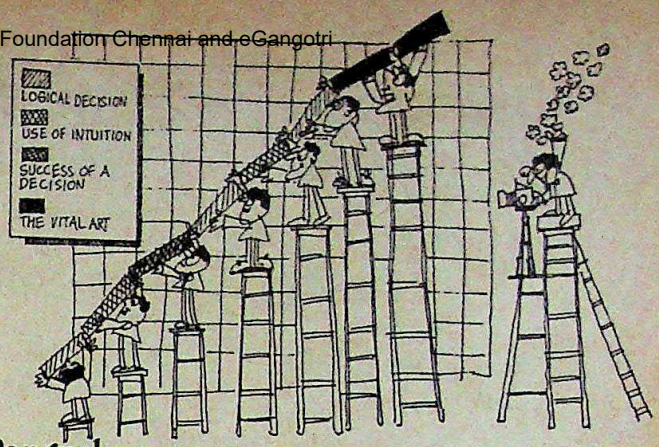
The Art of Decision Making



by Sharu S. Rangnekar
Management Educator, Bombay.

which the decision is implemented. Many a brilliant ision has failed because its implementation lacked husiasm.

his brings us to another aspect in the art of decision-ing: how to make the decision acceptable to those who sponsible for implementing it.

arisma is one way of making the decisions acceptable. ader with charisma can make his followers suspend their dgment in favour of his judgement. However, such matic ability is rare and cannot be depended upon erally.

ther way to make the decision acceptable is to get the rticipants involved in decision-making. There are ically three stages of such an involvement. The first is to ain them about the decision and seek information. e second is to seek their suggestions or advice. The third is for them to evolve the decision. Involvement becomes ningly greater as we move from the first to the d stage.

blems in participative decision-making

practice, however, it is not always possible to resort to fully icipative decision-making. Certain basic pre-requisites ve to be met. Firstly, there has to be a certain degree of ency in the goals of the person responsible for decision-ing and of the persons responsible for implementing the sions. Then alone the participation will guide the decision rds the commonly accepted goals. Where the implementers have an agenda of their own – different from that of the decision-maker – the decision might become a compromise that might not give the best possible results. If a manager wants to change procedures that are giving illicit benefits to his subordinates (e.g. through corruption), participative decision-making is unlikely to bring about an effective decision.

Similarly, there are situations where the subordinates are not ready to accept the responsibility involved in the decision-making. In such cases, the participation procedure becomes a waste of time. However, it is possible to develop the subordinates stage by stage so that they trust the boss and have confidence in themselves to embark on participative decision-making.

Involving the persons progressively in decision-making is also an art – and a vital one for the success of the decision.

The vital art

Thus, in spite of collection of any amount of information and analysing it with the most sophisticated computers, making important decisions and implementing them successfully is a vital art in the practice of management.

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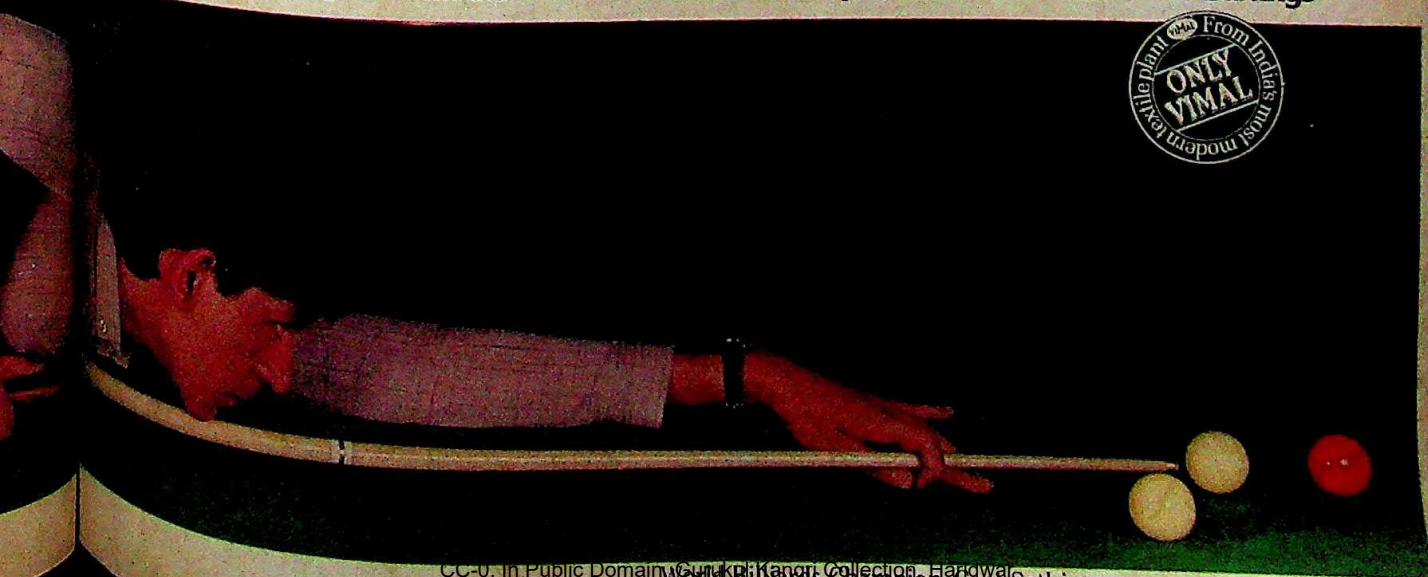

World Billiards Champion, Geet Sethi

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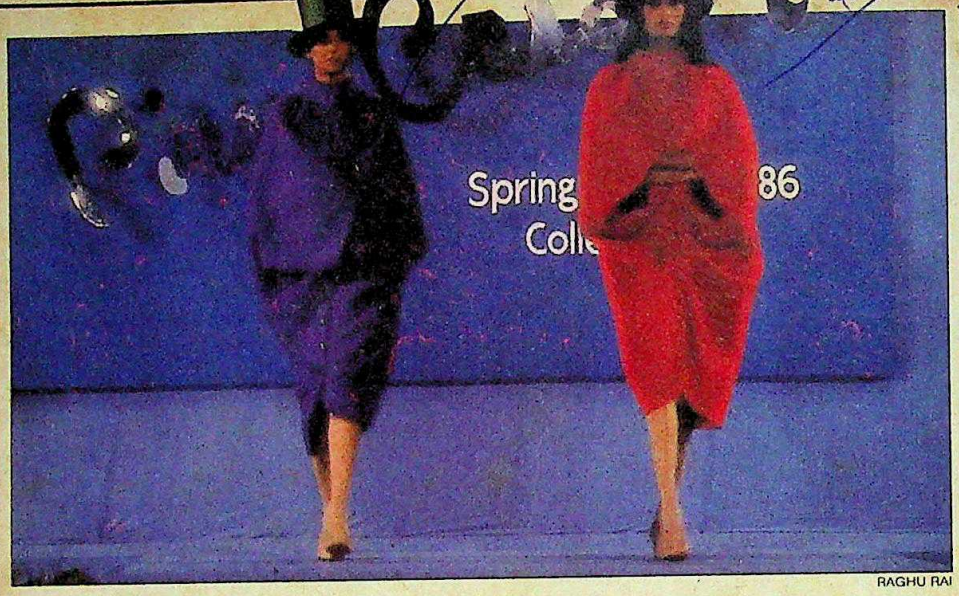


RAGHU RAI

◆ Guess who came to dinner last fortnight? **Pierre Cardin.** That's right. After having successfully wooed the Japanese, the Chinese, the Africans, the king of high-fashion arrived in India with his models and exclusive spring-summer fashions for 1986. At two glittering shows in Bombay and New Delhi, the master's leggy, six-foot models—16 from India and five from France—snaked and slithered in 300 outlandish creations that left the local glitterati bewildered. The silks and cottons were mostly Indian, and the designs had been adapted to suit the native style—tops to go with salwars and churidars and evening

Cardin: devious designs

dresses with colossal bows. But of course, these were not the only designs the Monsieur had on India. He was scouting around for licensees who would manufacture clothes, and everything Cardin for selling in India, export to France and maybe to Russia too. Now that's called clever designing.

◆ Bombay's 100-piece orchestras are at last going to get a breather. **Illaya Raaja,** the renowned music director of Tamil films, has just bought himself a neat little machine. Instead of drumming on the mridangam or strumming on the veena, Raaja types out notations on the keyboard of a computer, which records these tunes and 'mixes' them precisely with the vocals. Raaja claims that he has already mastered the computer keys and the fruit of his chipping labours will soon be on sound-track: for K. Balachander's next film, *Punnagai Mannan*. But in the end it's the same old man versus machine syndrome with the musicians cursing the machine.

◆ One could have sworn it was Miss Violet Stoneham from *36 Chowringhee Lane*. As she sat there, cross-legged and knitting, one almost expected her to call out to Sir Toby, her fat black cat. But of course, it wasn't Miss Stoneham. It was Madam Martha. Or, to make things sound more familiar, it was **Waheeda Rehman** complete with frock, chi-chi accent and horn-rimmed glasses. The role, Waheeda's TV debut, is of a rich, aging spinster in *Sauda*, based on Maupassant's famous short story, *The Little Cask*. The story is actually part of Shyam Benegal's *Kathasagar*, a TV anthology of classical short stories slated to go on the air by April. Waheeda accepted it because it is the main role and because the director is Benegal. Said the actress: "I have known Shyam for many years and this is the first time that he's directing me." Great talents, of course, are bound to produce classics.

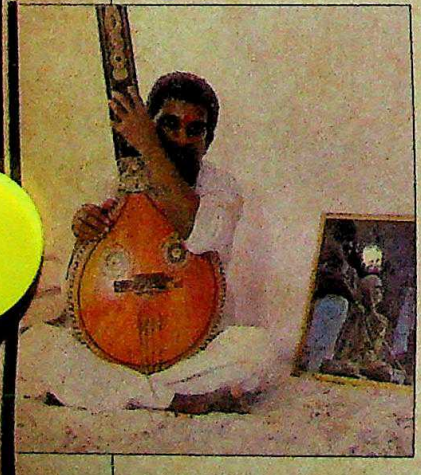
◆ As a 29-year-old veteran, who has covered the big events in Assam, Punjab and elsewhere, and penned a book (*Assam: A Valley Divided*), INDIA TODAY's Shekhar Gupta was a natural choice for the first Inlaks journalism award for his 'quest for professional excellence'. The award, which includes Rs 1 lakh for work abroad, was presented last fortnight by President Zail Singh. The Giani said he was glad the award included money or else "it would be like

LONGMAN

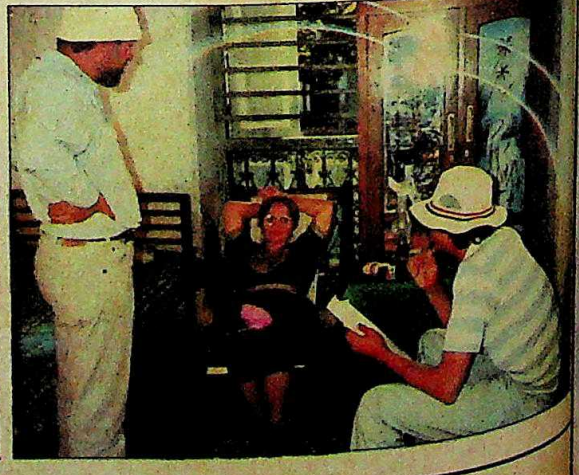
Gupta: receiving the award

a fragrant flower which does not bear fruit," and cautioned Gupta that "though the money is in foreign exchange you should not stay foreign." Says Gupta: "It is one of those pleasant things that come your way as you struggle from deadline to deadline."

—Compiled by MOHAMMED ASLAM



Raaja: computer chords



Rehman: prime time

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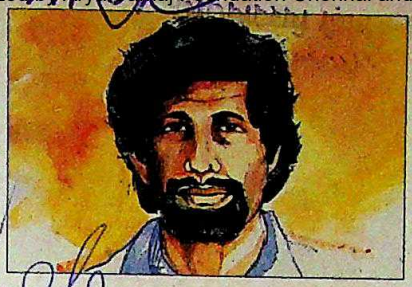
The Growing Malaise

Unobtrusively, alcoholism in India has suddenly acquired alarming overtones. Recent surveys have produced statistical findings that illustrate the dangerous inroads alcoholism has already made in Indian society and with what devastating effect.

COVER STORY 72



Nemesis in Goa

The massive manhunt launched for escaped criminal celebrity Charles Sobhraj ended in a Goa restaurant where Sobhraj was nabbed by a Bombay police posse. His interrogation, however, promises to reveal much of interest.

CURRENT EVENTS 29

Ribeiro's Challenge

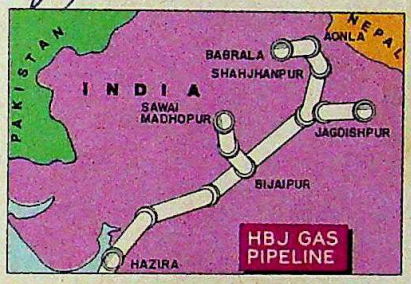
The Punjab police have become discredited and demoralised with Sikhs viewing the force as a symbol of state tyranny while non-Sikhs accuse it of inactivity. And an exclusive interview with police chief J.F. Ribeiro, who has to set matters right.

SPECIAL REPORT 68

A Lonely Journey

Sitarist Ravi Shankar features in the first of a new series of periodic photo essays in the magazine that will focus on the living legends of Indian music and art and allow them to describe their innermost beliefs and motivations.

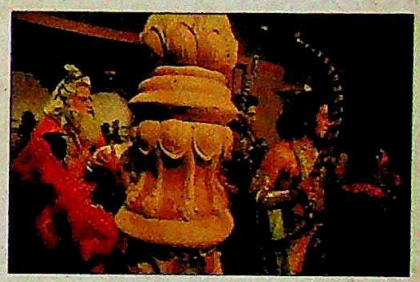
PHOTO ESSAY 86



The French Collection

The Government's decision to award the prestigious HBJ pipeline contract to the French-Japanese consortium led by Spie Capag ended months of cliffhanging suspense. But the delay in the decision could prove expensive.

BUSINESS 108



Electronic Epics

The filming of Indian epics as serials for Doordarshan has ushered the use of high-tech gadgetry into studios for the creation of special effects. The new technology is bringing about an electronic revolution on the small screen.

CINEMA 150

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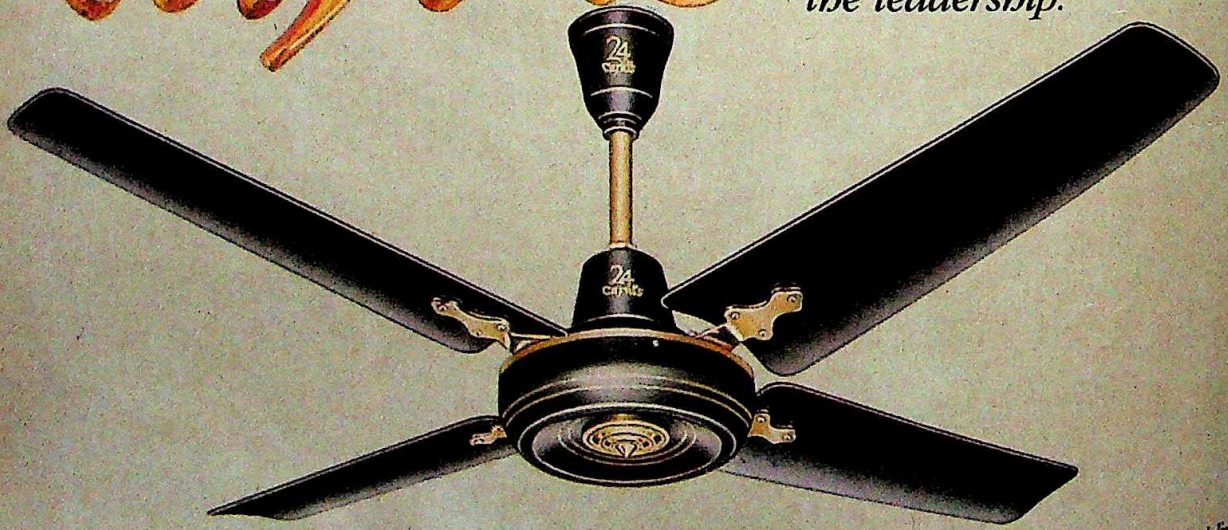

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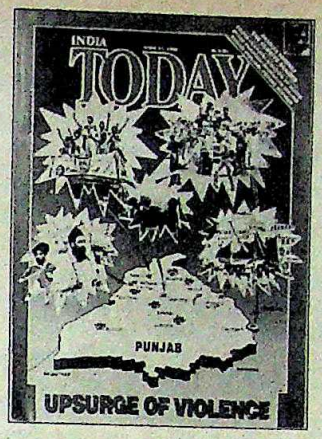

CURBING VIOLENCE

Violence has raised its ugly head once again in Punjab ("Upsurge of Violence", April 15). Every act of brutality boomerangs into smaller gruesome incidents. Terrorism must be curbed firmly and with caution. History should not be allowed to be repeated in Punjab.
Bangalore — **K. CHIDANAND KUMAR**

■ The Punjab chief minister's statement that "they (Congress-I) are not doing what they should do..." is unfortunately true. The people showed that they were in favour of democracy and against violence by rejecting the United Akali Dal's proposal to boycott the assembly elections. All the opposition parties including the Congress(I) should cooperate with the Akali Dal as the battle in Punjab is between the terrorists and the people.
Gwalior — **KAMLESH PRASAD**

■ The situation is even more serious than it was pre-Operation Bluestar. The authorities must restore normalcy or innocent Punjabis will continue to be the victims of terrorist bullets.
Hoshiarpur — **SANJAY CHOPRA**

■ A lot has been said and very little done regarding the implementation of the Punjab accord. Regarding the transfer of Chandigarh, I fail to understand why the chief ministers of Punjab and Haryana can't amicably resolve the issue when Chandigarh is going to continue to remain a part of India.
Allahabad — **BHARAT SINGH**

■ The Government formed after the elections is for the Akali Dal, of the Akali Dal and by the Akali Dal. The Punjab accord has only served to divide the people, shattering the harmony in the state further. The interests of the peasants and workers seem to be of no concern to anyone.
Berhampur, Orissa — **ABIR PADHY**

■ Pakistan's reported involvement in extending material and moral support to the terrorists is their way of taking revenge on us for having created Bangladesh, a country born out of India's active support to the Mukti Bahini freedom fighters.
Calcutta — **PRAHLAD GHOSH**

■ The escalating violence has succeeded not only in tearing apart the secular fabric and igniting communal passion in the state but it has also unmasked the inefficiency of the system in maintaining law and order.
Saharanpur — **NARENDRA M. PANT**

■ It is unfortunate that festivals have become synonymous with violence. Holi and Baisakhi are traditionally festivals of joy in Punjab, but now there is no joy, only terror and trepidition.
Jamshedpur — **B.N. BOSE**

■ The cover story horrifies. The tragedy that has built up in Punjab should be controlled. The state Government and the Centre must take firm and immediate action.
Madras — **K.V. RAJAGOPALAN**

■ Ramakant Jalota of the Shiv Sena ("Fighting Back", April 15) is mistaken if he thinks "every Hindu" in Punjab is a member and "all Hindus" outside are sympathisers. The Jagdish Tangris and Jalotas speak the same language of bigotry and hatred as the Kahlons and Joginder Singhs. It is a sad comment on the state of affairs that they still enjoy a substantial support and are being allowed to fracture the homogeneous Punjabi society.
New Delhi — **VIKRAM RAJ ANAND**

■ Shiv Sena's present activities in Punjab will not do the nation any good. Influential Hindu leaders in the country should call upon members of their community to be more responsible and not fuel the communal fire. The terrorists should not be allowed to gain popular support on account of the Hindu communalists.
Pune — **CHANDRASHEKHAR KULKARNI**

PLAYING FAIR

The comment ("Critical Facts", April 15) expresses completely the

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predicament the prime minister is in. His petulance has sprung from the feeling that his euphoria has been rudely pricked by the fourth estate. He should actually think himself lucky that the press, taking into account his inexperience, spared him the sharp and continuous flak that his grandfather and mother had received.

Bombay K.N. NINAN

ARMS AND THE MAN

The report on the arms build-up ("Operation Disarm", April 15) portrays an alarming escalation because of the Government's indifference. This indifference combined with political patronage to armed goons and the fact of weapons whose sale is banned being cornered by people with influence has led to the present state. The so-called arms verification held recently was a wishy-washy exercise. A verification should be carried out, not by ADM's who can be pressurised, but by a panel of senior retired government officers who would have nothing to lose.

Lucknow LT. COL. S.K. MUSHRAN

WANING POPULARITY

MGR's inability to communicate with the people and the fact that the present Government has not delivered the goods ("The Fading Star", April 15) is the reason for the waning popularity of both the chief minister and his party. Contributing to this general loss of public faith in the AIADMK is the mud-slinging and petty squabbles that some key party members have been indulging in.

Madras FRANKLYN STANLEY

■ With the chief minister's charisma waning, one finds a metamorphosis—intellectual and emotional—in the ranks of his so far docile followers. People who have been trained to blind obedience, habituated to the art of hero worship, are now thinking. But MGR remains blissfully unaware of what is happening around him.

Madras U.S. SAHASRANAMAN

UNPRINCIPLED STAND

"Hour of Reckoning" (April 15) clearly exposes the dilemma facing the CPI. Russia, in its efforts to befriend India, has always supported the policies of the Government. Strange that a country with such a glorious socialist tradition should in its efforts to be friendly, compromise itself by being agreeable even to the party of the Government in power.

Agra S.C. MATHUR

INEVITABLE ESCAPE

Charles Sobhraj's great escape from Tihar jail was inevitable. What is surprising is that it took the master criminal almost a decade to escape from the custody of the inefficient, indifferent and mercenary jail staff.

Meerut ANURADHA TULKA

■ It's a matter of shame for the whole country that Sobhraj, an international criminal and jail breaker, should have run away from what is claimed to be India's most high-security prison, and that too with the collusion of jail officials. Everyone knew that Sobhraj was the king of Tihar with the jail staff eagerly dancing attendance on him.

Chandrapur PRAKASH PRABHAVAT

DIRTY GIMMICKS

"Ridake Row" (April 15) indicates to what extent some pharmaceutical companies would go to promote their products. Quoting vaguely from reputable journals like *Lancet* they plug their own product. Strangely, these quotes are always favourable whatever the product may be. Obviously an advertisment gimmick.

Ahmedabad KETAN YAGNIK

MAN-MADE BARRIERS

India could learn a lesson from Morocco ("The Sahara Mirage", April 15) and construct a similar wall to prevent the terrorists and their friends sneaking in and out of the country at will. We would need only about 25,000 km of wall, the same length as the wall in Morocco. Though that figure seems rather exagerated as the length of the entire country is just 3,000 km.

Muzaffarnagar BRAHMA PRAKASH SHARMA

THE MONEY GAME

Hats off to you for the expose on Doordarshan ("The Money Machine", April 15). Now we know why we are being dished out such rotten stuff as *Ajube* and *Krishnavataar* at prime time. It's rightly said that money is the root of all evil, for under-the-table dealings have swiftly followed the commercialisation of this media.

Panchkula, Haryana PANKAJ CHANDGOTHIA

HANDS OFF RELIGION

Muslims have suddenly become of interest (March 31). Where was your concern for the widows of the Moradabad riots? Liberalism must be kept from religion.

Aligarh JASRAT JAMAL

PURE AND HOLY

The Ganga at Haridwar ("Holy Dip", March 31) is cleaner than it was even six months ago. The city of the Kumbh Mela is also from the point of view of sanitation above complaint. Your sweeping generalisations to the contrary could scare away pilgrims. Please let them come and take a dip in peace.

Dehradun G. PATTANAIK

AN APOLOGY

"CFD Taking Liberties" (October 15, 1985) contains several inaccuracies concerning me, and mentions that I "was not booked by the police because, as an official discreetly remarked, 'he has been helpful to the investigation'." Unfortunately your reporter did not care to verify his information.

I am not a scientist working with the National Physical Laboratory. I have no contact with the police in any manner and there is no truth in the innuendo of my being "helpful to the investigation". From the middle of September to the third week of October last year, I was away from Delhi on tour, and there was no question of my being in contact with the police and helping them with the investigation. I am the general secretary of the India Radical Humanist Association and I joined the fact-finding team of the CFD in this capacity.

Your report leaves an unsavoury hint as if I was collaborating with the police in the investigation into the so-called seditious activities of the CFD team. Assuming that a police officer made the statement, journalistic ethics required that you do not publish anything that might defame a person or might create doubts about his integrity without first ascertaining the truth.

I have never met any police officer in connection with the CFD report or any other matter. Your reference to me is entirely untrue.

New Delhi SUNIL BHATTACHARYA

The error and damage caused to Mr Bhattacharya's reputation is regretted. —Editor

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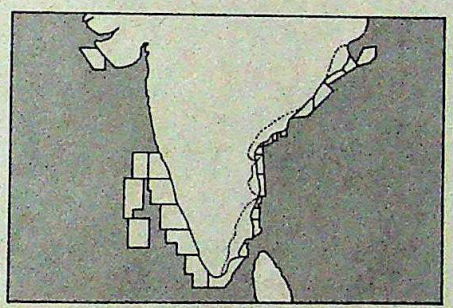
सत्यमेव जयते

The Government of India announces Third Round of bidding for the offshore exploration of oil and natural gas.



The Government of India invites bids from experienced international companies to explore for oil and natural gas in one or more of the 27 offshore blocks indicated in the map.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA

An information docket on each basin has been prepared. It will contain information on regional and local geology and the current status of exploratory activities in the blocks in each basin. Each docket is available at a cost of US $ 1,000/-.

Data packages containing seismic sections, gravity and magnetic anomaly maps, wireline logs, and structure contour maps etc., have been prepared for majority of the blocks and are available at a cost of US $ 10,000 each. For the rest, the entire available data is included in the information docket.

Companies may purchase either the information dockets or the data packages or both. There is no limit on the number of basins or blocks for which data may be purchased.

CONTRACT TERMS

The contract will be in the form of production sharing with

- The possibility of a seismic option
- No signature or production bonus
- No Royalty payment
- No minimum expenditure commitment
- No limit on the allocation of annual production of recovery of cost
- Profit oil share based on post tax rates of return or multiples of investment recovered
- No ring fencing of blocks for corporate tax purposes
- Suitable provisions for production and pricing of gas
- Corporate income tax at 50%
- Purchase of production for domestic consumption to be at international market price

Companies may bid for one or more blocks, singly or in association with other companies. Assignments would be permissible.

PRESENTATION

A presentation of the contract and existing petroleum legislations, applicable fiscal laws, basin review and other relevant information will be made in Delhi, London and Houston on May 7, 14 and 20 respectively.

Representatives of exploration companies are invited to attend. Companies interested in purchasing the data packages and in obtaining further information may write to:

Shri. D.N. Avasthi
General Manager
Oil & Natural Gas Commission
6th Floor, Kailash Building
26-Kasturba Gandhi Marg
New Delhi – 110 001.
INDIA
Telephone No. 3310477
Telex No. 3165,184 IN
3166, 262 IN

Bids should be submitted not later than November 30, 1986 addressed to:

The Joint Secretary (Exploration)
Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas
2nd Floor, Shastri Bhavan
Dr. Rajendra Prasad Marg
New Delhi – 110 001. INDIA

CLARION D 124

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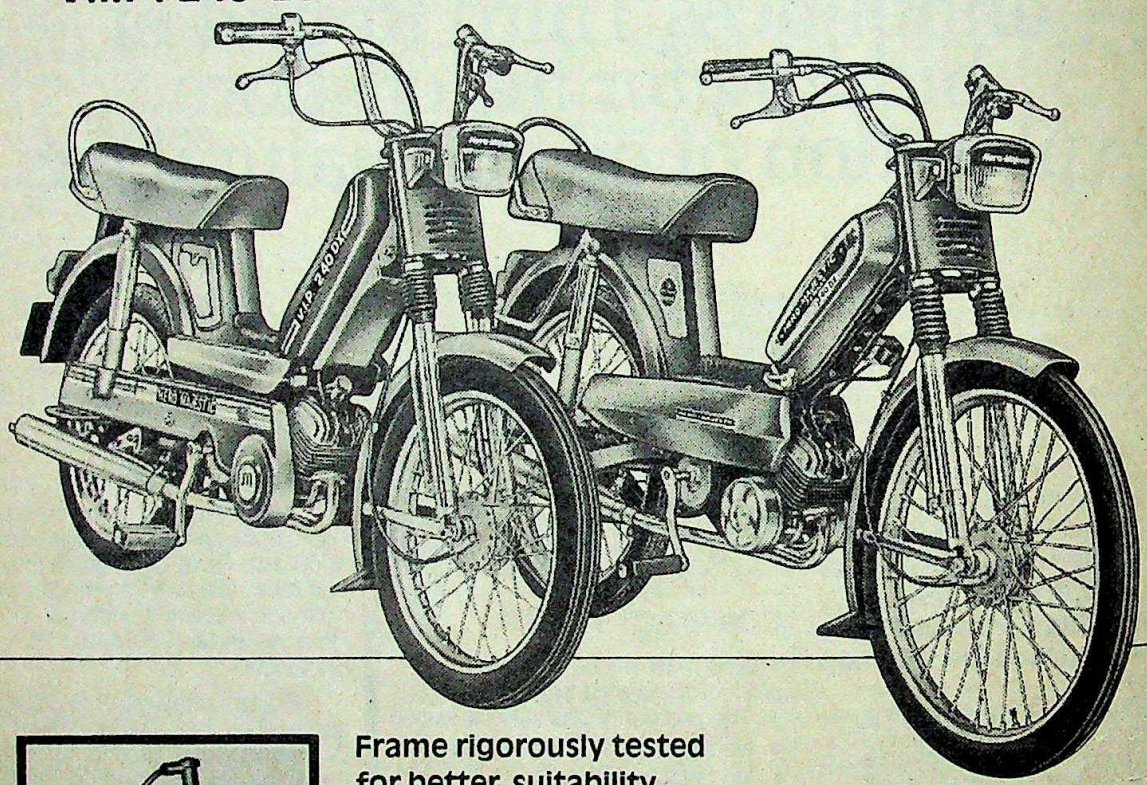

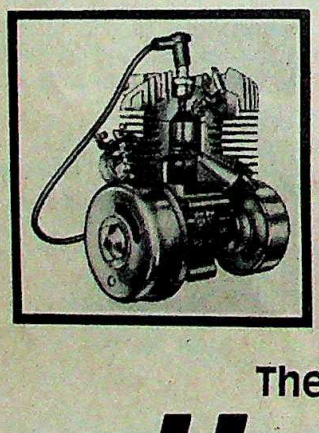

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* PAY LOAD	: 120 Kgs.

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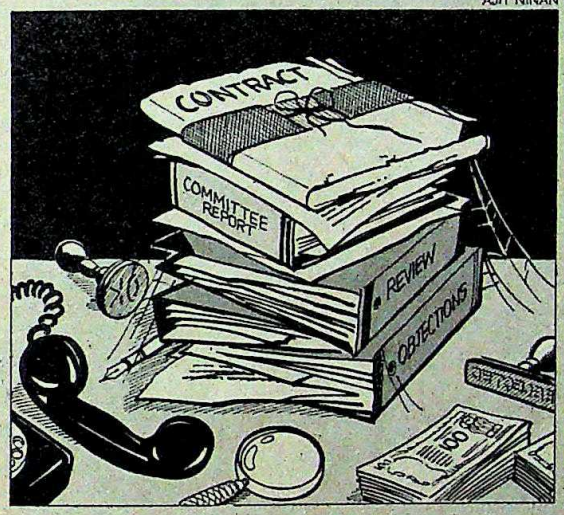
Controversial Contracts

THE FURORE before the awarding of the Hazira-Bijaypur-Jagishpur (HBJ) pipeline was only in part due to the fact that Snamprogetti, the company which launched—unsuccessfully—an unprecedented public and private campaign to win the contract, was Italian and has been doing unusually well in India. It was due far, far more to the widespread feeling in the bureaucracy and outside that a foreign company had been able to kick up dust and apparently influence the Government to change is established procedures for the awarding of contracts.

If anything, the HBJ contract, which was won by the French Spie Capag-led consortium last fortnight, shows up the absurdly inept way in which government contracts are negotiated and awarded, and the crippling delays that result. As a report elsewhere in this issue shows, the HBJ contract changed shape and went through several hands before landing in the lap of the party that was first recommended for it anyway. Caution is admirable, but it can be carried to counter-productive lengths if the original procedures aren't properly thought out or if decision-making is complicated by extraneous factors. This isn't a question of projects slipping behind for administrative or technical reasons; it's a problem of conception, of having a clear idea of what is wanted, finding the best people to assess the offers, and making a speedy, clean, unambiguous decision.

AJIT NINAN



Unfortunately, the HBJ contract is merely the latest example of how not to do business. The last time Snamprogetti was controversial was in 1980, when the Government overruled a decision taken by the Janata government in 1979 to award a prestigious fertiliser plant contract to an American company, and gave it instead to a Danish firm owned partly by Snamprogetti—after the American firm had been asked to revalidate its bid an incredible 14 times in less than two years. That reversal was a unique one, but the delays associated with it, setting back the erection of large fertiliser projects, are a far more common problem.

Take for example the 155 mm field gun, the contract for which was finally awarded to the Swedish Bofors company last month. The first moves to acquire such a weapon were taken in the late '70s and what with field trials, offers, pressures, pulls and counter-pulls, a process that ought to have taken no more than one year dragged on for seven. The Harrier acquisition programme, which has come in two instalments, has similarly seen delays and cost escalations. The acquisition of Westland helicopters announced earlier in the year, similarly, has been a tortuous process.

If defence contracts are an area of perennial controversy, the situation is no better in purely industrial projects. Roughly four years ago, a major contract for manufacturing electronic telephone exchange equipment was given to a French firm without others being allowed to bid; then the same firm was given a repeat order after the Government declared that other bidders were not qualified under the tender—this after the Government had negotiated with them on their tender documents, asked them to revalidate their bids for a further period of time, and sought more information on the basis of their bids. In yet another celebrated case, the Government short-circuited the decision-making process on a massive contract for a three-million tonne steel plant in Orissa, only to find the British company that got the contract asking for 40 per cent more money during detailed negotiations. The deal was cancelled, and the project has still to see the light of day after four years. This list can go on, with the instance of another British company being asked to set up a super-thermal power station in India without the usual tenders being floated. This is now the only super-thermal power project that is in the doldrums—because the British firm did not have the experience and ability required to see the project through.

Prime Miniser Rajiv Gandhi has claimed that the delay in awarding the HBJ contract has helped the country get lower quotations and save money. That may well be true, but it does no credit to the country if the Government's decision-making process takes longer than the actual project implementation. The HBJ tender was floated two years before a decision was taken, and less than a year remains for the first phase of the pipeline to be ready. There is also perpetual going back and forth on the merits and demerits of turnkey contracts (where Indian involvement is minimal) and piecemeal deals (where Indian companies learn on the job by being responsible for the project). If one argument is found acceptable in one case, a second case finds the second argument being used, and the ordinary citizen should be forgiven for assuming that which argument wins out in which case depends on the strength of the lobbying.

There are few countries that sign up as many major contracts as India does, but there can be none other which has an even remotely comparable record of dilly-dallying and flip-flopping on contracts. And there comes a time when bidders tailor themselves to the system, providing for the delays and last-minute bargaining while submitting their original bids. This does no one any good, and the Government should review its past record on major contracts and determine a new procedure that is sensible, business-like and worthy of a government that claims to work faster and cleaner.

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KEC turns an eternal truth on its head.

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Strange as it may sound, our success at KEC and the total confidence of our customers derive in some measure from our response to crises, troubles and failures.

If a critical motor stops, very likely a great many operations in a factory or a mine may come to a grinding halt. KEC's first concern is not to apportion blame but to put our motors or drives back in shape and to keep our customer's set-up running.

Take the case of Bokaro Steel's Mudgun drive for instance.

In 1977, Heavy Engineering Corporation obtained our 50 kW flame-proof motors for the Bokaro Steel Plant through our agents. It was a routine order. We manufactured, tested and then delivered the motors. We had done our duty. End of the matter, yes? Hardly. It was just the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship with Bokaro.

Some time later, a KEC technical team happened to be at Bokaro, not giving a sales pitch but brain storming with Bokaro engineers on "the selection of motors for specific applications."

That started a chain reaction. When the KEC branch manager visited Bokaro the engineers there discussed the suitability of the motors they had ordered for mudgun operations. Now that the job and the operating environment had become clear, the KEC branch manager consulted the technical staff at the head office and told the unvarnished truth. The motors supplied were unsuitable. A different kind of motor which would take three to four months to design was required to meet the specific need. Would the Bokaro people still be interested? Yes, they were. They had complete faith in KEC's designing and manufacturing capability.

But events in the meantime had already overtaken matters. True to the KEC prognosis, the motors failed under actual operating conditions. Some of our best design engineers were immediately sent to Bokaro for an on-the-spot study. What they found was critical.

During the manufacture of steel, molten metal flows out through the base of the blast furnace. Once the metal is drained, the outlet is sealed with wet clay fired from a distance by a mudgun. On contact with the hot walls of the blast furnace, the wet clay hardens and forms a strong and secure lid. After tapping out the contents, the furnace is charged again. Imagine the consequences of a faultily functioning mudgun drive or a defective clay lid: liquid metal at a temperature of about 1400 C would flow out, pose a fire hazard and endanger innumerable lives.

The KEC team returned home fully seized of the problem and in close consultation with HEC, determined new specifications for a 50 kW, 415 Volts frame motor. A little later KEC got the final O.K. from HEC, with minor modifications in the mounting assembly.

Soon after, the new KEC motor was already operating. After slight adjustments in cabling, the motor has been functioning faultlessly. What the whole episode proved once again was that there's more to the specifications of a motor than just the rating.

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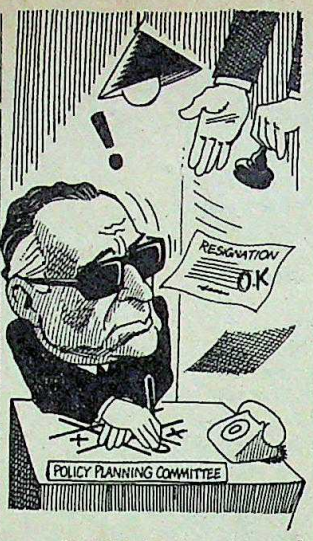
Lobbying on

● The loss of the prestigious HBJ pipeline contract has not deterred high profile lobbyist Ottavio Quattrocchi from looking after the interests of other Italian companies based in India. A day after he lost the pipeline battle he was back in action, though in a relatively minor fashion. Accompanied by the regional manager of the Italian airline, Alitalia, Quattrocchi walked into the office of Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jagdish Tytler whom he knows personally. The Italian airline had earlier failed in convincing the International

Airport Authority of India (IAAI) that it needed three counters at the new Indira Gandhi Airport in Delhi for its operations as against the two allotted to it. Tytler obliged him by instructing the IAAI to look into it favourably. But it was small relief for someone who'd lost a project worth over Rs 1,000 crore.

Calling it Quits

● Following in the footsteps of G. Parthasarathi, former Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) chief Ram Nath Kao has also sent in his resignation from the Policy Planning Committee. Though Parthasarathi was persuaded to take back his resignation, sources



say that Kao's was accepted when it was clear that he was adamant about his decision. The reasons for Kao's quitting are the same as those given in Parthasarathi's resignation letter—lack of any worthwhile work for the Policy Planning Committee.

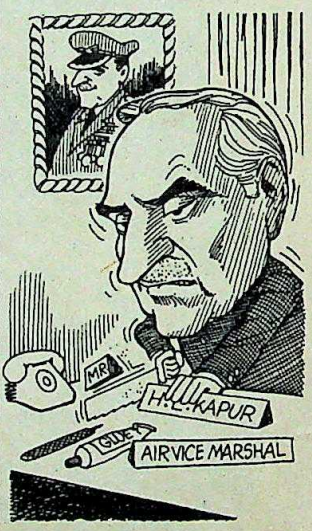
According to the sources, Kao handed in his resignation about the same time as Parthasarathi but was persuaded by the prime minister to hold out for a month. He agreed, but when things didn't improve, sent in his letter on March 20. The Government has now decided to accept his resignation.

To Sir With Love

● How does one address a retired armed forces officer reemployed in a senior civilian or diplomatic job? The officers themselves prefer to be addressed by their rank but the Government seems to think that having retired they become plain misters.

One such person is Delhi's Lt Governor, Air Vice Marshal H.L. Kapur. He has made it clear that he prefers to be addressed by his rank, but most official letters that come to the Raj Bhawan are for Mr Kapur. There are many former brass in Kapur's category who share his views. Former army chief K.V. Krishna Rao is a governor, and two former air chiefs are ambassadors: I.H. Latif in France and Dilbagh Singh in Brazil. The grand old man of the Indian Air Force, Air Chief Marshal Arjun Singh, took a firm stand on this when he was ambassador some years ago. When he was 'mistered' in official correspondence, he insisted he had spent a lifetime earning his rank and no mere babu could deprive him of it.

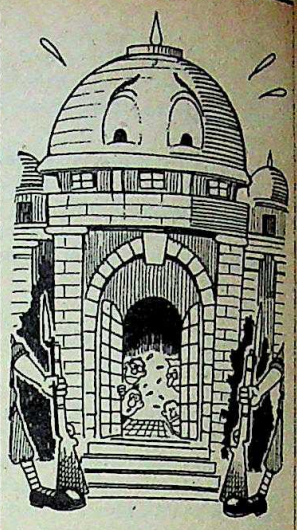
More recently, when Kapur was a member of the Rajya Sabha, prior to his elevation as lieutenant governor, he gently tried to make the same point but with no effect. Since only a court martial can strip



armed forces officers of their rank, how can mere bureaucratic procedure do this, they ask. But the bureaucrats are adamant and the controversy is still being hotly debated.

Security Bungle

● Less than two years ago, someone bungled in allowing Beant Singh and Satwant Singh to position themselves in a manner that enabled them to assassinate a prime minister. Incredibly enough, a similar bungle was repeated recently when a couple of soldiers who had deserted their army stations in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar, and been rehabilitated in the Defence Security Corps following



the Punjab accord, were posted as security guards at one of the gates in South Block, which houses the offices of the prime minister as well as the defence and external affairs ministries.

The two guards were at their stations for a few days when someone woke up, began asking questions and found out what had happened. The guards were quickly changed. But how were they allowed to be in South Block in the first place?

The answer to that can only be that the Government's left hand does not know what its right hand is doing. The defence authorities had been opposed to reinstating the deserters, but the prime minister committed himself to this as a part of the Punjab accord last July. Rather than full reinstatement, the defence authorities decided to rehabilitate some of the deserters in the defence security corps, which usually comprises retired jawans who are re-employed to do guard duties. The corps guards all manner of offices and defence installations, including—it now turns out—parts of South Block. And the government *babu* who assigned members of the corps to understaffed stations either did not have the slightest inkling that they were deserters, or did not give it a second thought.

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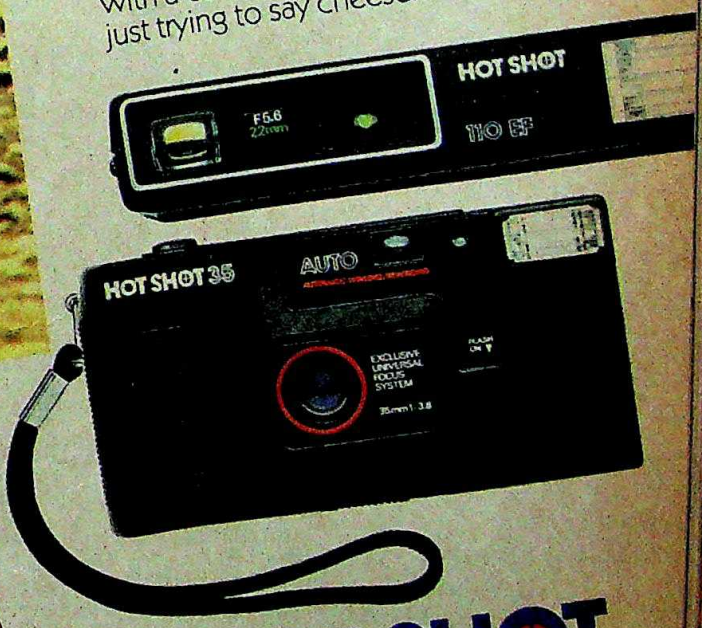

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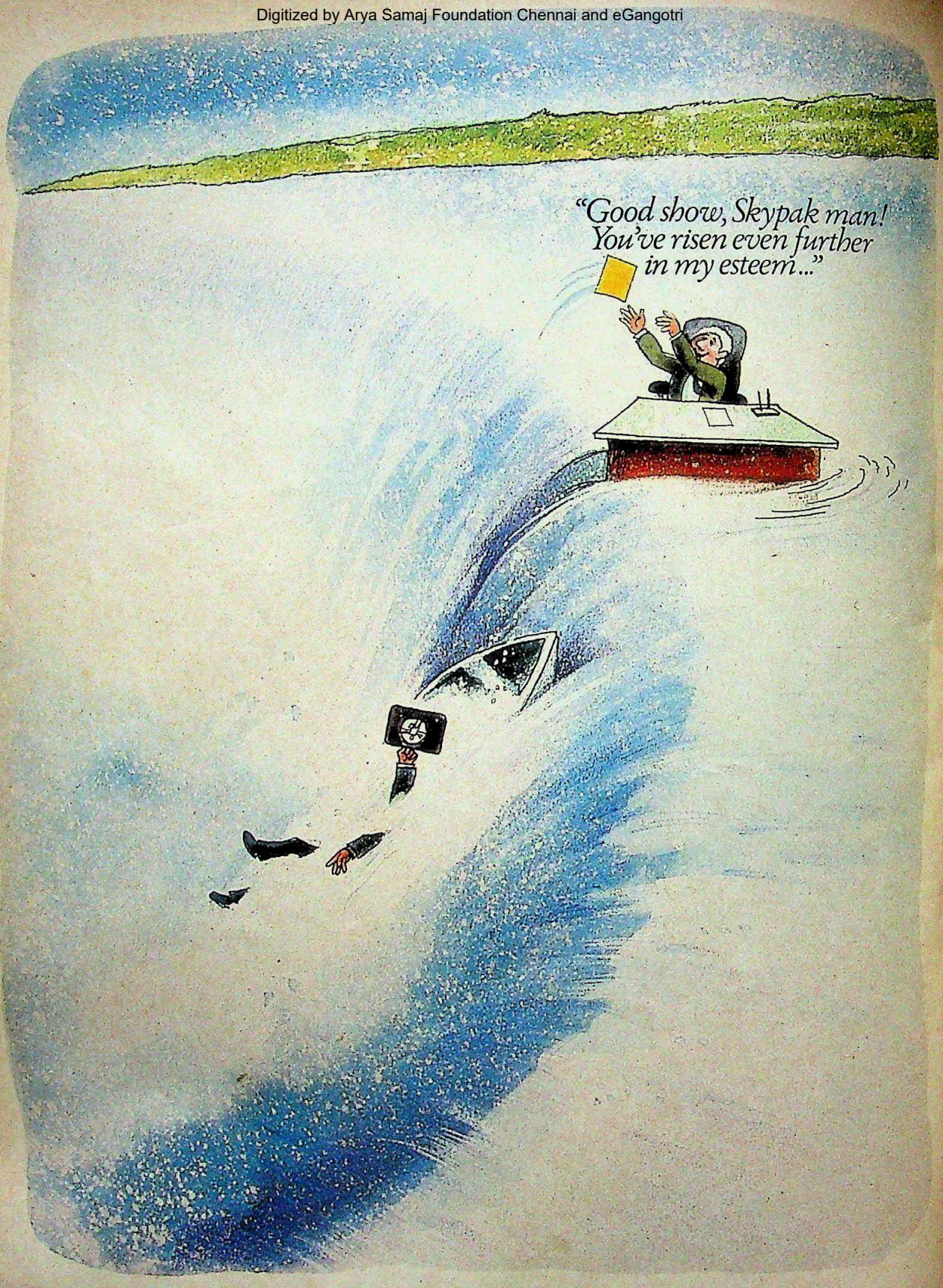

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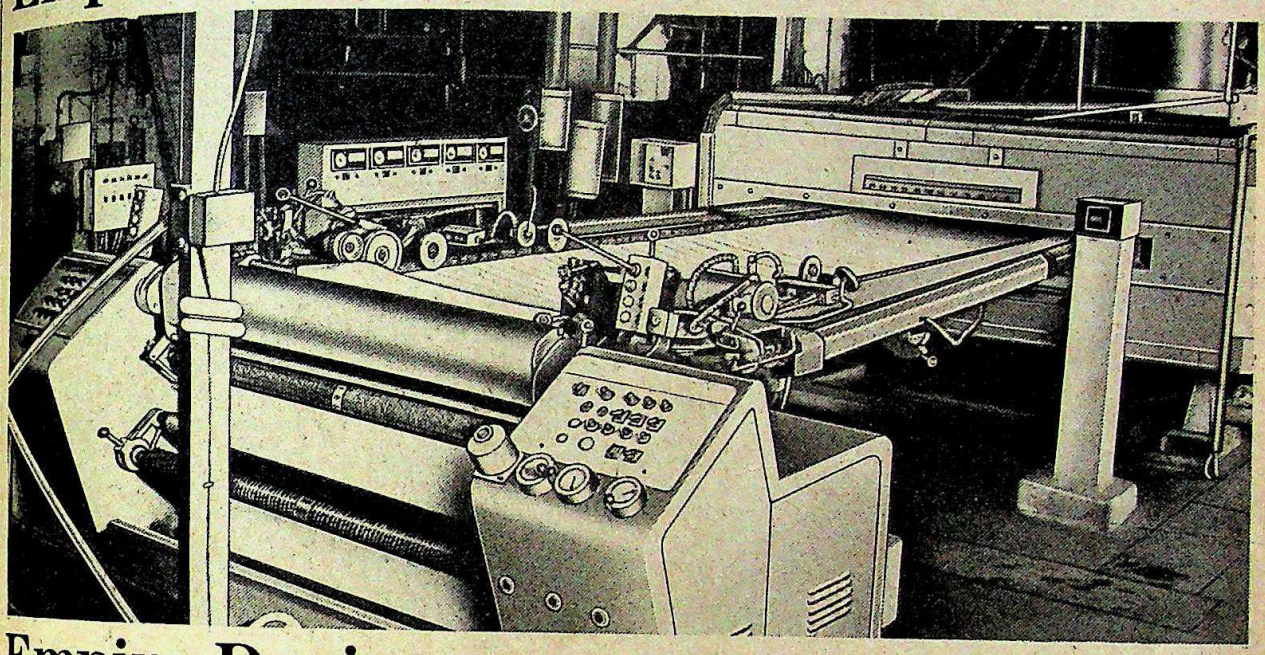

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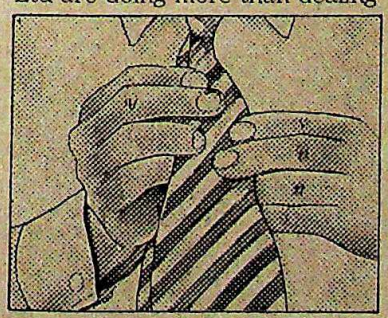

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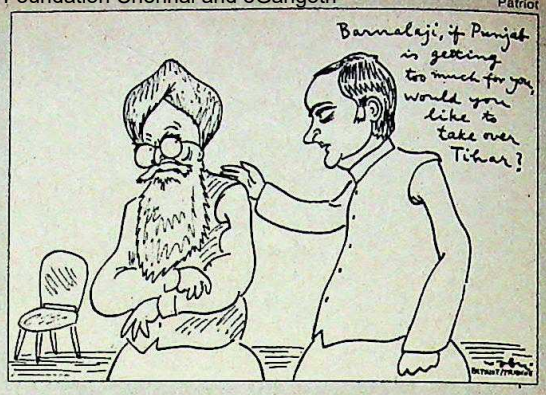

● *I get the feeling that he (Rajiv Gandhi) is very vulnerable to the pressures that act on him at a given time and that makes him swing and oscillate from one extreme to another. He pursues a certain policy and is attacked for being pro-rich, so if the image of being pro-rich has to be erased, he agrees to undertake raids.*

■ L.K. ADVANI in *The Sunday Telegraph*

● *A baba-log Government—that's how it is seen in the bazaar these days. It's the ayahs' expression for the molly-coddled kids of the upper classes. They are seen as playing games, playing government, and for the fun of it.*

■ ROMESH THAPAR in *Economic and Political Weekly*

● *If American help to Pakistan has not made Pakistan democratic, Russian aid to India will not make us communist either.* ■ V.P. SINGH in *Gentleman*

● *I am lifting martial law to give democracy a chance. But democracy must come back charting the course I have laid down for it.*

■ GENERAL ZIA-UL-HAQ in *Sunday*

● *Punjab is burning and all that the Centre is doing is setting up commissions on waters and boundary issues. The Punjab issue cannot be settled through commissions.* ■ BABA AMTE quoted in *The Tribune*

● *If I could, I would throw Mr (Jyoti) Basu so far into the Bay of Bengal that he would not be able to swim back to the shore again.*

■ A.B.A. GHANI KHAN CHOUDHURY in *The Telegraph*

● *I am the most loyalist partyman in the country. So the question (of starting a new party or leaving the Congress) doesn't arise.*

■ GUNDU RAO in *The Sunday Observer*

● *In your field of journalism, facts are sacred and opinions free. It is the same with diplomacy; only journalists are paid to write while a diplomat is paid to keep quiet.*

■ A.P. VENKATESWARAN, foreign secretary designate in *The Telegraph Magazine*

● *We don't look to the rest of India, which is intellectually inferior. Our literature is related to French literature, not Hindi, I don't even read Hindi. Calcutta is like Paris.* ■ AVEEK SARKAR in *Far Eastern Economic Review*

● *It was only after I was elected MP, I got back in touch with reality. Otherwise we stars do get lost in the world of make-believe.*

■ SUNIL DUTT in *Stardust*

● *Wet scenes are okay. I am fully clothed. You have to establish passion in some way. I can't do all my films in a* burqa. ■ FARHA in *Filmfare*

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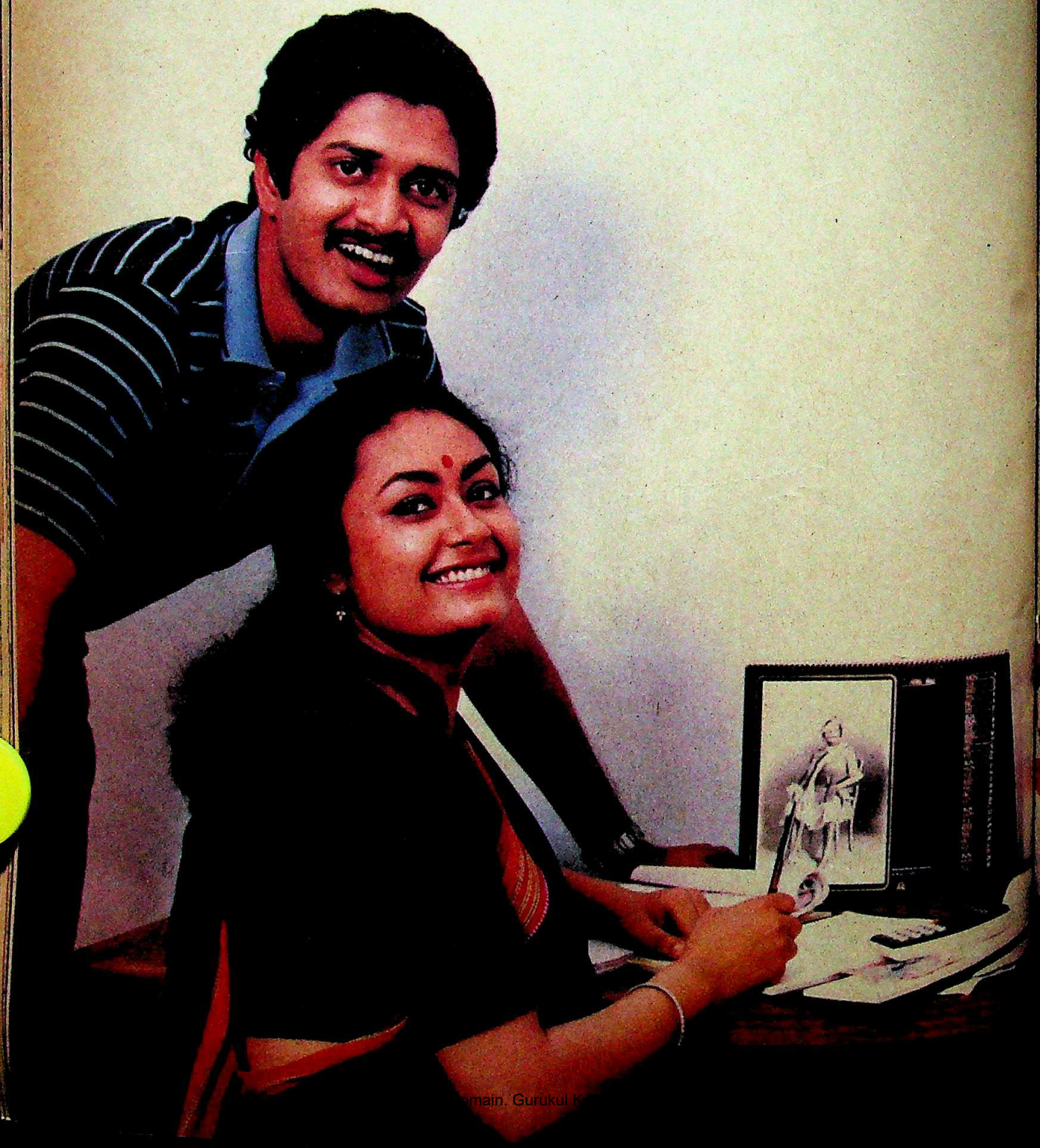

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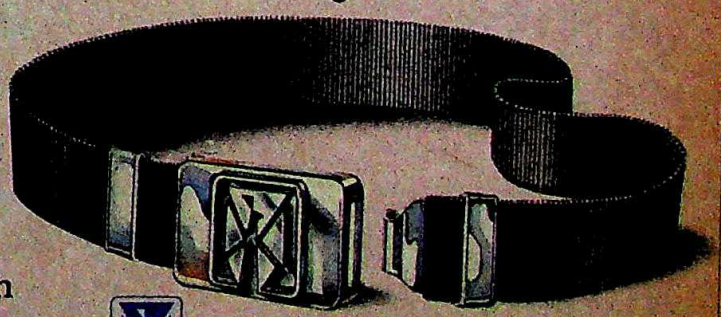

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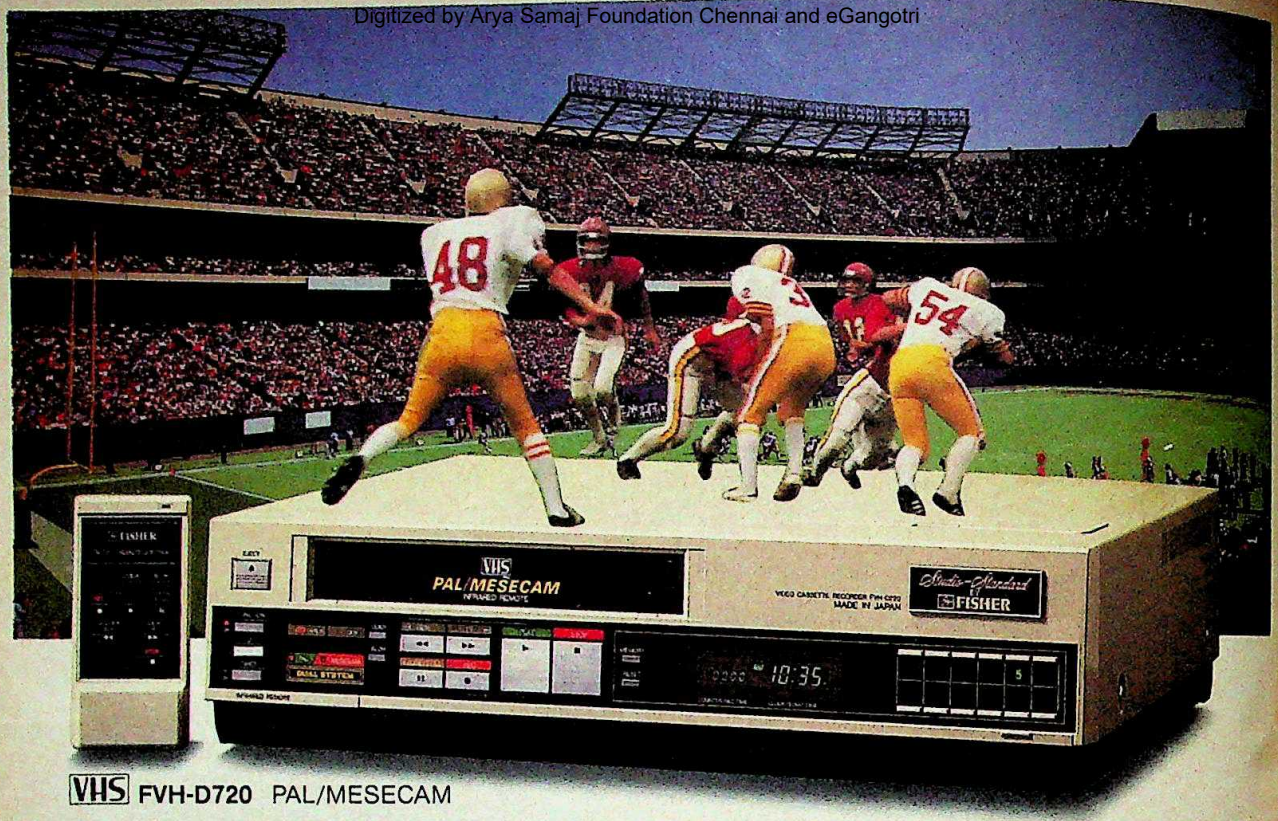

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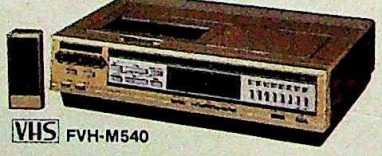

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DOG'S DAY

■ A dog is a man's best friend. So it was not surprising that when the pet dog of Dr D.S. Malhotra of Bhopal died recently, Dr Malhotra was sufficiently moved to decree a solemn funeral. The more so when he suspected that his darling dog, the light of his life, had been poisoned by someone who turned green with envy whenever he saw the affectionate animal bathing Dr Malhotra with his tongue. Who was this murderous man? Dr Malhotra lost no time at all in pointing his finger at Tirath Das, a local councillor. A sizeable crowd backed him up and then Dr Malhotra had an idea.

A little later, the funeral procession wended its way to the burial site. In front, was the despondent master. Just behind him, was Tirath Das, staggering along to the boos and jeers of his fellow countrymen, bearing his own personal cross in the shape of a very dead dog on his shoulder. And he also had to dig the grave himself and put the animal inside. Only then did the crowd's anger subside somewhat. When reports last came in, Tirath Das had filed a complaint against the doctor, for abuse and harassment. The dog, good soul that he was, certainly wouldn't have liked to be the cause of such unbrotherly strife.

CAPTIVE GUEST

■ Velandi is a poor cobbler-shoeseller who somehow makes two ragged ends meet on a railway platform in Madras. Sometime ago, he met the woman of his dreams, proposed and was accepted. However, Velandi is not just any railway cobbler getting along in life. He has a magnificent obsession and he shares it with a thousand other people in the state: M.G. Ramachandran, chief minister of Tamil Nadu, lord and master of the silver screen. Velandi wanted MGR to be present at his wedding. To that effect, he laboriously penned a telegram inviting him and telling him that he (Velandi) would kill himself if he (MGR) did not turn up.

MGR got the telegram and because he is so concerned about the welfare of his electorate, asked somebody to find out if Velandi was serious about committing suicide. The somebody traipsed all the way to the platform and discovered that yes, he was. After that the chief minister had no choice but to dress up in his fanciest dark glasses and go. And so it was that on the great day, Velandi and his wife bowed deeply to Tamil Nadu's benevolent god for blessings.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

■ The Japanese are coming! The Japanese are coming! And if you think they're only bringing along bundles and bundles of CTV's and VCR's and others electronic abbreviations, you couldn't be more wrong. For this time, they'll be coming with pearls.

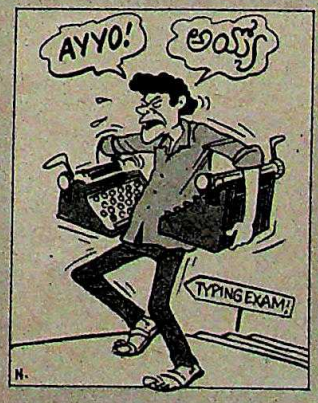
The Samovasran temple in Saurashtra, Gujarat, is an expensive piece of devotion, costing as it does Rs 1.5 crore. But the Jains are rich and a few crores here and there should not make any difference to them, or to the 108 Jain Tirth Darshan Bhavan Trust which collected the money to build the temple over a period of 14 years. The 108-ft tall building was finished last month and it cried for a sumptuous opening.

Eureka! They had it. Come the opening and an aircraft will shower 2 kg of Japanese pearls over the stone and marble construction even as the devotees queue up at its doors to prostrate themselves before the deity inside. The pearls will be both natural and cultured and will be mixed with small pieces of gold in what is probably the costliest confetti ever conceived of. The organisers were silent on the cost of the pearls, but like the makers of Maruti, seemed to be having difficulty in reducing the foreign content.

TRUE TO TYPE

■ Jobs are at a premium nowadays and jobseekers have to go through fire and flies to get one. But those everyday hassles paled into insignificance in the face of what typists in Vijaywada had to go through recently.

About 200 applicants for posts in the corporation were asked to appear for a test. As all of them had said they were proficient in both English and Telugu typing, both were included in the test. Now the catch: they had to bring two typewriters, one each for English and Telugu. Thus started the great typewriter rush in Vijaywada, and especially for Telugu typewriters, which were not to be had for love or money, especially money. The typing institutes said they would give their instruments only to their students. Then there was the problem of carrying the machines. Somehow, most of the candidates managed by sharing, all the while cursing the corporation for not supplying them. The corporation sheltered behind the plea that it would have been accused of supplying good machines to some and defective machines to others. That's what one calls being true to type.



—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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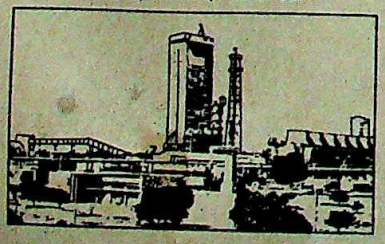
Listen to the breeze whisper, 'Here comes the 21st Century!'

The Nangal Plant was established in 1961, when the sweet windsong of prosperity was in the far distance.

The winds of change are sweeping India to the threshold of a bright new century. And NFL's Nangal Plant has not merely kept pace with the times but is heading towards futuristic computerised production methods. Already, capacity utilisation is at 93.8%, a new record which the plant will better with newer, innovative techniques.

Today, NFL's Nangal Plant is a model of successful management producing in addition to Urea and CAN, chemicals such as Methanol, Ammonium Nitrate and Nitric Acid for industrial use, and Heavy Water for the nation's nuclear programme. Through Nitrogen production alone, NFL's Nangal Plant has benefited the nation by Rs. 711 crores.



But the Nangal Plant does not just stop at setting records in innovation and productivity. It's commitment to human resources development, energy conservation and pollution controls dates back to its inception.

And as a result of its dedicated efforts, it has won Innovation, Productivity, Shramvir Awards. And no less than 67 national and international awards for safety.

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NANGAL PLANT

NLF – the active ingredient of growth into the 21st Century holds the distinction of being the leading producer of nitrogenous fertilizer in the country and has three operating units located at Nangal, Panipat and Bhatinda.

NFL is setting up the first inland located gas based project at Vijaipur in Guna district of Madhya Pradesh. The plant has an annual installed capacity of 7,26,000 tonnes of Urea.

NFL's Nangal Plant has completed 25 years of service to the nation and its farming community and is breezing its way into an exciting new era.

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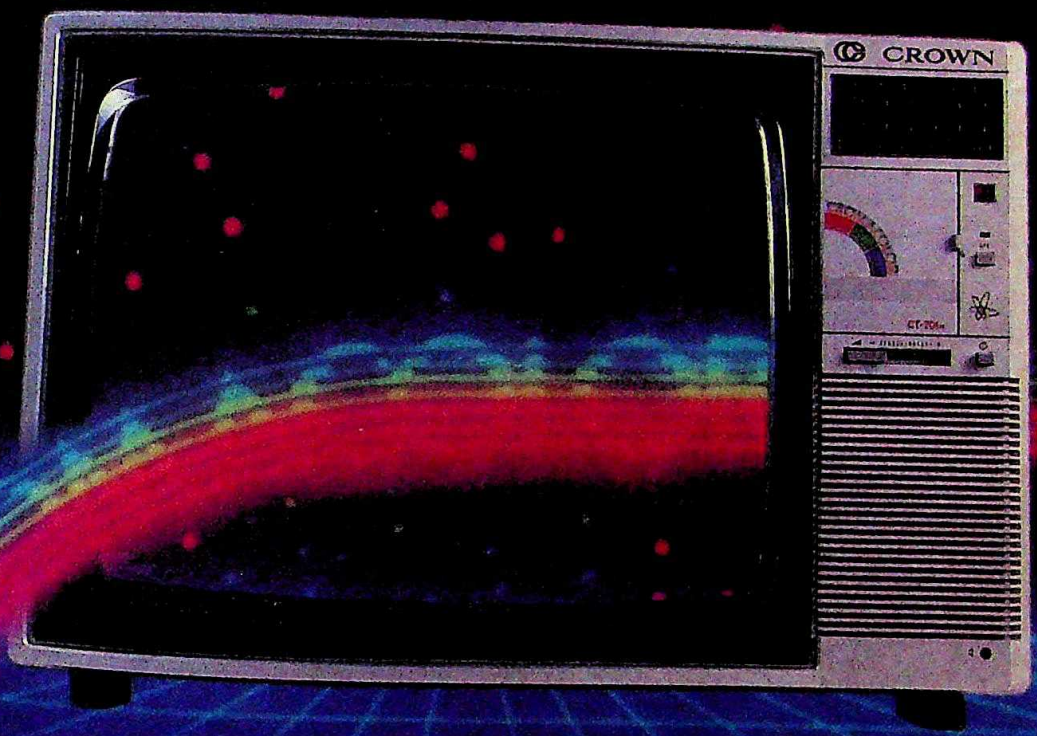

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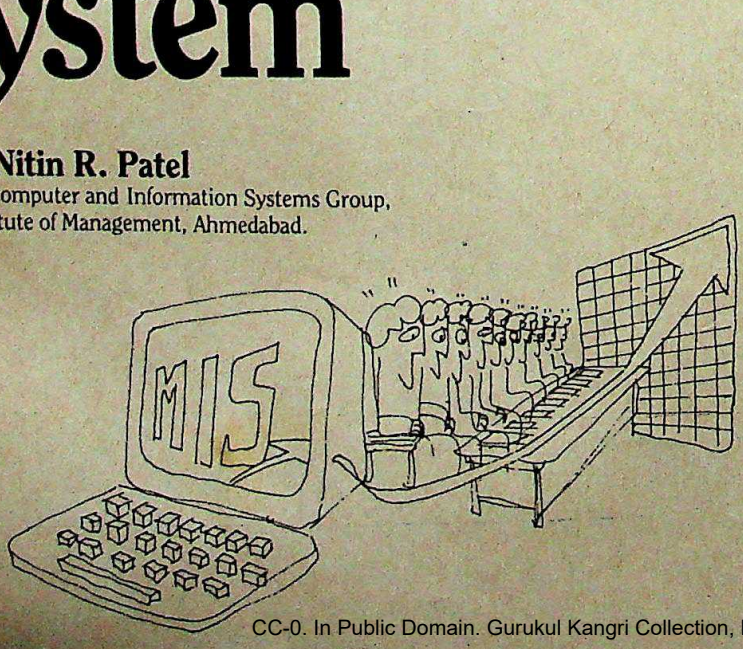
Corporate decisions don't flow from thin air. Plenty of facts decide each. And form the solid source. Which is fine as long as the right facts... the right data... are coming along so the decisions are right. But are they?

Management Information System

by Dr. Nitin R. Patel
Professor, Computer and Information Systems Group,
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.



Managing information

In one of his short stories the Nobel prize winning Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges describes an infinite library which houses every imaginable book. However, the library is so unorganised that one can never access desired information. Today's manager, inundated as he is in a blizzard of data from reports, newspapers, telex messages, telephone conversations and conferences, at times feels he is in such a library.

Today, managing information is becoming as important as managing men, machines, money and materials. Two fundamental reasons underline this occurrence.

1. Complexity. Within the organization and without

A manager's decision-making environment is becoming exceedingly complex. This is due to rapid technological innovations, changing government policy initiatives, fluctuating economic trends as well as organizational factors such as size, geographic dispersal and the need for specialization. All these factors underscore the need for better information.

After all, information is the cement that binds together the various structural components of an organization. One has only to imagine an organization in which one department, say production "does not speak to" another department, say marketing, to realize the fundamental importance of information in co-ordination of activities.

2. Information technology

A major revolution, based on micro-electronics, has been in progress during the last 20 years. This revolution has brought about a hundred to thousand-fold reduction in the cost of computers. Telecommunication costs have also been dropping sharply. These technologies are rapidly converging into one integrated technology. The ability of computers to compress time can now be combined with the ability of telecommunications to compress space to provide systems with totally unprecedented capabilities. Examples of such systems in India are the on-line reservation systems of both Air India and Indian Airlines and the bold project that Indian Railways is undertaking to keep track of wagon movement on the broad gauge network.

Management information systems

A major step towards coping with the problem of information is to develop a strong Management Information System (MIS).

An MIS provides a systematic, well defined process for routinely collecting, processing and presenting information both from within the organization and from the environment to enable managers to make better decisions.

Planning and control

The information provided by an MIS assists managers to make planning and control decisions. In order to function, every organization must perform certain operations

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For example, a car manufacturer must undertake certain manufacturing operations. In addition to performing these operations, plans must be made for them. Decisions have to be made on how many and what type of cars to assemble next month. Control must be exercised on the operations in the light of plans and targets developed in the planning process. Manufacturing operations should be in line with targets. If not, deviations must be corrected, or plans revised.

Data processing and MIS

Often there are elaborate data systems for assisting operations. For example, the car manufacturer will have to provide data to workers on the shop floor about work that needs to be done on a particular batch of material. This system has no managerial decision making significance. It is not part of an MIS. If the system provided information on productivity, machine utilization or rejection rates, it would be part of an MIS.

An MIS includes historical data on an organization's activities as well as current status data. Other ingredients are manual procedures that are used to collect and process information and computer hardware. Equally important are the computer programmes used to process information and models employed to structure data.

Using computers in MIS

The role that a computer can play in an MIS depends on the type of decision to be taken. Some decisions can be structured in such a manner that most of its important aspects can be reflected in a computer model. This is frequently the case with short-term, day-to-day operational level decisions. For such situations, once an appropriate model is constructed, the computer can make the right decision subject to managerial review for unusual situations. A typical example is inventory control.

Strategic decisions are often very difficult to structure. However, it is possible in some cases to structure part of the decision so that it can be handled by a computer. A typical example could be a major investment decision in which there are many uncertain factors. The opportunity to exploit a computer's strengths of speed, accuracy and large memory to support decisions, occurs often at the middle level where medium term decisions are made. Examples are various analyses of sales, rejection analysis in production, monthly production planning, annual budgeting and sales forecasting.

Executive computer

One of the most exciting features of micro-computers is that they enable managers to directly work on their own with computers. This has become possible because powerful and easy-to-use software packages are now available. The most important of these are electronic spread sheets. The essential idea in spread sheet software is that the procedure for calculations has to be spelt out once. Subsequently, the procedure can be applied automatically to answer "what if" type of questions. For example, if in an investment decision the tables for calculating the return on investment have been laid out once, subsequently the impact of reduced demand or inflation or loss of production, can be evaluated.

Do's and don'ts in setting up a computer based MIS

1. Do focus on the key result areas of your business.
2. Do not be guided in your choice of application areas by what others are doing.
3. The best use of a computer in your organization depends on your strategy and the attitudes of your people.
4. Do not leave the choice of applications to technical computer staff. They will most likely automate existing systems, rather than develop systems in areas where they are most needed.
5. Do involve line managers and users in deciding on applications, participating in system design, assessing benefits and in implementation.
6. Do give careful consideration to training needs of both staff and managers.
7. Do not rely on utilization to judge the effectiveness of your computer system. High utilization often results from inefficient systems.
8. Do give careful consideration to reliability and security issues.
9. Do draw up a broad long-term information systems plan before obtaining computer equipment.
10. Do keep abreast of development in computer and communications technology.

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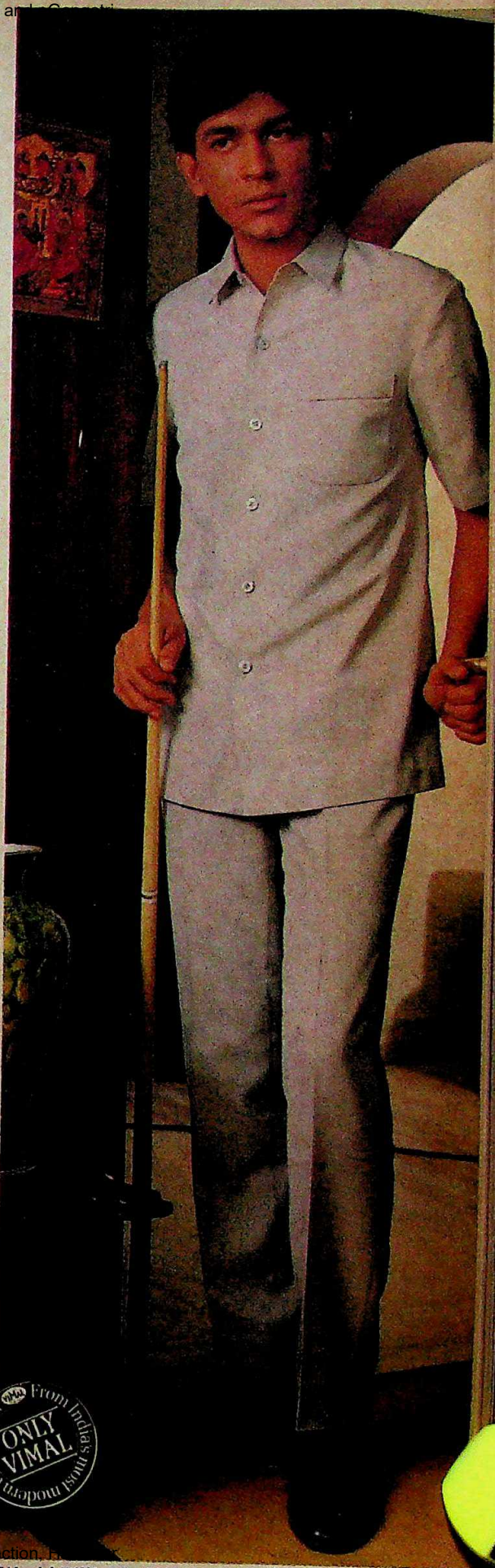

World Billiards Champion, Geet Sethi

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CHARLES SOBHRAJ

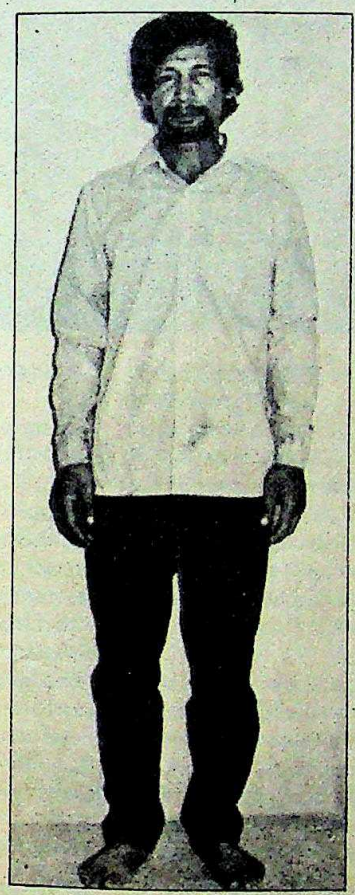
Nemesis in Goa

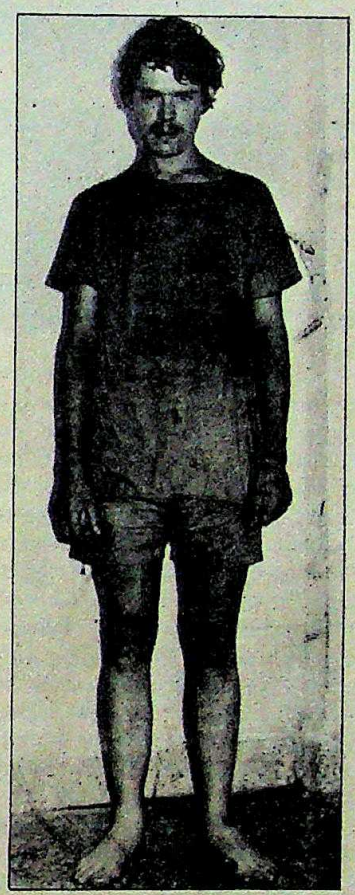
IT HAD all the ingredients of a pulp thriller. A cosy, dimly-lit bar overflowing with beer and bonhomie. Attractive waitresses in gaily-coloured skirts swaying through the crowds. A bride and bridegroom dancing to the beat of the banjo. The main protagonists in the drama sitting a few feet from each other. One, a criminal on the run blissfully unaware that his reprieve was coming to an end. The other, an ace sleuth with his men nearby sipping drinks and trying to blend into the local ambience.

There was, in the end, a disappointingly anticlimactic end to Charles Gurmukh Sobhraj's latest escapade. Known to be a man with expensive tastes and a liking for women and fine food, these were the very attributes which terminated Sobhraj's reprieve exactly 23 days after he, aided by accomplice David Hall, a small-time drug peddler, made his dramatically arrogant escape from Delhi's top-security Tihar jail. His flight from pursuing lawmen ended, somewhat inevitably at the one place where he would feel most at home, the hippy haven of Goa, and in one of the coastal resort's best known restaurants.

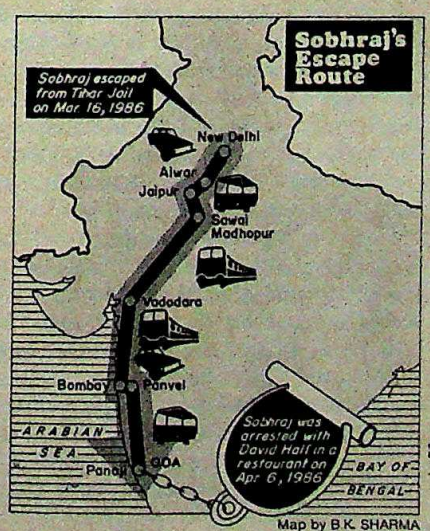
The O'Coqueiro bar and restaurant is housed in one of the classic porched houses in Goa and it boasts a fine cuisine. It also boasts a fine telephone exchange, better than the one at the Central Telephone Office in Goa, and the police backtracking Sobhraj's erratic trail had been tipped off that he would most certainly try to use the bar's phone to call abroad. They had visited the bar the previous day. This time they struck gold.

"I was sitting at a table where I could watch both the telephone booth and the gate," says Senior Inspector Madhukar Zende, the man who caught Sobhraj one-and-a-half decades ago and repeated the performance last fortnight. "A white Fiat drew up, and two men got out. One of them had a beard, ruffled hair, and was wearing a black cap, the kind you wear when you play cricket. The moment I saw him, my spine tingled. I was 90 per cent sure—he was heavier than when I laid hands on him last, he was without his spectacles, but I was sure—this was Sobhraj. And the fair foreigner with him could be none other than David Hall."





Sobhraj (left) and Hall: anti-climax



Map by B.K. SHARMA

Sobhraj and Hall did not come inside, but sat in the porch, waiting it seemed, for a call to come through. Not wanting to make any hasty moves, Zende waited too and, a few minutes later, slid over unobtrusively to a table near Sobhraj's. Meanwhile he had instructed three police colleagues to fan out around the building and two to stay in the room. The waiter was told to go outside and casually ask the driver whom the car belonged to.

It worked, but only partially; the car driver walked in and whispered something to Sobhraj. "I knew then that I would have to move quickly," says Zende, and swiftly pushing his chair aside he grabbed Sobhraj's arm in a judo grip and said "Get up, Charles". Zende almost never carries a gun and he was worried about the contents of the bag lying on the table. The struggling Sobhraj kept his cool and protested "I'm not any Sobhraj, you've made a mistake." Zende, excited, shouted back: "You're bloody Sobhraj. Don't you remember I arrested you years ago? Get up and come with me." He yelled to a fellow officer to grab the bag and Hall. "His nose was twitching like an animal's when it senses danger," said Zende. The cornered fugitive, after a brief struggle, slumped and went limp. Hall, bewildered but resigned to his fate, pulled out his wallet to pay the bill. It was 10.30 p.m.

Zende's first thought was to ensure that Sobhraj did not slip out of their fingers. He called for rope and the two were trussed-up like chickens. "I knew I had to get back to Maharashtra before

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the Goa police raised any complications." The entire party flung its captives into waiting cars and drove to Mapusa, Goa's main market town, escorted all the way by two local motorcyclists. There, Zende hastily called up Bombay police headquarters with news of his catch. "I told them that we had him. They asked me if I was sure. I said of course I am sure, 100 per cent. I was ordered to return immediately." On the way Sobhraj slept and once pleaded with Zende to remove the rope, but Zende, taking no chances, told him: "You have made us suffer, now it is your turn to suffer. If you want to urinate, do it in the car. You will be allowed out only in Bombay."

But it was luck and the eagle instincts of a railway police head constable posted at Bombay's Victoria Terminus railway station that provided the first breakthrough on March 29, 13 days after Sobhraj had made his escape. Constable S.V. Kshirsagar sensed something fishy about a luggage-laden passenger entraining for Bhopal and detained him. A search of his baggage at the police station yielded a countrymade revolver, cartridges, a live hand grenade, a tape recorder and a camera. The passenger claimed to be Ashok Kumar Agarwal from Jaipur, but on questioning admitted he was actually Ajay Singh Tomar who had escaped from Tihar jail along with Sobhraj. He led the police to a hotel in nearby Panvel.

The police watch on the hotel was rewarded with the prize of Devkumar Brahmdutt Tyagi, who returned to the hotel and was nabbed on April 2. Tyagi was the driver of the getaway car which had carried Sobhraj and his accomplices out of Tihar. Tyagi yielded a bonanza of clues: a state-of-the-art camera with film which could be crucial evidence. The camera turned out to be a model not yet patented and, days later, the police were still trying to figure it out. The most important discovery was a calculator with a memory which contained addresses and telephone numbers.

From Tyagi's interrogation the police discovered that Sobhraj had been too clever by half. He and Hall had probably decided to dump Tyagi and Tomar. Tyagi had, therefore, been despatched to Delhi with a pair of ear-rings for Sneh Sengar, one of Sobhraj's Indian girl friends, and a message asking her to come to Goa. If she agreed Tyagi was to cable a cryptic message—"Father keeping well". Discovering that Sengar had already been picked up by the Delhi police, Tyagi eventually sent a telegram "Father not keeping well, coming in three four days". By the time the telegram arrived Sobhraj had already skipped Bombay. When Tyagi was arrested and realised he had been dumped, he put the police on the Goa trail.

IT WAS a challenge and a slap on our face that Sobhraj had stayed in Bombay and left without us finding out," said Police Commissioner Soman. So Zende, who had tracked and caught Sobhraj in the past, was asked to pick up the trail that was now beginning to get warmer. After escaping from Tihar in Delhi, Sobhraj, Hall, Tyagi and Tomar drove to Alwar in Rajasthan where they abandoned the getaway car and caught a train to Jaipur and then booked themselves onto another train to Bombay. But, cautious as ever, they detrained at Vadodara and instead reached Bombay by taxi. After a few days in Bombay, Sobhraj and Hall gave the slip to Tomar and Tyagi and left for Goa by bus.

For the duo, Goa offered the obvious gateway. As Goa IGP P.S. Bawa says: "Sobhraj must have felt confident that he could merge with the tourists here, he knew some of them and was familiar with the place." Police believe that Sobhraj was planning another of his classic cons to rob holiday package tourists of their passports and return tickets to make what would have been a relatively easy flight from the country.

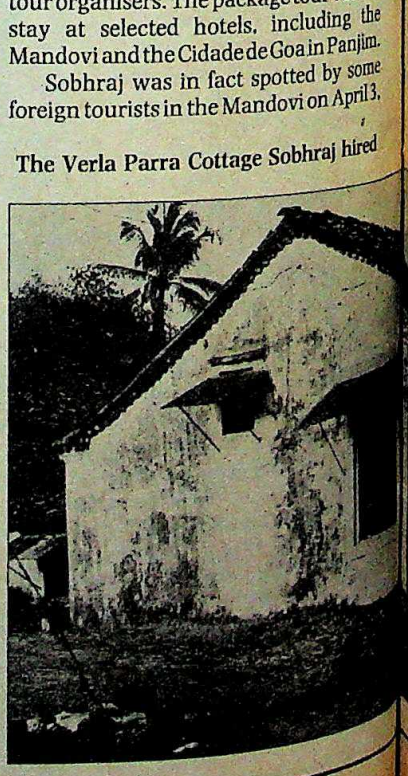
Photographs by M. RAHMAN

The O'Coqueiro restaurant in Goa

Every Monday night, at least 175 foreign tourists who come on a package tour to Goa board the Condor return flight to Munich and Frankfurt on tickets that can only be purchased abroad. There are just six immigration officers to clear the passengers, whose names are checked with the list of incoming passengers along with local representatives of the package tour organisers. The package tour visitors stay at selected hotels, including the Mandovi and the Cidade de Goa in Panjim.

Sobhraj was in fact spotted by some foreign tourists in the Mandovi on April 3.

The Verla Parra Cottage Sobhraj hired



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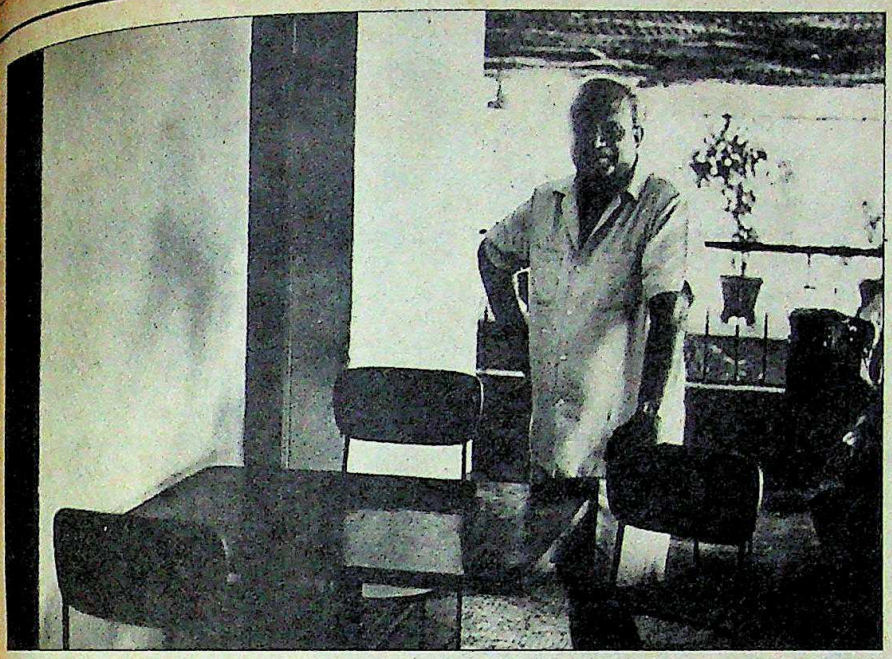

Owner Veigas: scene of the capture

while they were having breakfast in the restaurant. He, however, slipped out of the hotel before word got to the police. Sobhraj had actually checked into the hotel at 2.50 p.m. the previous day, registering as a Mexican, Humberto Cayou. He had identified himself with an American Express card and booked himself for four weeks. The Goa police found the grey ambassador that Hall had hired for Rs 3,500 stalled in the sand near Charlston Hotel in Calangute beach on April 6, the day of the arrest and also of Sobhraj's 42nd birthday. The car contained a blue rucksack with trousers, shirts, a copy of Leon Uris' *The Haj*, and a piece of paper with a series of numbers written on it.

POLICE believe that the escapees could have arrived in Goa on March 19. Sobhraj and Hall were definitely in Goa on the morning of March 20. That day, at 10 a.m., a young Indian speaking broken English made inquiries about buying a Rajdoot Yamaha motorcycle at the Kakulo Agency in Panjim. He returned with David Hall at 12.45 p.m. and Hall paid Rs 22,000 for a blue Rajdoot. The Indian with Hall collected the temporary registration certificate (GDR 6231) from the Panjim RTO office the next morning in the name of D.K. Joshi, giving an address in Vadodara.

On March 21, Sobhraj and Hall had lunch at the Lobster restaurant in Mapusa and returned for dinner, this time with two Indians accompanying them. Says Abreu Lobo, the owner: "They came several times to the restaurant between March 21 and April 3. I noticed Sobhraj because unlike other foreigners who eat either beef or seafood, he was a voracious eater of garlic chicken. The first time, he ate four plates of chicken. He also has another strange habit of ordering half a glass of milk with six spoons of Nescafe coffee. He came to the restaurant thrice and he was always very polite. He said he was John, a journalist from Mexico and Hall was 'Mac', a photographer and commercial artist from the US with an office in Athens. He would change his appearance every time. Once he was clean-shaven with his hair swept back, once it looked like it had been permed, another time it was unruly and he had a beard. On March 2, he wanted to know where he could make international calls fast. He wanted to make a call to France. The night cashier, Braganza, told him about O' Coqueiro."

On the morning of the arrest, Sobhraj had driven in the Ambassador to the secluded village of Verla Parra, 4 km from Mapusa. They had fixed the date earlier with the night cashier of the Lobster restaurant, Lincoln Braganza. Recalls Braganza: "Sobhraj and David came to the restaurant at about 9.30 p.m. on March 29 looking dirty and tired and claimed they had been to Belgaum." Sobhraj said he was looking for a cottage to rent as his friend was expecting his wife and children to join them. He said he wanted a quiet place away from hippies and the hustle and bustle where David could set up a darkroom for his photography. Braganza showed David a cottage in his village, Verla Parra on April 2. "He came back with Sobhraj on April 6 and they liked it and David paid Rs 200, saying they would take it for at least 10 days," says Braganza. The motorcycle Hall had bought was parked inside the room and the duo left. Describing them, Braganza says: "David was so friendly and talkative, I find it difficult to believe he is a criminal. Sobhraj would not talk much. He used to sit at a table in the cottage deep in thought or reading a magazine."

Evidently, Sobhraj and Hall were taking no chances, since they had already rented another room in Calangute on April 1. The cottage in which the room was rented belonged to Mrs Loudina D'Souza and was situated close to the Charlston Hotel on Calangute beach. Sobhraj identified himself to Mrs D'Souza as 'John' and David Hall as 'Paul'. When police searched the room later, they found it bare of personal possessions.

Sobhraj and Hall also befriended a couple, Mohammed Rezalsavari, an Iranian and his young Finnish wife, Tula Marja Hanelle, living in a cottage in Calangute and stayed with them often in the days prior to their arrest. The couple lived a typical down-and-out life, selling fake 'foreign goods' supplied by Sindhi businessmen from Ulhasnagar near Bombay. On April 3, Sobhraj took the couple to Panjim in a taxi, did some shopping, and on the way back, stopped at O'Coqueiro. The same evening, after a dinner of lobsters, garlic chicken, prawns and wine

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INSPECTOR ZENDE

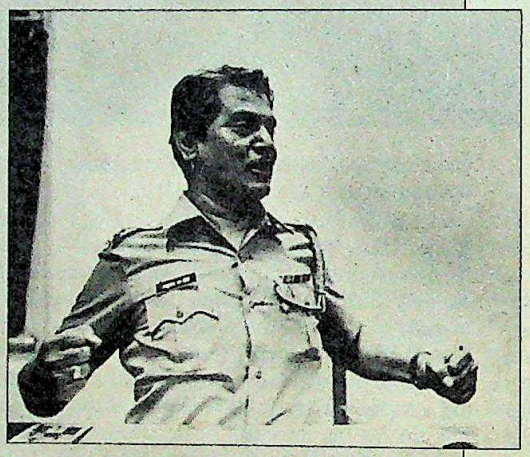
Prize Catch

INSPECTOR Madhukar Baburao Zende is a large man with a large voice. The day after he returned to Bombay with his trussed-up prize catch, he was booming out his thanks to a steady stream of visitors who came with bouquets to his ground-floor office in the Agripada police station. He is two years short of 50 but, apart from the streaks of grey in his hair, looks a vigorous 40. "All those snacks in restaurants in Goa waiting for Sobhraj to turn up have done my figure no good," he says ruefully, pulling out a bill from the O'Coqueiro restaurant which shows that he spent nearly Rs 100 on a gimlet and fish curry and rice.

Zende has been with the force for 27 years and in his time has put people like Haji Mastan and Karim Lala behind bars. The first time he arrested Mastan was when the don had assaulted a constable in 1964. "That was the only case in which he was convicted," remembers Zende. He remembers with equal pride his going to the rescue of a constable who was being assaulted with knives by five taxi-passengers: that exploit earned him Rs 2,000 in award money. "I usually don't carry a gun so I just shouted at the top of my voice and grabbed two knives in both my hands. They got scared and gave up."

Despite his tough-cop exterior, Zende is a kind-hearted man and ironically, it was this that led to his first arrest of Sobhraj in 1974. Ajay Mara was a small-time felon who, after a stint in jail, was advised by Zende to reform, advice which he disregarded. He met Sobhraj on the sands of Chowpatty beach one day and was asked, as a test, to put together a plan to rob the Air-India office. Pleased, Sobhraj took Ajay to Delhi: the young crook, however, lost his nerve, stole two pistols belonging to Sobhraj's gang and fled to Bombay, where he tried to sell the pistols on the sly. Unfortunately one of them went off, injuring a prospective customer in the chest, and Ajay thought it prudent to come clean with Zende. Says Zende tellingly: "Even when he knew that his protege had come back to Bombay, Sobhraj was stupid enough to return to carry out the Air-India crime." Tip followed tip and Sobhraj was held.

Zende almost caught Sobhraj again in 1974, soon after he and a woman accomplice called Lilian had robbed J. Rocher, a French tourist staying at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay. The two were sitting in the Taj coffee shop when the manager entered, recognised them immediately, but gave the game away by rushing out to phone Zende. Sobhraj and Lilian rushed to the nearby Ritz Hotel and had piled their luggage in a



Zende: hero of the hour

car when the police arrived. Sobhraj escaped; Lilian was caught with such goodies as chocolate-covered bullets and a revolver in a powder tin. "I used to think Sobhraj was over-rated," says Zende. "He isn't a particularly intelligent person if he keeps getting caught again and again."

Earlier, the ubiquitous policeman had earned laurels when the then Gujarat director-general of police Julio Ribeiro had asked him to come to the state to find out if the Bombay underworld was spreading its tentacles there: someone had thrown a bomb at Ribeiro. Zende worked alone and incognito in Gujarat for a month and was pleased to inform Ribeiro that the Bombay underworld had not moved into the state. He says he is "not in the habit of asking for gifts for doing my duty," but could hardly turn down the Rs 15,000 he recieved as a reward for the Sobhraj capture.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

brought by Hall to the cottage, they went to the Marina bar in Anjuna where they watched video movies till 2.30 a.m.

The events of the fateful day of April 6 are described by Vidhyadhar Chodankar, the driver of the taxi Sobhraj hired. "That night, Sobhraj hired my taxi at 9.30 p.m. from Calangute and said he had to go to O'Coqueiro to make a telephone call. He didn't speak much but always thanked me and praised my driving. After waiting outside O'Coqueiro for a while, I went inside to order two bottles of beer to settle a bet I had just lost. As I was coming out, Sobhraj, who was sitting with another hippy, called me to his table to say that I could go, his friend had another taxi. Just then, all hell broke loose."

The "hell" was Inspector Zende and his team moving in for the arrest. They had patiently been waiting for several hours, confident that Sobhraj would show up. The Bombay police, making enquiries at the post and telegraph office in Panjim about possible telegrams addressed to Sobhraj, had discovered that O' Coqueiro was where most foreign tourists went to make overseas telephone calls. Just a month earlier, a Panjim magazine had carried an article on the illegal arrangement between an unnamed restaurant and the telephone department for clearing overseas calls quickly. Everybody in Goa knew which restaurant the article was referring to. "You can get an overseas call through in two minutes from O'Coquiero," says a Goa policeman.

Recalls Gines Viegas, the affable owner of the restaurant: "Sobhraj arrived at about 9.45 p.m. on the night of April 6 and sat in the verandah with Hall. Sobhraj ordered a Haywards beer, poured half a glass and just then the Bombay police pounced on him." Though Viegas maintains that he thought the police team were tourists, a Goa police official said that the restauranteur had already been introduced to the police posse earlier. In any event, Zende and his team had left little to chance. As Sobhraj was speaking to Chodankar, Zende, using the driver as a shield, grabbed Sobhraj and other policemen sitting at tables flanking the one Sobhraj was using, grabbed the bag containing a pistol.

Intriguingly, Sobhraj subsequently claimed that he actually gave himself up. When the police produced him before a magistrate two days after his arrest, he said that he would not have been so stupid as to sit in a public bar and could easily

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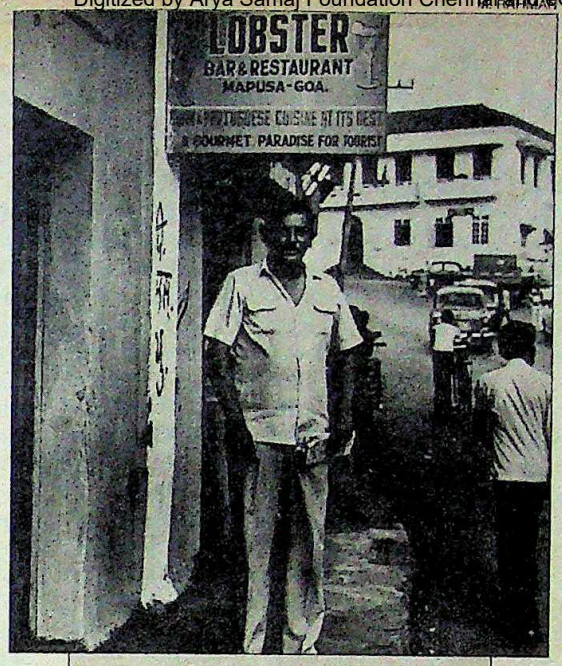
have fled the country if he wanted to. But Delhi Police Commissioner Ved Marwah dismissed this claim: "Don't you believe it; in that case why was he carrying a gun?" Though Marwah has a point, it does serve Sobhraj's purpose to remain incarcerated in an Indian prison. The alternative will be extradition to Thailand where he faces execution. Having broken out of jail, Sobhraj now faces a fresh sentence in India of maybe seven years.



M. RAHMAN

"Sobhraj would change his appearance every time he came here."
ABREU LOBO
Lobster restaurant owner

WHILE the Bombay police walked away with the honours in the case, the Delhi force it turns out was also hot on Sobhraj's heels. The Delhi police had worked their way to Goa independently of the Bombay force, two teams had visited Goa, circulated Sobhraj's pictures with the local police and in fact exchanged notes with Bombay Inspector Zende. Said Deputy Commissioner (crime) A.K.Kanth: "Our own investigation had led us to Goa, but it was the Bombay police that had the luck."

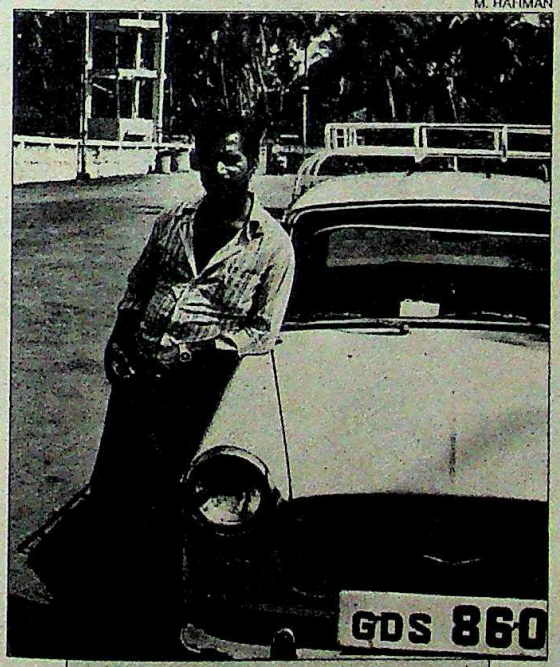
Meanwhile, the ones most concerned about the intensive Sobhraj interrogation on the fourth floor chamber of the Ashok Vihar police station in North Delhi (guarded by a platoon of armed policemen) were his contacts in Tihar jail, including jail officials, who could have cause for concern if Sobhraj decides to blow the whistle on those who aided and engineered his escape, especially since investigators suspect that there was a large amount of money involved.

Tyagi has admitted that Sobhraj and Hall were carrying $12,000 with them when they arrived in Bombay. Lobo, the owner of the Lobster restaurant in Goa, said that Hall was always carrying a large khaki duffle bag packed with foreign and Indian currency. "There were at least Rs 3 lakh in it," he said. By the time they were arrested they had only $ 2,000 on them, having presumably spent the rest.

Initially, there was considerable speculation that an international drug running mafia had masterminded and bankrolled the escape operation. But a senior narcotics official of the Central Government says that neither Sobhraj nor Hall had come to their notice as major drug runners. "They are the kind who buy their drugs at a drugstore," scoffed their Delhi representative of an international anti-narcotics agency.

Investigators, however, have added another intriguing element to the drama. The CBI investigating team handling the prosecution of bankrupt London financier Rajinder Sethia and the Delhi police team interrogating Sobhraj have started coordinating their activities to uncover possible links between the two. One link they investigated was Sethia's nephew Daljeet Singh Bhalla who recently transferred a large sum of money from London. Investigators suspect that the money was meant for Sobhraj and Bhalla was arrested and later released on bail. However, Bhalla told INDIA TODAY that the circumstances were quite different. His version is that he was being threatened by extortionists who demanded money and threatened to kill him if he did not pay. Bhalla says he spoke to his uncle who in turn spoke to Sobhraj. He says that Sobhraj promised to get infamous dacoit Raju Bhatnagar to frighten off the extortionists but demanded a sum of Rs 21,000 for the service. Bhalla claims that he paid the money to Sneh Sengar and that he can account for the rest of the money he had transferred. In fact, another crucial actor in the escape drama seems to have been Raju Bhatnagar, who apparently arranged for the getaway car through his man, the re-arrested Tyagi.

M. RAHMAN



"Sobhraj didn't speak much but thanked me and praised my driving."
VIDHYADHAR CHODANKAR
taxi driver

The police believe that though Hall, Sengar and some others helped him achieve his breakout, Sobhraj himself wrote the final script. After initial questioning, the police are sure that some officials of Tihar colluded with Sobhraj in the escape, but no names are being released until all avenues of inquiry have been explored.

Meanwhile, the relatively easy manner in which Sobhraj was captured has punctured the oversized legend that has grown around him. According to people who have known Sobhraj and spent some time with him, he is not the criminal mastermind that he has been made out to be. He is basically a mediocre person who has the uncanny ability to spot the weaknesses of a system and exploit it. But the Sobhraj saga has ended somewhat differently. This time it was the police who spotted Sobhraj's weakness and exploited it.

—M. RAHMAN in Goa, JAGANNATH DUBASHI in Bombay and RAMINDAR SINGH in Delhi

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UTTAR PRADESH

Welcome to Amethi

IT WAS planned and publicised as a visit by an ordinary member of Parliament to his constituency. But Rajiv Gandhi is no ordinary member of Parliament and Amethi can by no stretch of imagination be considered an ordinary constituency. So it was hardly surprising that the prime minister's plans for a low-key visit to Amethi last fortnight, his first in a year, was transformed into a noisy and unmanageable political jamboree.

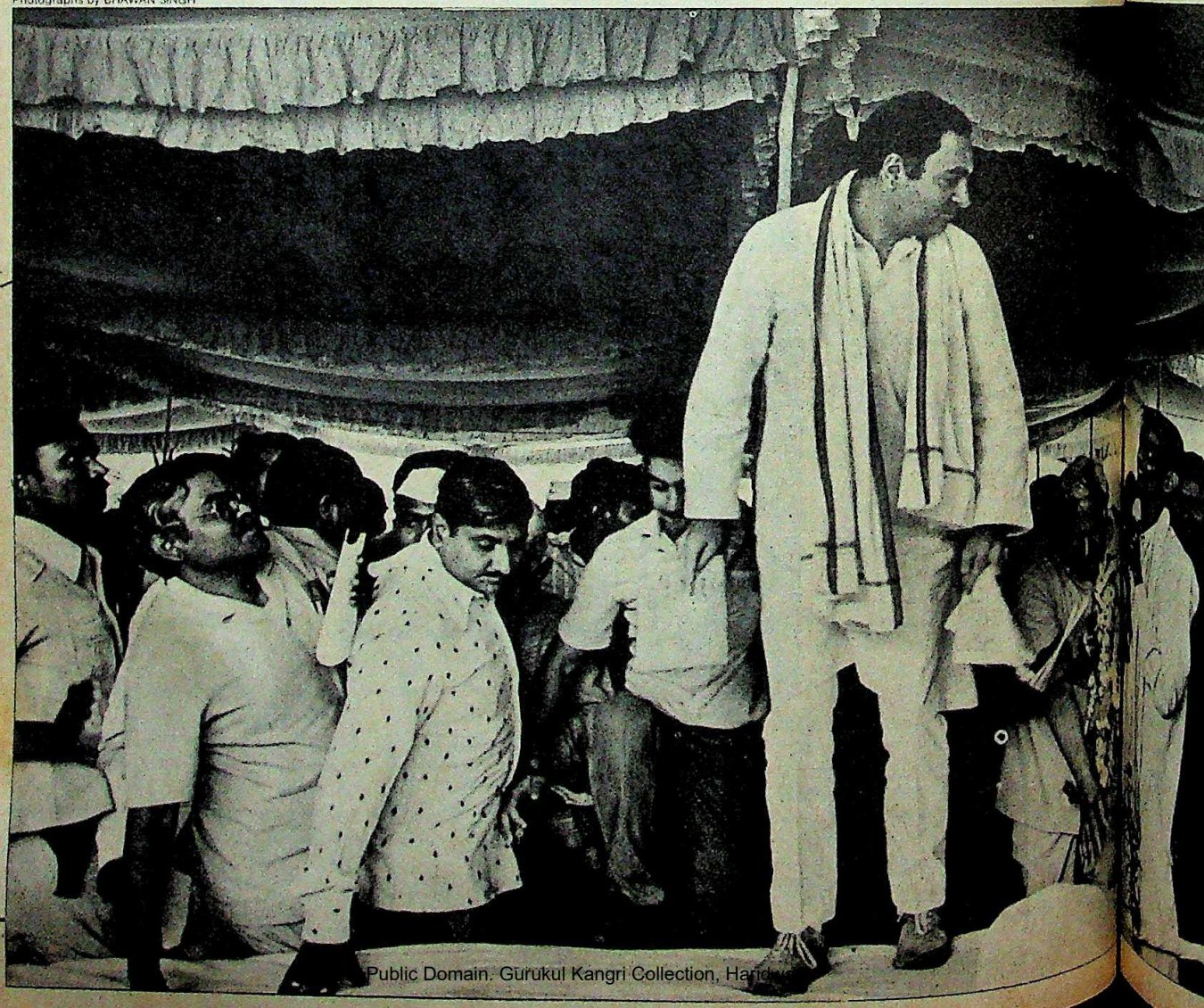
Despite prior instructions from the prime minister's office that no mediamen, officials and ministers would be allowed into the constituency during the visit, not only were there over a dozen ministers present along with their aides when the prime minister's aircraft landed, but almost the entire state government bureaucracy descended on Amethi to scramble for space in the newly-built guest-houses in the five assembly segments. To add to the carnival atmosphere, the entire constituency was decorated with welcome arches and every road crossing was barricaded for security reasons. And as further proof of its over-enthusiasm, the state Congress(I) committee had plastered the walls of prominent places with posters of both Rajiv and Sonia sporting gum boots.

State Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh camped in the constituency three days before the visit. And since it was Rajiv's first visit to Amethi after assuming office, bureaucrats and local politicians had obviously decided to make it a grand tamasha, ignoring the fact that the instructions and directives from the prime minister's office had expressly forbidden such extravagance.

Further violations were in evidence right from Rajiv's first public engagement to inaugurate a unit of the public sector Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. The function was held in the Amethi assembly segment which is the constituency of state Transport Minister Sanjay Singh, who, in keeping with his ministerial post, commandeered over 700 buses from the state road transport corporation to ferry 40,000-odd people to the ceremonies.

That was not all. Over 100 state government vehicles—brought from places as far as Lucknow, Faizabad, Sultanpur and Rae Bareli—were parked outside Tatarpur guest-house where Rajiv stayed during his visit, for the use of state and central government officials. As Rajiv began his Amethi tour in his custom-built, chocolate-coloured, bullet-

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH



Rajiv Gandhi addressing constituents: grand tamasha

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proof jeep with Sonia beside him and the chief minister perched behind, he was trailed by at least five cabinet ministers and over 30 officials from the departments of public works, electricity, irrigation, education, industry and finance.

The reason for the presence soon became evident. They were required for taking on-the-spot decisions and follow-up action on complaints received by the prime minister and his team in the course of their tour. At a meeting of the Jagdishpur Congress workers, for instance, the chief minister announced decisions involving a recurring expense of over Rs 50 lakh to the state Government. And to top it all, every single demand raised by speakers in the presence of the prime minister were conceded with alacrity by the chief minister. Examples:

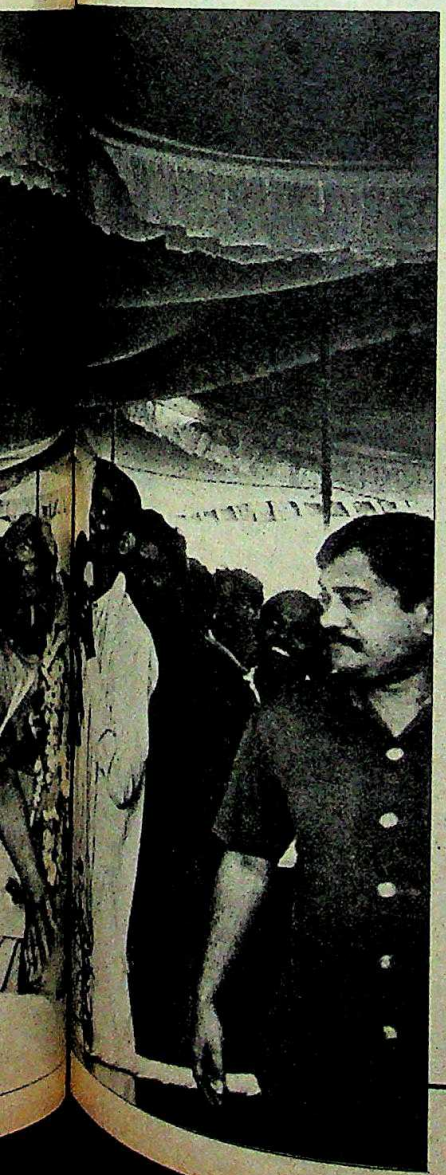
- Orders were issued to commence professional and technical courses in local colleges (most of which do not have enough space and facilities).
- Junior schools would be raised to the senior level.
- A degree college offering all courses will start functioning in the constituency from the coming academic session.
- A local dispensary in Musafirkhana would be raised to the level of a hospital.

Singh's concern for Rajiv's electorate bordered on the obsessive throughout the two-and-a-half-day trip. At one point, it became so embarrassing that the prime minister had to order the hordes of eager officials and Congressmen dogging his every footstep to immediately return to their respective places of work.

Despite such aberrations, Rajiv's tour of his constituency was understandably a resounding success. By covering all the five assembly segments, he effectively silenced party workers who had earlier complained about his inaccessibility. Said Rajkaran Singh, MP, and president of Sultanpur District Congress Committee: "We are grateful to the prime minister for spending so much time with us. He heard us with patience and took important decisions on the spot. Rajiv is the ideal representative of the people of Amethi."

But local sentiments can hardly be otherwise. During the last five years, Amethi has been transformed beyond recognition. Gone is the barren and parched landscape, unlit streets, potholed roads and filthy villages. In their place, as if by the wave of a magic wand, is a fairy-tale land which echoes with prosperity and promise. Each revenue village is now linked by a *pucca* road, has water pumps and electricity connections. As against

The prime minister's plans for a low-key visit to Amethi was transformed into a noisy and unmanageable political jamboree



Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi with an admirer

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125 electrified villages in 1981, there are over 900 now. Of the 1,200 km of PWD roads, over 750 were constructed during the last five years alone. Since the area is primarily dependent on agriculture, various research institutions involved in laboratory-to-land experiments have spent several months in Amethi trying to improve crop yields so that farmers can earn more from their plots. In collaboration with the state Agriculture Department, they have carried out successful experiments leading to a rise in per hectare yield from 1,100 kg of wheat in 1979 to 1,348 kg in 1984 and that of rice from 420 kg to 1,116 kg. Almost the entire cultivable area in the constituency is irrigated through a water-filled canal system criss-crossing the entire constituency.

The local industrial landscape has not lagged behind. The Jagdishpur industrial estate, established by Sanjay Gandhi in 1976, has seen an investment of over Rs 200 crore and two massive projects—that of Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited and Indo-Gulf Fertiliser—are already in an advanced stage of completion. Says Satish Sharma, Rajiv's aide responsible for Amethi: "The prime minister has been closely assessing the needs of his constituency during the last few years. It was on the basis of this feedback that we drew up a development plan down to village level."

The credit for much of Amethi's success story, apart from the fact that it is a privileged constituency, goes largely to trusted aides handpicked by the prime minister. It was Arun Singh who drew up a detailed development plan for each assembly segment, which was finalised after extensive discussions with local Congress workers and the officials concerned. When Sharma took over from Singh in Febuary 1985, he had only to concentrate on the implementation of the plans. Says Sharma: "The prime minister wanted each area and problem to be properly identified and I was receiving almost 1,000 petitions from the people. Quite a large number of them were sorted out at the district level and the rest forwarded to the state Government or the Central Government agencies". He does, however, concede that "we were lucky in getting a response from the officials faster than the others. Rajiv wants to make Amethi a model for others to emulate." But that will not be easy. As the prime minister's office tried unsuccessfully to prove, Amethi is no ordinary constituency.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Amethi

ANDHRA PRADESH

Governor Row

THERE seems to be no end to problems between Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao and the state governor. In his nearly three and a half years in power, he has had to deal with four governors, and he has had his differences with the three ex-Congress(I) leaders who have followed K.C. Abraham. Last fortnight, his relations with the present governor, Kumudben Joshi, also went into a predictable spin and it became publically known that NTR had tried to scuttle Joshi's scheduled two-day tour of coastal Srikakulam last month.

N.T. RAMA RAO
Chief Minister

KUMUDBEN JOSHI
Governor

NTR's relations with Governor Kumudben Joshi went into a predictable spin when it became known that he had tried to scuttle Joshi's tour of Srikakulam last month.

The souring of relations was triggered off by an innocuous incident at Kalwakurthy in Mahbubnagar district on February 27, where Joshi had gone to distribute loans sanctioned under various development programmes. Former Harijan Congress(I) parliamentarian L. Anantharamulu sent a request to her that he should also be allowed to speak as he was an important member of the National Institute of Rural Development and Mahbubnagar was his home district. Joshi acceded to the request. Telugu Desam activists reported the instance to NTR, charging Joshi with partiality, and the chief minister admonished Mahbubnagar district Collector S. Bhattacharya for lack of tact.

Matters took a turn for the worse when Joshi, in her capacity as chancellor of universities, began consultations with officials to chalk out a programme whereby placement officers in colleges would work with industrialists in finding jobs for graduating students. NTR took exception to this and dashed off a confidential letter to her on March 18, bluntly stating that "it is the chief minister alone" who can give information required by the governor since that "is a constitutional obligation cast on me". In fact, the correct constitutional position is that while it is obligatory for a chief minister to pass on any information sought by the governor, there is no bar on the governor taking the initiative to collect information.

Unlike her predecessors, Joshi has extensively toured 17 of the state's 23 districts and was scheduled to visit the coastal Srikakulam district on March 25 and 26. Less than a week before she was to set off, NTR ordered officials and partymen to abstain from attending all her functions. This was done, but District Collector H.S. Brahma was placed in an understandably embarrassing position. Says a senior bureaucrat: "We are caught between two stools and tend to go on leave during such visits."

But for the present, both NTR and Joshi prefer to keep their differences under wraps. Yet, despite the courtesies, it is to be seen what the next round of telephonic instructions from NTR will bring when Joshi goes on a two-day tour of Anantapur district which includes the chief minister's Hindupur constituency later this month. When Joshi arrived in Hyderabad to take over charge, NTR had greeted her with a warm handshake instead of the normal, less effusive, *namaste*. Remarked a wag: "The keep-off sign will be evident when Rama Rao switches to the traditional *namaste* for the governor." —AMARNATH K. MENON

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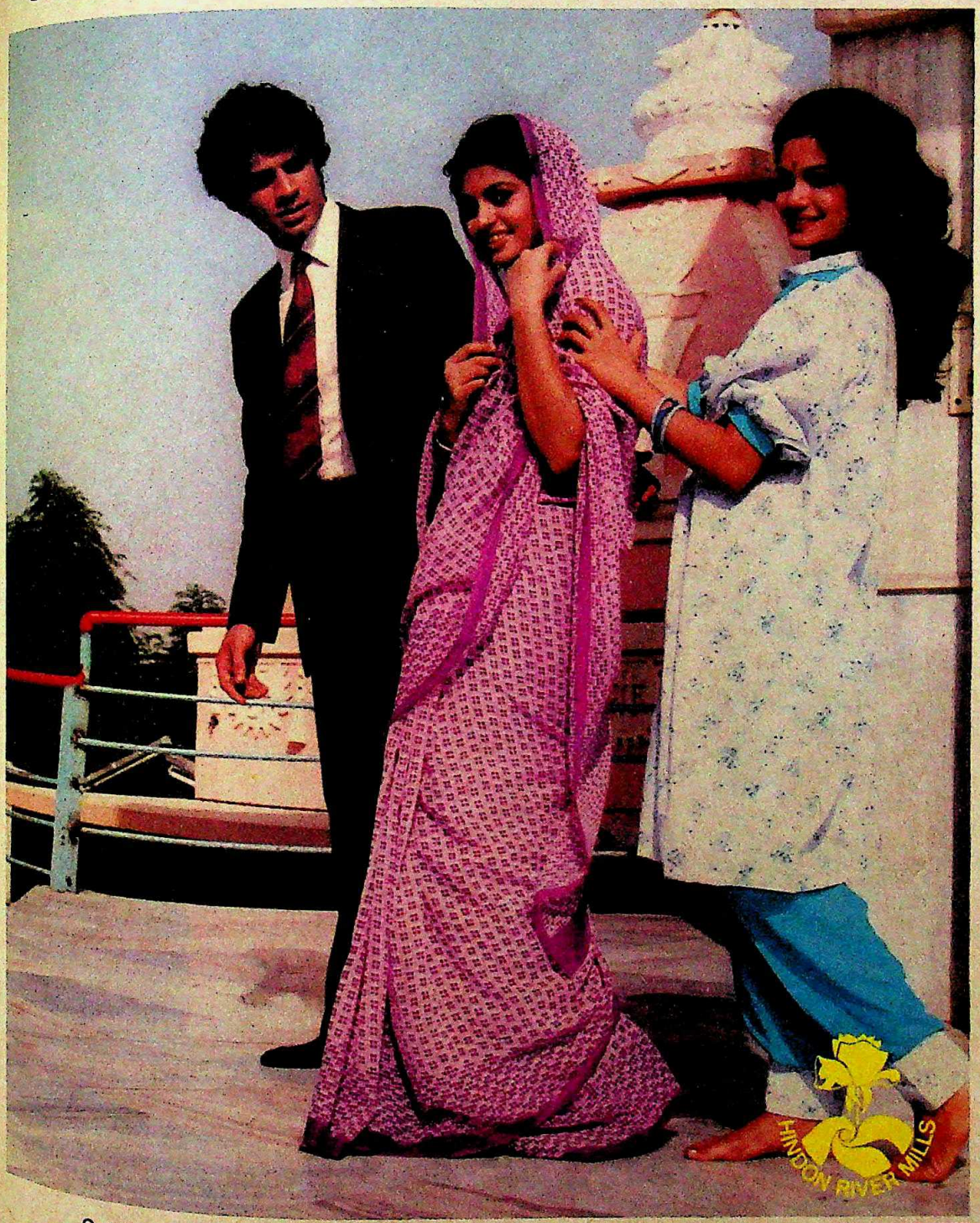

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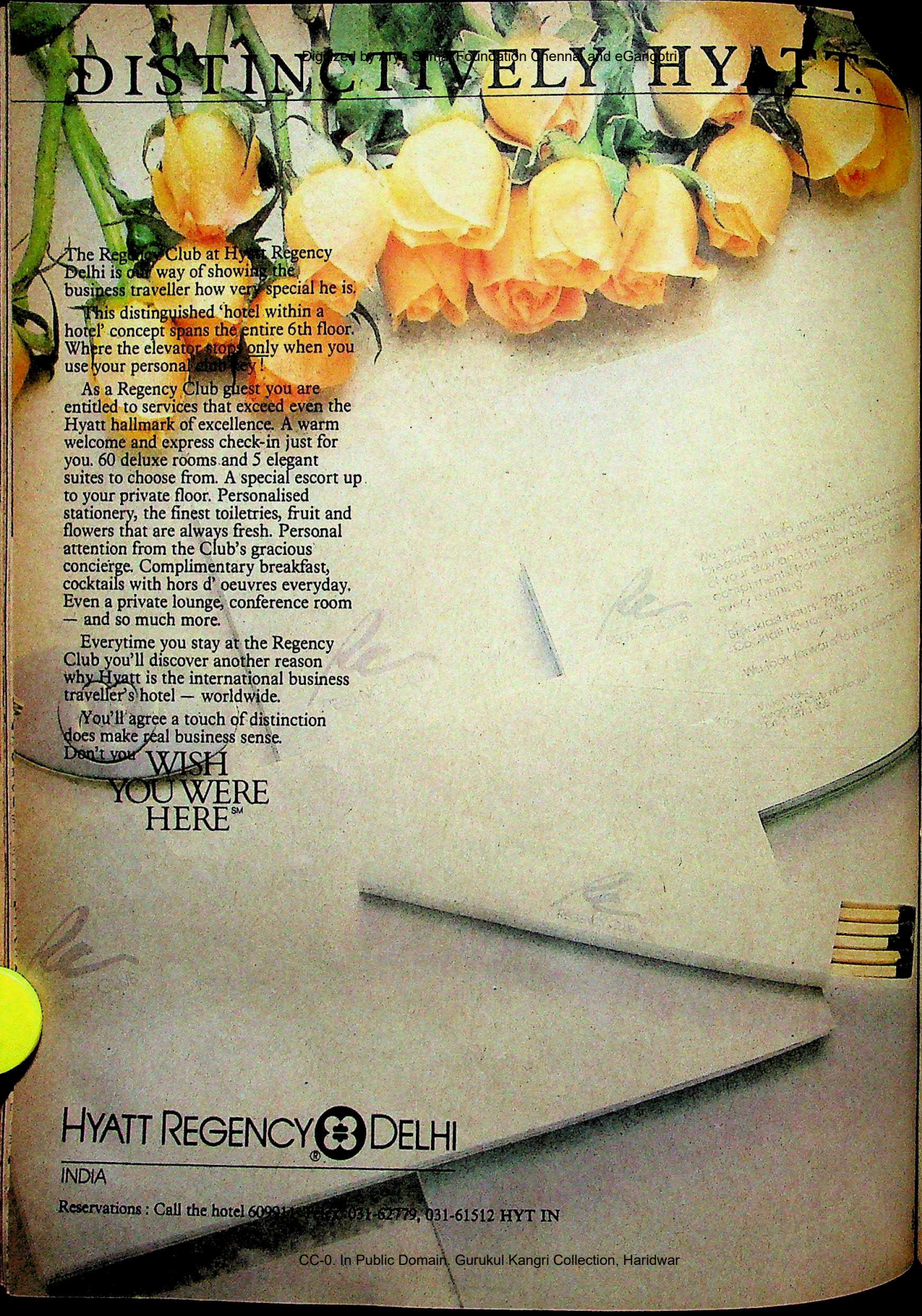

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CONGRESS(I)

Conciliatory Moves

WITH most assemblies in session, the sprawling Bhavans of various state governments that dot New Delhi's exclusive Chanakyapuri area normally have a low occupancy during March-April. But last fortnight many of them were full up, with over 400 disgruntled Congressmen from all over the country parked in the capital. Though they came from West Bengal and Orissa in the east, Karnataka in the south, Bihar in the Hindi belt and Gujarat in the west, all of them had a common grouse: their state leadership was ineffective and did not deserve the support of the high command.

Their numbers and the intensity of their complaints took the Central leadership by surprise. For the first time after Mrs Gandhi's death, Delhi saw the familiar sight of dissidents flocking to party offices armed with memoranda against chief ministers and PCC(I) chiefs and demanding changes in the state leadership.

The growing dissidence, coming in the wake of the defiant postures by three former chief ministers, Jagannath Mishra, Madhavsinh Solanki and R.Gundu Rao, coincided with a change in the high command's strategy of dealing with disgruntled partymen. Earlier, dissidents, no matter how eminent, were not even given an audience, now it has been decided to meet them and 'sort out' their complaints. Said All-India Congress(I) Committee Vice-President Arjun Singh: "People in large numbers from various states came to us with complaints, either administrative in nature or related to personal problems. If someone concludes that there is a revolt in the party, that is just a figment of the imagination and we will not oblige the dissident by changing the leadership. But we are listening to them as well."

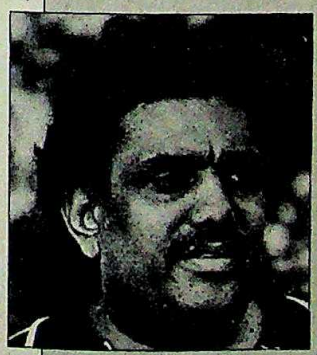
The attempt at rapprochement was kicked off by a summons to Solanki to explain the "leak" to the media of his critical memorandum to Rajiv. His hour-long meeting with Rajiv was followed by separate meetings with trusted aides Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh, and Arjun Singh. Gundu Rao was handled similarly, and both were told that they could not air their grievances in public. Said Singh: "Gundu Rao wants to work and we will find suitable work for him."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

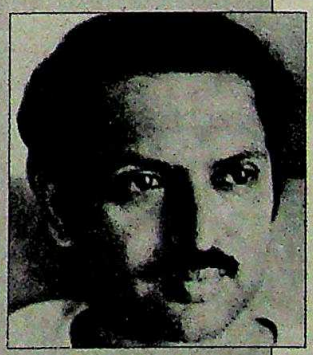
Arjun Singh: main mediator

Madhavsinh Solanki

Jagannath Mishra



Gundu Rao



Subrata Mukherjee

Growing dissidence led by had-been party stalwarts has forced the Congress(I) high command to begin listening to complaints.

Hardly had the troika succeeded in containing the rebellious mood of the had-been stalwarts, than dissidence in the ranks surfaced in Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa. While the West Bengal Congress (I) Legislature Party set a precedent of sorts by passing a resolution demanding the removal of Priya Ranjan Das Munshi from the presidentship of the PCC(I), hordes of dissidents from Bihar and Orissa led by various factional leaders rushed to Delhi. In their signed memoranda, they asserted that the party was paying a heavy political price by letting the present leaders stay in office. Specifically, they charged that:

- both chief ministers had lost control over the administration and depended on a coterie of bureaucrats for advice;
- officials were indulging in corrupt practices with immunity;
- development activities were behind schedule; and
- the chief ministers were not conceding the request of party MLA's for funds for development works in their individual constituencies;

The various factions in Bihar broke their caste affiliations to join hands against Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, and said their number was above the three figure mark. But Dubey maintained that the number of dissident MLA's was between 40 and 50, which had "no meaning in a house of 240."

Orissa dissidents totalled only 14 MLA's and a handful of MP's, but undeterred by their small number and led by former PCC(I) chief Nityanand Mishra, were assertive enough to manage a meeting with Rajiv. One MP said that for the first time Rajiv appeared convinced that under the leadership of J.B. Patnaik, "Orissa has been ruined". Said dissident leaders Rasbehari Bahera and Umakant Mishra: "The prime minister and Central leaders must rescue Orissa from autocratic family rule. We, the legislators, don't want to become a party to the corruption and

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inaction of the Government of Patnaik."

However, with a majority of the MLA's solidly behind him, Patnaik was sanguine about riding out the storm. In their meeting with Rajiv, both chief ministers also maintained that by washing dirty linen in public and leaking out corruption charges, the dissidents were besmirching the Congress(I)'s image.

Rajiv, on his part, moved on several fronts. On the one hand, he made it clear to the dissidents that their complaints were not serious enough to merit a change in the state leadership and they should patch up with their state leaders. On the other hand, he asked the chief ministers, in town for the National Integration Council meeting, to be more accommodating in their dealings with MLA's and other party workers. He directed his party general secretaries to undertake extensive tours of the states under their charge and prepare a report on the functioning of both the party and the Government.

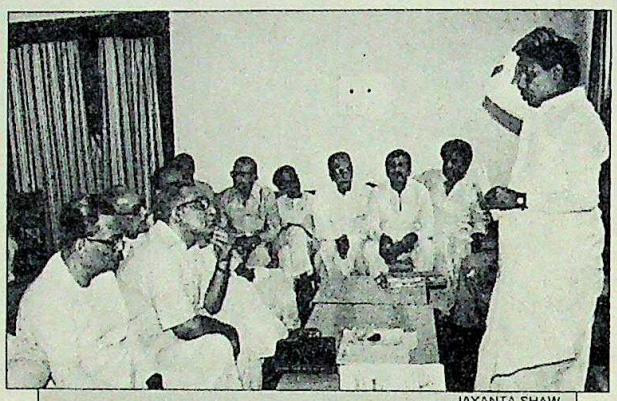
HE HAS also decided to hold fortnightly consultations with his office-bearers to sort out party squabbles. Said AICC(I) General Secretary G.K. Moopanar: "We heard their complaints seriously and found that these had more to do with routine administrative functioning. But we have taken a stand that all problems have to be sorted out at party forums. There is no need to air them in the press. All of us must learn to work together. No decision will either be reversed or taken under pressure."

The impact of this new policy was felt most strongly in West Bengal where the two heavyweights of state Congress(I) politics—Das Munshi, and party chief whip Subrata Mukherjee—announced a dramatic truce and swore that henceforth their only enemy would be the state's ruling Marxists. To prove that their new alliance meant business, Das Munshi also announced a programme to activate party workers through the state and to flag off their offensive against the Left Front by first *gheraoing* the Writers' Building—the state secretariat—next month. And Mukherjee reciprocated by declaring: "Now I am determined to stand by Priya and fight the communists unitedly."

This remarkable show of solidarity confounded not only the state's political pundits and the leftists, but state Congressmen as well. For the dramatic alliance came just when a split in the state unit of the party had seemed imminent. On April 3, Congress(I) legislators had openly revolted against Das Munshi's leadership. At a stormy three-hour session of the Congress(I) legislature party, as many as 51 of the state's 57 party MLA's had threatened to resign en bloc if the West Bengal PCC(I) was not immediately reconstituted and the recently-formed district committees dissolved.

Not only was Das Munshi condemned for running the state Congress(I) with the help of his former Congress(S) cronies but even the party high command was criticised for trying to foist leaders from above. Subrata Mukherjee, Sisir Bose, Zainal Abedin and Amar Bhattacharya were chosen to prepare a memorandum listing grievances for submission to Arjun Singh. Mukherjee flew to Delhi the same day to inform his party high command about the developments.

Das Munshi (below); Patnaik (bottom left); and Dubey: dissident targets



JAYANTA SHAW

Beleagured state leaders countered that by washing dirty linen and leaking corruption charges, dissidents were besmirching the party's image.

While in New Delhi, however, Mukherjee performed one of the most remarkable about-turns ever witnessed in the state Congress(I)'s shifting internal politics. Instead of a showdown, he meekly capitulated to Das Munshi and returned to Calcutta to flabbergast state Congressmen by declaring: "Priya has faced enough harassment and it is time that all of us forget our differences and cooperate with him."

Mukherjee's capitulation appears to result from a realisation that he was heading for political eclipse by playing the enfant terrible of the state Congress(I). Admitted Mukherjee: "I realised that neither the people nor party supporters will support me if I continued fighting inside the party. They will say I wrecked the party because of personal ambition." While what precisely transpired in Delhi between the two former arch-rivals remains a mystery, neutral Congressmen are most relieved. Said Gyan Singh Sohanpal: "It is the best thing that could have happened to the party, for our effectiveness as an opposition party in the state had become zero."

With one round of dissident activity over, Rajiv is faced with the problem of finding suitable political assignments for Congressmen who held important posts in the past and, despite their controversial image, continue to maintain their grip over a sizeable section of the party. Also, Rajiv's gamble of replacing venerable PCC(I) chiefs with young faces in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat has not paid off so far. The organisational elections, scheduled for July, will be the real test for his new policy of the politics of consensus and his attempt to give the party a united image.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with FARZAND AHMED and INDRANIL BANERJIE

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PUNJAB

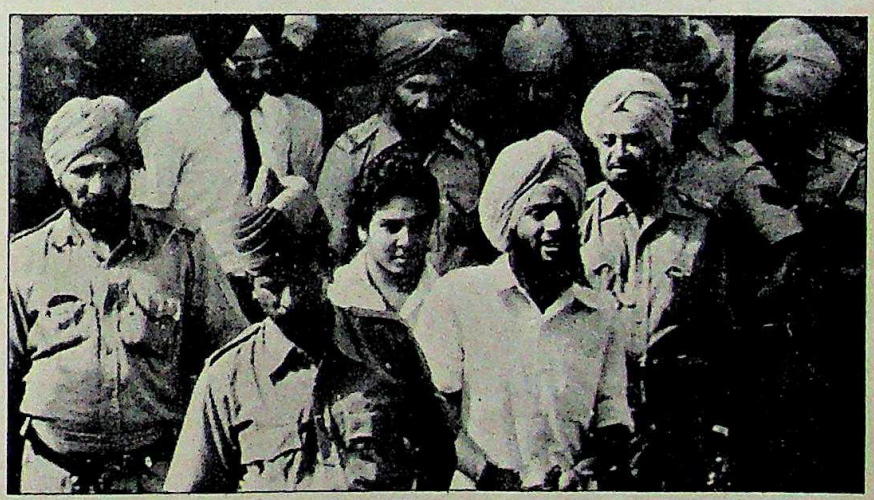
Restoring the Balance

THE INERTIA, finally, seemed to be coming to an end. Pushed by mounting terrorist killings and a growing feeling of government paralysis, both the Akali Government in Chandigarh and the Centre took some quick-fire steps to show that they both meant business. As the Punjab police stepped up their retaliatory actions against the terrorists notching up valuable successes, the Centre sent Siddhartha Shankar Ray as governor and Julio Ribeiro to take charge of the police and shore up their sagging morale. A new commission was announced which would put the derailed Punjab accord back on the rails, and once more it seemed that the initiative, which had passed into terrorist hands, would again be returning to the side of sanity and law and order.

Yet, even as these moves made themselves felt on the ground, the terrorists showed that they were far from being bested. In their most dramatic 'success', they burst upon unwary policemen guarding a clutch of notorious killers outside the court of the additional session judge, Jalandhar, showered a hail of bullets from their Stens and machine pistols, killing six policemen on the spot, maiming another four and set free three of their dreaded partners in crime.

The killing showed up the absurd amateurishness of the state's police. That morning, the scene outside the court of Additional Sessions Judge Prithipal Singh Grewal was tense. It was 11.30 a.m. Four undertrials, arraigned in Chander's killing, awaited their call outside the garden some 25 metres away. Their case was listed at number seven, and they asked to be taken to the toilets. Although there is a provision for urinals near the court room, the policemen took them to a public toilet adjacent to Post Office Road. As the four entered the toilet, five police officials encircled it. Suddenly shots rang out across the road. Two constables and a head constable lay dead. Another, who tried to run, fell injured. An assistant sub-inspector hid himself in a lawyer's office. The attacking terrorists jumped over the wall and freed three of their colleagues.

Meanwhile, Head Constable Dilbagh Singh who was on routine duty at the court heard the shots, rushed out, snatched a carbine from a constable and as the terrorists were escaping towards Netaji Park, fired at them. But before he



Sukhdev Singh (top); and freed terrorist Bhola: police negligence

and another constable who was loading his rifle could hit anyone, the terrorists providing cover to their escaping colleagues killed them too. The miscreants then calmly walked to a blue jeep, but the engine wouldn't start and four of them push-started it as others provided cover by firing in the air. The engine fired and the desperadoes disappeared into the city, passing at least six CRPF posts. A white Fiat drove away in tandem, providing cover.

Ironically, it was only when one of the terrorists, Subegh Singh, surrendered—for reasons that still aren't clear—that the police knew what had hit them. Among those revealed to have participated in the assault was the short, cool and light-footed Jarnail Singh of Halwara village in Ludhiana, who masterminded Longowal's killing. Others involved were Gursewak Singh of Raikot and Ranjit Singh alias Rana of Amritsar. Gursewak had only recently escaped from the custody of the Rajasthan police. Subegh Singh is an old friend of Gurinder Singh alias Bhola, who escaped along with two other undertrials, Sukhdev Singh and Sarbjit Singh, the alleged killers of Romesh Chander, editor of the *Hind Samachar* group of newspapers.

State police chief Julio Ribeiro admitted later that the incident showed police negligence. The undertrials were not kept in the guards' room but allowed to sit on a bench outside. They were allowed to go to a public toilet, and contrary to instructions the courts were not properly screened or guarded. The incident sent tremors through the force. And in an effort to boost morale, Ribeiro declared: "We shall give them a befitting reply."

That, indeed, is what Ribeiro has been sent to Punjab to do, but it is no easy matter. His induction primarily aimed at revamping the Punjab police and, more important, giving it the leadership it needs to confront its enemies *(see page 68)*. Indeed, the appointment is just one of the new moves unveiled in New Delhi after nearly two months of dithering to give substance to the Centre's claim that it was solidly behind Barnala.

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The despatch of Siddhartha Shankar Ray provided effective back-stopping to the Akali Government, a man in reserve to step in if the popularly-elected Government wasn't able to cope. Ray's appointment was necessitated by Shankar Dayal Sharma's desire to leave Chandigarh for personal reasons. And he may also serve as a conduit between Barnala and Rajiv Gandhi.

However, most Akalis were surprised by the sudden and unannounced change of governor. Senior party leaders G.S. Tohra and Prakash Singh Badal absented themselves from the swearing-in ceremony while Barnala and colleagues Sukhjinder Singh and Basant Singh Khalsa kept a low profile. "I was informed about the new change. Sadly, there is no real tradition of consulting the chief minister before bringing in the governor," said Barnala. The Congress(I), on the other hand, was jubilant. "Ray's appointment is a welcome change. It shows the keenness of the Centre to save Punjab from terrorism and extremism and bring peace," said Congress(I) Legislature Party leader Gurbrinder Kaur Brar. Fearful of being labelled partisan, a worried Ray tried to put the record straight by saying: "Tell them I am no Congressman now. I am not here to look after the interest of the party but to do my every bit within the Constitution to help Punjab. I have no special favours for Congressmen."

THE APPOINTMENTS of both Ray and Ribeiro are aimed at bolstering the state Government and at the same time, the Government announced a new commission to determine which Hindi-speaking villages in Punjab would be transferred to Punjab, while work on the controversial Sutlej-Yamuna link canal might be handed over to a Central authority. Sources close to the Congress(I) high command emphasised that the Centre had no wish to take on the terrorists directly. The strategy seems to hinge on:

► Reforming the Punjab police and giving it effective professional leadership so that it is protected as far as possible from political and social pressure;

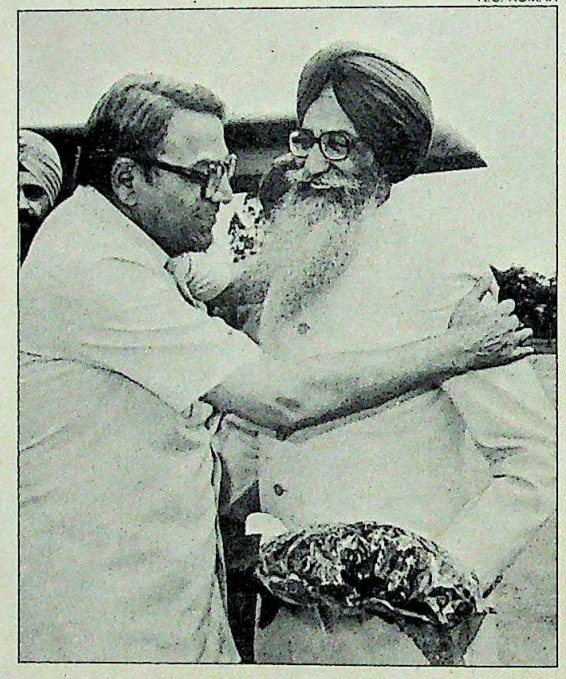
► Sending the required paramilitary forces to help keep the peace;

► Keeping up the pressure on terrorists so that the widespread feeling that they can act at will is checked;

► Scaling the border more effectively by shooting those who seek to cross illegally—in the six weeks till last month, more than 40 people had been killed on the border;

► Trying to mobilise public opinion on all sides, including in the Congress(I), to offer political support to the Barnala Government; and

N.C. KUMAR



Ray being received by Barnala: man in reserve

► Expediting the settlement of the outstanding issues from the Punjab accord.

Since the failure to keep to the original time-table of the Punjab accord, the initiative had passed out of the hands of the Akali Government, and it was the terrorists that were calling the shots. Still, though counter-pressure built up as more of them are being apprehended or killed in encounters, their murderous campaign hadn't slowed down.

Last fortnight saw another 15 people lose their lives and three more towns—Garhshankar, Hoshiarpur and Patiala—came under curfew. But the tide had begun to turn in at least one respect: the police met with significant success in nabbing at least seven known terrorists and were able to establish the identity of the people involved in four major shoot-outs where seven people were killed.

Forty kilometres from Jalandhar, the police had a rare vein of luck when they raided the farmhouse of Roshan Singh, general secretary of the Kapurthala unit of the United Akali Dal and arrested Gurmukh Singh, Rachhpal Singh and Gurmeet Singh. The police recovered the jeep (PJZ 4971) used in the Nakodar shoot-out, 232 cartridges of .303 rifles, 125 rounds of 9mm bullets, 25 rounds of ancient 410 bore muskets and 28 bullets of .38 calibre and .455 bore revolvers as well as two revolvers. Soon after the Nakodar incident, a BSF patrol under Inspector Surjit Singh chased the terrorists up to Lohian. Later, guided by the tyre marks of the terrorists' jeep, the police reached Raval village on the Jalandhar-Kapurthala border within half-an-hour, and the terrorists were caught unawares. The only regret the police had was that among the five who escaped from the farmhouse was one of the most wanted terrorists in the state, Manbir Singh. Ribeiro believes that this was the gang involved in the brutal killing of seven people at Kapurthala on March 6 and destroying the house of Inspector Jaskirat Singh at Kassochohal village near Kapurthala the very next day.

Again at Khanna, as the terrorists were escaping on foot towards Amloh in Patiala district, Ludhiana police chief Surjit Singh Bains heard about the shoot-out on his way from Patiala. Significantly, the message also gave the direction in which the terrorists had escaped. Bains led the chase and caught one terrorist. Two more were arrested later. Their interrogation revealed how well organised they were. Five terrorists under the command of Gurdev Singh boarded a bus from Tarn Taran at 5.30 a.m. and travelled 250 km to Majhri village near Khanna, where they were provided with pistols and divided into two groups. One went into the bustling market, where they killed three and injured four people, and the other group headed for Amloh. Ribeiro is confident after the surrender of Subegh Singh, one of the killers of the six policemen, that he will be able to catch the others. "The terrorists will have to pay with their lives for the crimes they are committing," he declared while announcing awards for the policemen who caught them. But it's going to be hard work before Punjab's books of blood are balanced.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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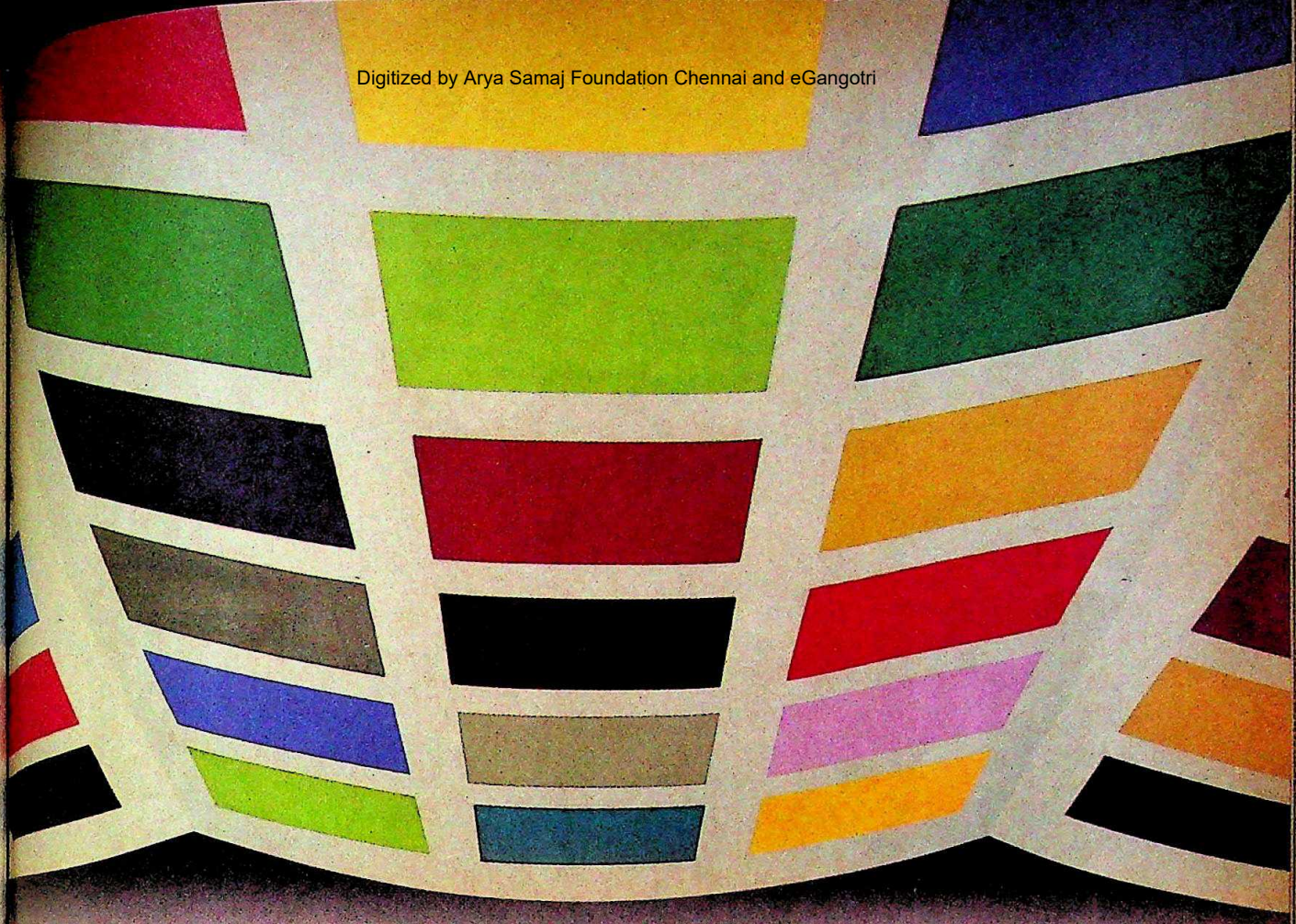

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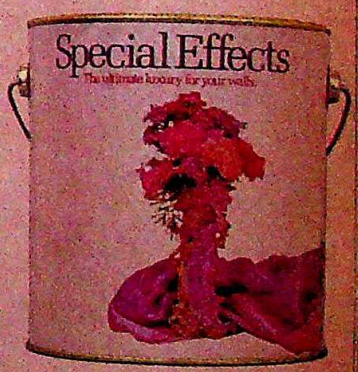

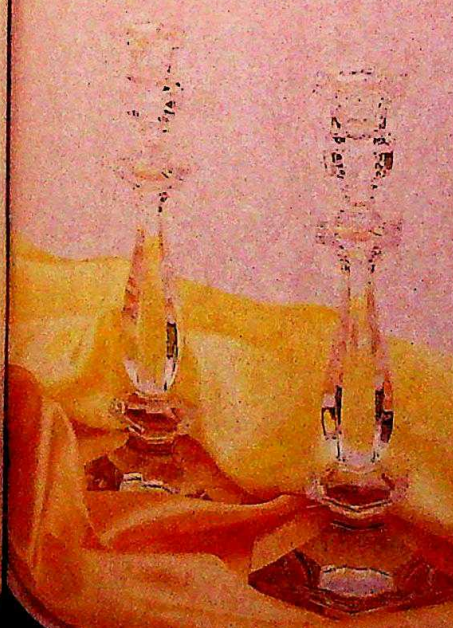

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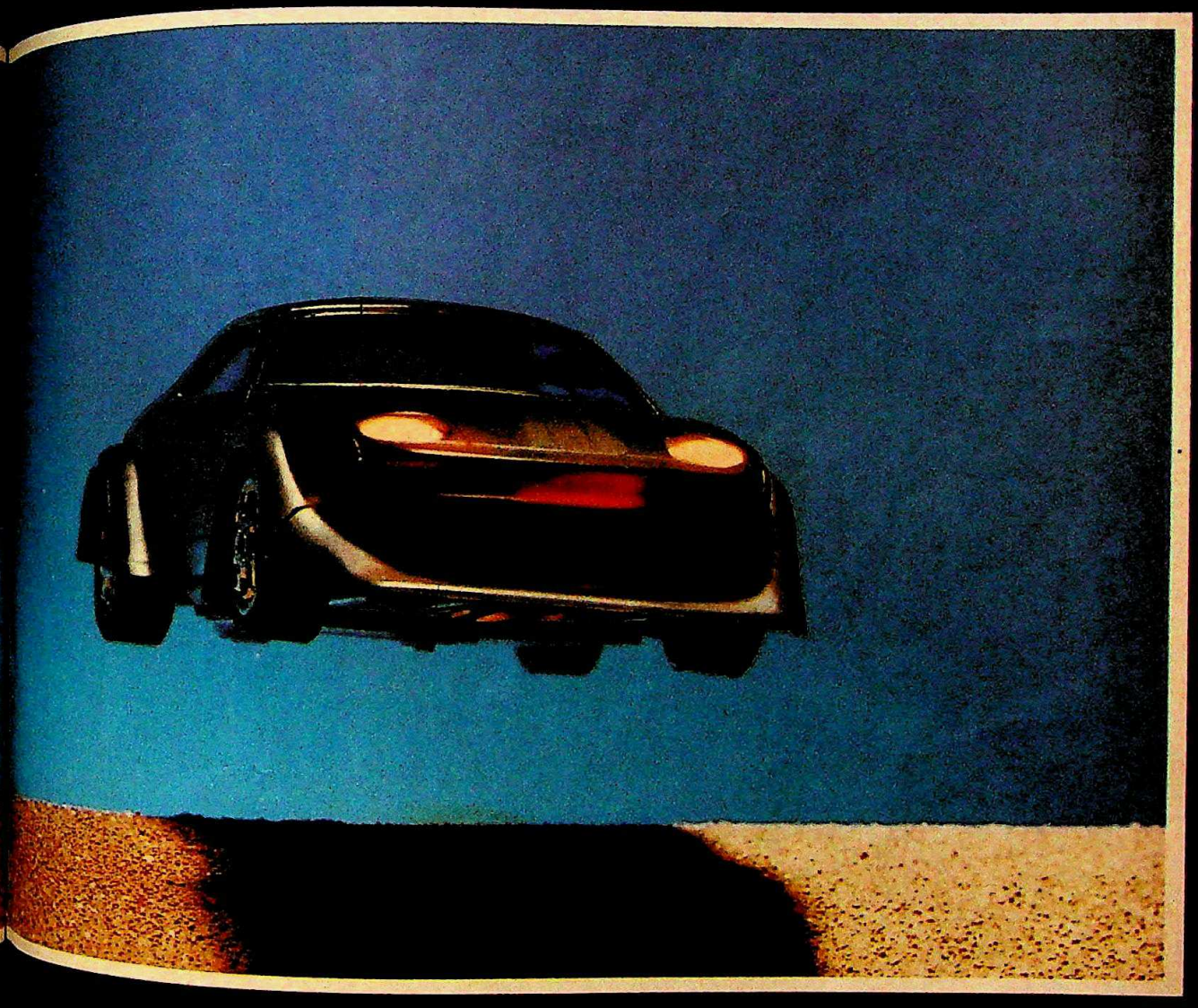

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MISHRA COMMISSION

Serious Setbacks

EVEN when the Justice Ranganath Mishra commission of inquiry was appointed a year ago, independent observers had predicted that it would turn out to be a lame duck investigation. A tough inquiry would have caused important heads to roll. And Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had made no secret of his own reluctance to order an official probe into the large-scale killing of Sikhs during the riots following Mrs Gandhi's assassination in October 1984. He had once referred to the riots as a "dead issue," and had argued against "opening up old wounds."

The commission was finally appointed because of public pressure and the exigencies of the Punjab accord. But those who predicted that it would not get very far seemed to find their prophecy coming true last fortnight when an influential body of eminent lawyers and jurists—the Citizens Justice Committee (CJC)—which had been invited to assist the Commission in its fact-finding—withdrew from the Commission's hearings after bitterly criticising its procedures in a 44-page petition addressed to Justice Mishra.

The CJC alleged that the Commission was failing to protect witnesses who were testifying on behalf of the victims, that the witnesses were subjected to continuing threats and intimidation and that the commission was conducting its affairs in such secrecy that no independent evaluation was possible. Said V.M. Tarkunde, retired judge of the Bombay High Court: "We did not feel there was any point in our participating any more. This has been a one-sided investigation. We were never given a chance to participate in it as we had been promised."

Commission personnel refused to comment on the CJC decision. R.L. Gupta, secretary to the commission, offered "no comment" while Justice Mishra could not even be approached for a response.

The CJC's withdrawal from the commission's proceeding removes the only body that was actively representing victims and survivors of the November 1984 violence. The CJC had got more than 600 affidavits from victims alleging participation by the police and politicians in the carnage. Among the 18 members of the committee (which grew out of an earlier team that conducted a citizens' inquiry into the riots) are former Chief Justice S.M.Sikri, Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora, and journalist Khushwant Singh.

Relations between the Commission and the committee had never been cordial. From the start, CJC members claimed that the independent investigation agency (headed by a junior superintendent of police from Orissa) appointed by the commission was not powerful enough to undertake investigations involving senior government officials and politicians. In addition, while the CJC produced hundreds of witnesses who have been subjected to rigorous cross-examination within the commission, "not one officer from the government or the Delhi administration has been invited to step into the witness box," the CJC petition said. And even though a total of some 2,900 affidavits have supposedly been filed until now, "no copy of any of the affidavits filed by people other than CJC witnesses has been provided to the CJC for scrutiny."

"This has been a one-sided investigation. We were never really given a chance to participate in it as we had been promised."

JUSTICE TARKUNDE

"The terms of reference of the commission were biased against the victims, the victims were forced to come to the investigation with the burden of proof on them."

LT. GEN. AURORA

A CJC member, advocate Soli Sorabjee, said that key interviews had been conducted behind closed doors and "we were not given an opportunity to cross-examine anybody." The CJC's list of complaints against the commission is long and weighty. Vital government documents, including police reports on the riots, summoned from the government at the CJC's behest were kept secret from the CJC despite repeated requests for disclosure. Another request that nine senior government officials responsible for maintaining law and order during the riots be summoned was turned down on the grounds that their statements had already been recorded by the commission. In fact, only five of the nine had been examined by the commission. Their identities were not disclosed and their statements were not made available. In addition, "the same police officers against whom allegations of intimidation and harassment had been made by the witnesses were entrusted the task of investigating the allegations." Their reports, along with replies from the Delhi administration, were made available to the Commission but not disclosed to the CJC.

The citizens' committee is aware that its decision to withdraw from the commission's proceedings is likely to be misunderstood in the surcharged atmosphere in Punjab. Members said the decision had not been taken in haste, and that it had been contemplated for several months. Said Gen. J.S.Aurora: "From the beginning, the terms of reference of the Commission were biased against the victims. The investigation did not go to the victims, the victims were forced to come to the investigation with the burden of proof on them."

Following the CJC's withdrawal, the work of the commission is almost certain to be speeded up. But when the commission does give its final report, it may find that it has few takers.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

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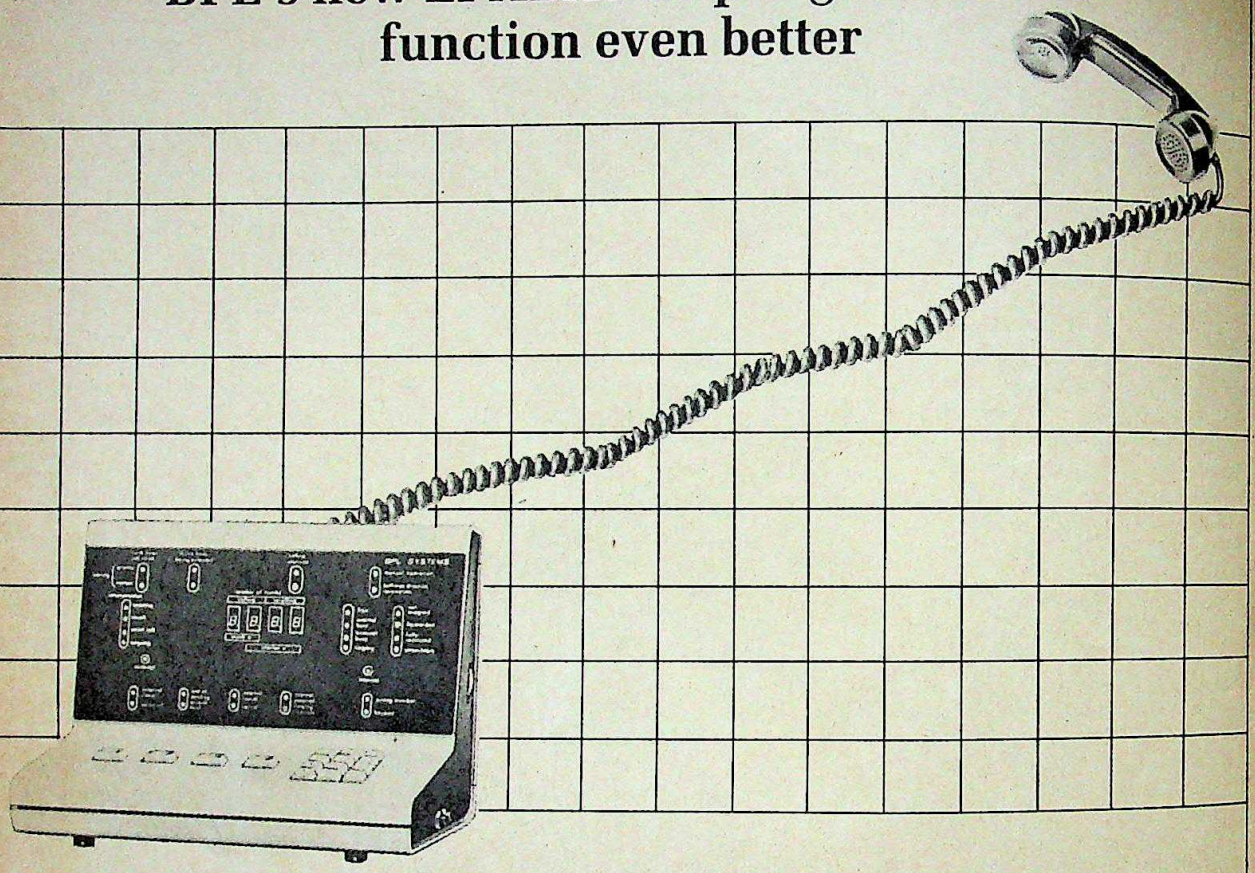

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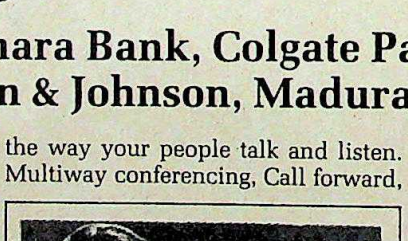

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MAHARASHTRA

Eviction Problems

Aaj ki raat bahut garam hawa chalti hai,
Aaj ki raat na footpath pe neend ayegi,
Tum utho, tum utho, tum bhi utho,
Tum utho, tum utho, tum bhi utho.
Koi khidki isi deewar mein khul jayegi.
from Kaifi Azmi's *Makaan*

A FEW decades after Kaifi Azmi wrote that inspiring poem on the plight of homeless construction workers, scores of slum dwellers woke up one morning last fortnight in Bombay to find by their side none other than the poet's daughter, the actress Shabana Azmi. "We were stunned when we saw Shabana Azmi," said Phooljahan Begum, 35, a resident of the Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, who after being evicted was now occupying the footpath along General Jagannath Bhosale Marg in posh south Bombay. "It is always a surprise anyway when rich people come to our aid. But she was very nice, she told us we shouldn't worry, that they will ensure the Government gives us alternative accommodation."

In a surprise day-long operation on March 12, about 300 huts nestling on reclaimed land were demolished by municipal workers and policemen led by Bombay's additional collector (encroachments) and Madhukar Patil, controller of slums. Nearly 1,500 residents of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar salvaged whatever they could and many pitched makeshift shelters on the footpaths, some along the compound wall of the 17-storey Sarang Building occupied by Cabinet ministers and judges. The authorities quickly fenced in the land.

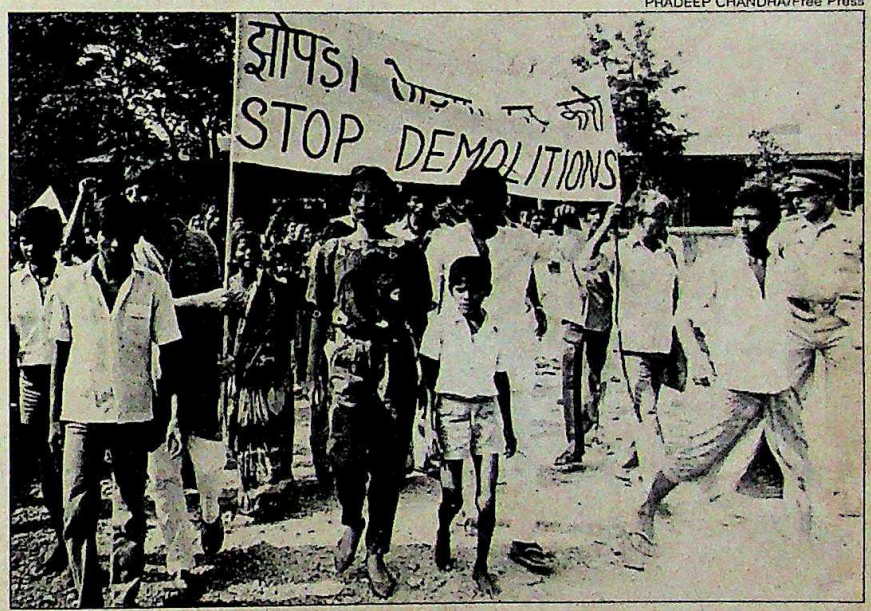
It was here that at 9 a.m. on April 1, Shabana Azmi and documentary film makers Anand Patwardhan and Uma Sehgal led over a hundred slum dwellers to symbolically reclaim the land. They were soon arrested and taken to the metropolitan magistrate's court at Azad Maidan, where they were joined by actor Om Puri, film maker Govind Nihalani, scientist Homi Sethna, writers Vijay Tendulkar, Asghar Ali Engineer and Dinkar Sakrikar. The somewhat overawed police served them *pau-bhaji* and tea before releasing them around 2 p.m.

Commenting on her involvement, Shabana Azmi said later: "It was the first time that I participated in a public protest. Basically, I went because I was very moved by Anand's film *Hamara Shahar*. In the beginning I felt I was becoming a heroine for doing nothing. But then the response of the people was wonderful. I was really amazed by the verve and fervour shown by them, especially the women. This creates in me a tremendous sense of responsibility."

It also created a fresh obstacle in the path of the municipal authorities to clear families who came after 1980 have also been evicted. "Unfortunately an impression has been created that we plan to clear all the slum colonies in Bombay," says Jamshed Kanga, municipal commissioner, "we neither have the resources nor the desire to do this. Our priority now is to clear hutments from pavements or public land required for the development of civic services."

But in the absence of both a master plan and sufficient resources, the Government has been able to earmark only six plots of water-logged land for the BMC to develop. The corporation has already spent Rs 40 lakh on just one plot at Dindoshi in Malad, where recently-

PRADEEP CHANDRA/Free Press



Azmi with slum dwellers: surprise aid

the city of unauthorised slums and pavement dwellers. Out of a population of 90 lakh, an estimated 46 lakh live in makeshift homes. Last July, the Supreme Court permitted the authorities to renew from November 1, the slum clearance operation which the court had stayed for two years. "The Government's policy is clear," said V. Subramaniam, the state housing minister. "Where the land is required for a public purpose the hutments will be removed. But we've taken a humanitarian view and have decided to provide alternative accommodation to not only those who came before 1976, as the Supreme Court ruled, but also to those who came up to 1980."

In the first phase of the operation lasting till June, 15,000 families are to be evicted. Nearly 2,000 have already been rehoused on newly-developed sites-and-services in the suburbs and 18,000 evicted slum dwellers have been dumped. The Government proposes to utilise Rs 55 crore of the Rs 100-crore loan promised by the prime minister, for slum development including Rs 15 crore for redeveloping Dharavi. "We cannot do very much unless we get tremendous assistance from the Central and state governments," a senior municipal official, confessed.

However, officials have been forced to respond to Shabana's protest. The additional collector sent notices to the slum dwellers to provide proof of occupation and Chief Minister S.B. Chavan also agreed to look into it. But the authorities are in a quandary—if they provide alternative accommodation without proof of occupation before 1980, they set a precedent for lakhs of other slum dwellers in Bombay. If they don't, they will reaffirm the fact that there is no permanent place for the poor in India's richest city.

—M.RAHMAN

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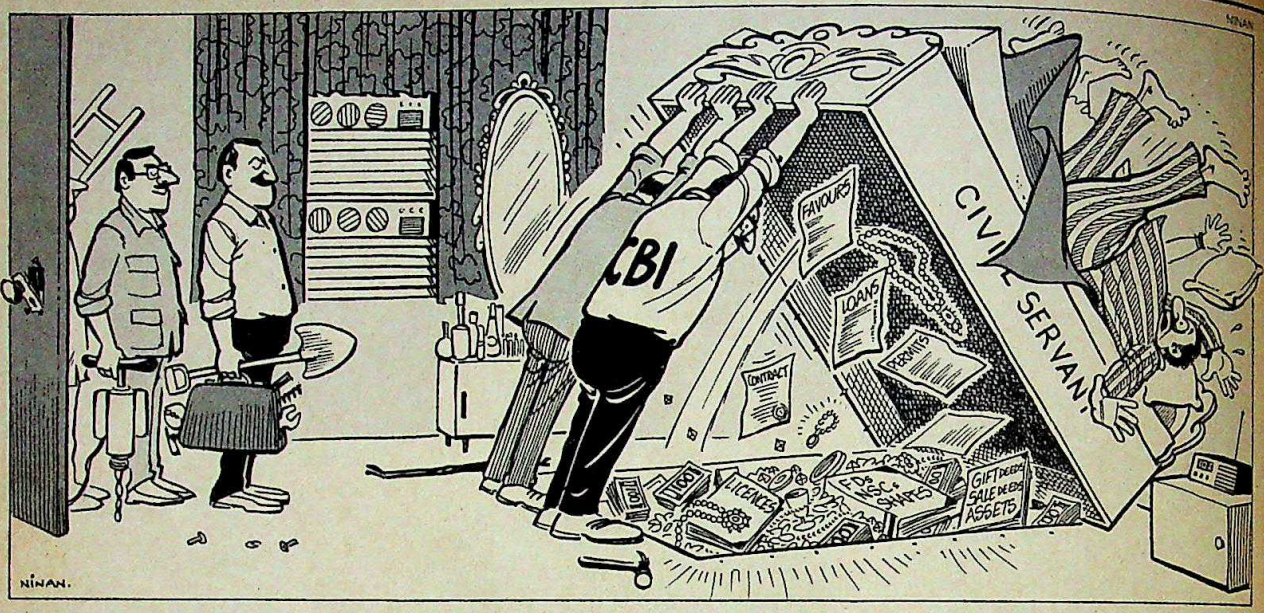

RAIDS

Exposing Bureaucracy

THE MASSIVE raids caught everyone by surprise, including the steel-framed Indian civil service and publicity-shy bankers. Sleuths of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) swooped on senior officials in the Government and public sector undertakings, and then briefed journalists extensively about the juicy details of what the raids had unearthed. The CBI raided the homes of 30 officials in 19 cities, including an IAS official on deputation with the Food Corporation of India (FCI), a programme director with Doordarshan and over a dozen managers of nationalised banks and other public sector organisations. Last fortnight, as the raids continued, the unaccounted assets recovered totalled over Rs 2.5 crore and the frauds exposed involved more than Rs 50 crore. Said a CBI official: "We have never had such success earlier while raiding officials.This proves that the bureaucracy has also contributed to the generation of black money."

In fact, the CBI has set a record during the last three months by launching cases against 83 government officials, including three belonging to the IAS. Last year in raids on 78 officials, the CBI exposed fraud worth Rs 12 crore and recovered assets worth Rs 1.41 crore (*see chart*). Said a senior official who was coordinating the raids: "We thought we had a pretty good idea about the amount that would be recovered, but the catches surpassed our wildest estimates."

Some of the prime catches of recent months testify to the extent of corruption that frequently goes undiscovered:

► During a raid on the house of a junior official in the Directorate-General of Technical Development (DGTD), the CBI found documents showing assets worth over Rs 12 lakh which were not accounted for. His monthly salary was barely Rs 2,200. The official, it turned out, was related to a former minister in Mrs Gandhi's cabinet.

► An IAS officer posted as regional manager with the FCI owned a few apple orchards, plots of industrial land, three cars including an imported one, an electronics factory and three bank lockers. The estimated value of the assets: over Rs 50 lakh. His monthly take-home salary was no more than Rs 3,500.

► The search and interrogation of an IAS officer in Hyderabad on deputation with the Steel Ministry led to the disclosure that he had illegally married a second time, was maintaining his wives in separate houses, owned two houses in the prestigious Banjara Hills area, and had placed two cars at the disposal of his wives. Two kilogrammes of gold were recovered from his lockers. His monthly take-home salary was less than Rs 3,000.

► An inventory of the documents and valuables seized from the residence of an industrial adviser with the DGTD included Rs 52,000 in cash, two commercial flats worth over Rs 10 lakh, a plot in a new housing colony outside Delhi, National Saving Certificates worth Rs 1.60 lakh and a monthly cumulative deposit of Rs 10,000 with a nationalised bank. His net salary was barely Rs 2,800 per month.

The CBI struck similar pay-dirt with bank officials, exposing the rot that had set in. For example, P.K. Nedungady, a former general manager of the State Bank of Travancore, was instrumental in advancing a Rs 4-crore loan to a textile mill. When this irregularity was detected, he left the bank and joined the mill at a monthly salary of Rs 8,000.

In another case, the CBI discovered papers showing loans given by a bank general manager to bogus beneficiaries under the 20-point programme. The money, it turned out, was actually being used for buying immovable property that was then audaciously rented back to the bank. And from the house of a senior general manager of a nationalised bank in Karnataka, the CBI recovered documents showing bank loans worth Rs 80 lakh made to fictitious people. Using this money, the officer had been advancing loans to private individuals at 24 per cent interest for speculative purposes. Explained a deputy director of the CBI who raided most of the bank officials: "This is the first case I know of public money being used for private banking."

The drive against corrupt officials in the Government and public sector organisations was given a push by the prime minister himself. The Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms (DPAR), which comes under the prime minister, issued detailed guidelines to all

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the ministries and more than 200 public sector corporations on the need to improve the image of these departments.

The DPAR identified organisations like the offices of chief controller of imports and exports, FCI, the DGTD, the Income-Tax and Excise Departments, the Steel Ministry, the Information & Broadcasting Ministry and all the nationalised banks for special attention because it was from these offices that the Government received more than 70 per cent of the complaints of corruption. In addition, the DPAR also chose local bodies like the Delhi Municipal Corporation and the Delhi Development Authority for special shock treatment. Said Minister of State for Personnel and Administrative Reforms P. Chidambaram: "A three-pronged strategy has been adopted to fight corruption. A time-bound action plan has been suggested for the identification of the corruption-prone areas and expeditious disposal of cases." According to the new approach there will be simultaneous raids on the entire chain of people involved in any particular case of corruption. A clear directive has also gone out to all the public corporations to either remove people with doubtful integrity from sensitive posts or require them compulsorily if they are above 50 years.

However, before the ministries or departments could take any action on DPAR's directives, the CBI (which comes under DPAR) struck with a vengeance. Last year, in October itself it raided over 20 senior income tax and customs officials, besides more than a dozen other public sector employees. It was during these raids that the CBI was surprised by the amount of unaccounted wealth and money possessed by the moderately paid government employees. Another round of searches was carried out in November and December, taking the total for the full year to 73, from only 40 in the first nine months of the year.

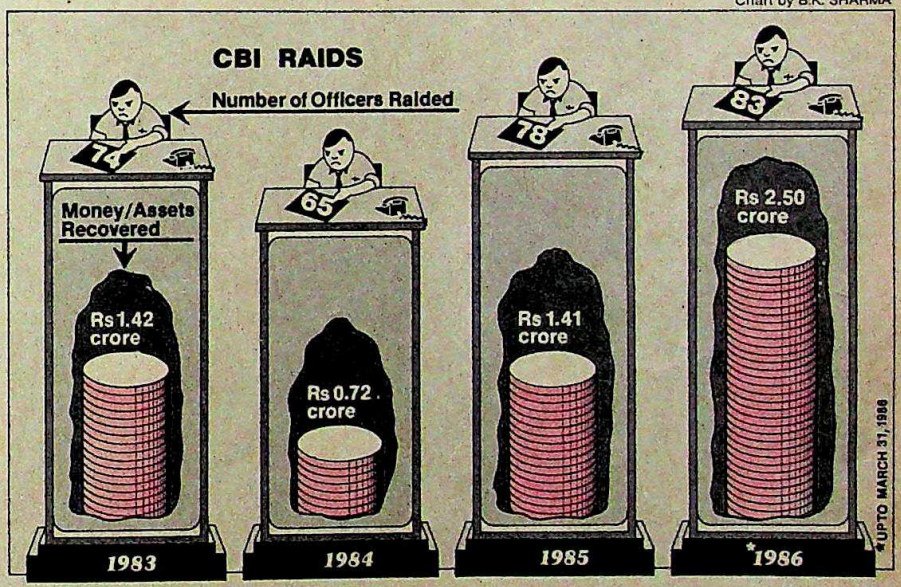
When the new year dawned, the raiders attention was focused on bank men. On one day in January, 48 officials of 19 nationalised banks were raided in 27 cities. As a joint secretary in the DPAR put it, the targets were vertically integrated. If the CBI marked the general manager, it also chose all those working directly under him who were believed to be accomplices in siphoning off public money.

What has been unearthed so far may be no more than the tip of the iceberg. For more than 2,000 cases are still pending with the CBI and the Central Vigilance Commission for further investigation.

"A three-pronged strategy has been adopted to fight corruption. An action plan has been suggested for quick disposal of corruption cases."

P. CHIDAMBARAM
minister of state for personnel and administrative reforms

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Since the entire process is time-consuming, various investigating agencies have made slow progress on the investigations. Explained a CBI official: "Our job is different from investigating a crime. Raiding an official means raiding the entire family and other close relations and involves scrutiny of whole sets of documents."

Some of the cases investigated testify to official ingenuity. In one case, an official claimed that he had received Rs 46 lakh as a gift from his father, who had died 10 years earlier. But the CBI was able to show that the documents were forged. It often took them more than 10 months to unravel such mysteries.

But the CBI is learning new tricks too. Its new strategy is to collect information from three different channels before it finally raids an official. The basic document on which it starts action is the audit report on the financial dealings of a concerned department. Since audit reports are well documented, the CBI now knows where to look for what. The audit reports are then tallied with the internal vigilance inquiries, and finally CBI's intelligence wings provide officials with the necessary back-up material. This well-coordinated move has worked for the CBI, which now takes barely two to three months for completing an investigation, whereas the earlier average used to be one year and more. To help improve things still further, the DPAR is devising a scheme similar to that in the Finance Ministry under which the officials and members of the public providing useful information will get a part of the booty recovered from those raided by the CBI or other agencies.

The CBI's reputation may have been bolstered by its recent successes, but its track record in securing prosecutions on the cases it has initiated is nothing to write home about. Last year, the CBI could complete its investigations on only 407 of the 1,626 complaints received against public servants. Worse, it could send only nine cases for trial to the courts, while no more than 16 cases were recommended for departmental action.

Even in the courts, its success in securing convictions has been no more than 70 per cent. Investigations have been tardy and slow in some cases. Of the 1,359 cases pending investigation this year, over 15 per cent have been gathering dust for over a year, and 25 per cent for six months. Clearly, this record will have to improve if the new round of raids against corrupt civil servants and public sector officials is to yield results.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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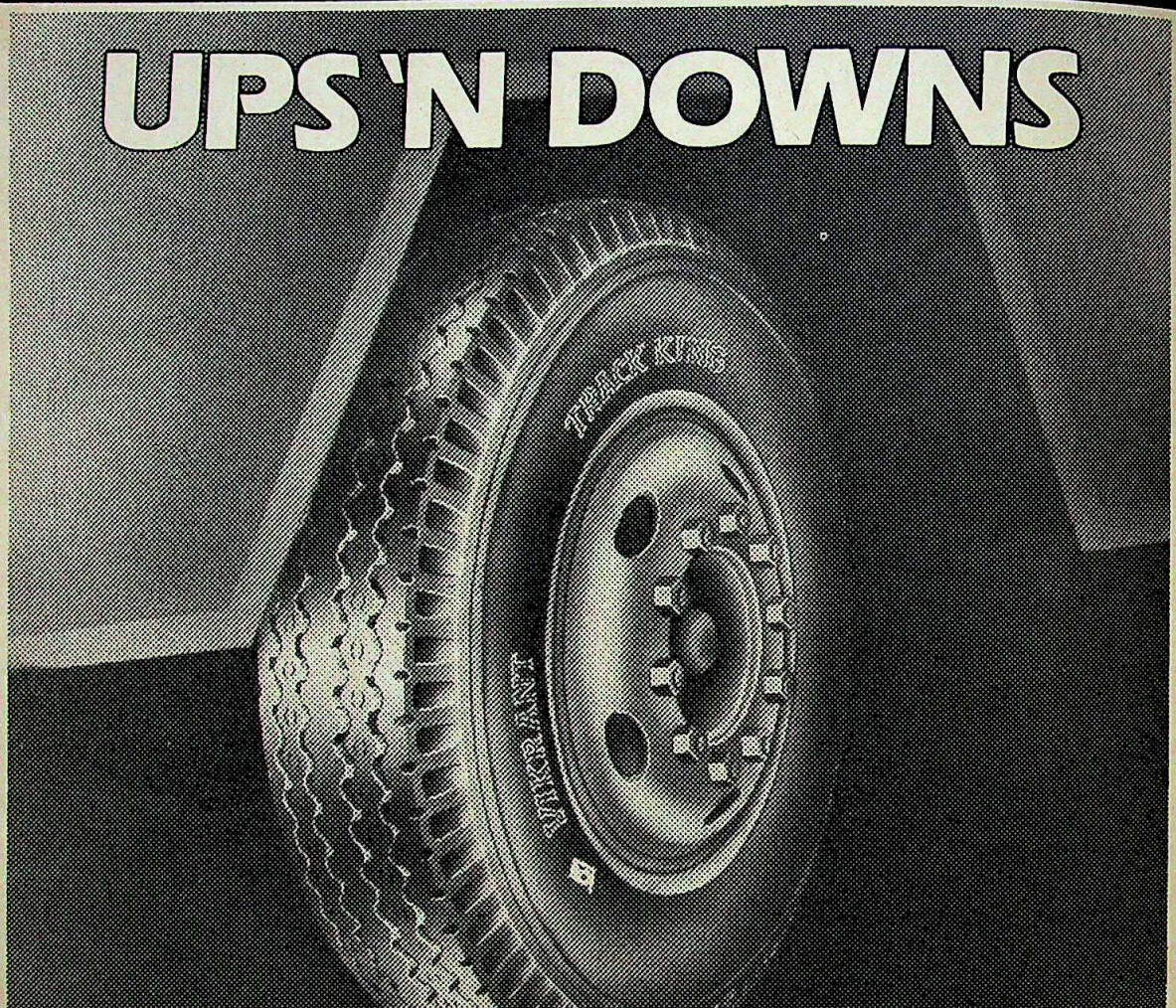

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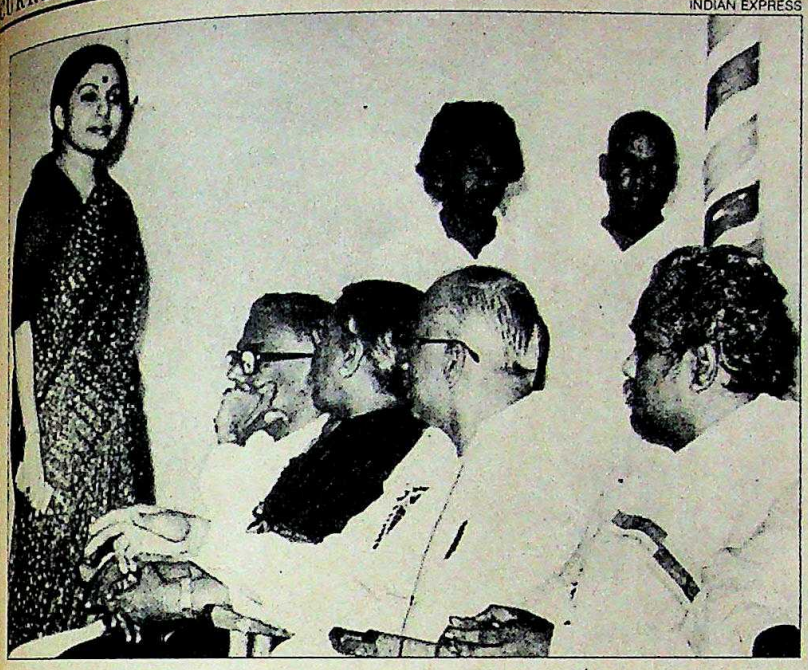

Jayalalitha: winds of change

TAMIL NADU

Merry Go Round

WITH an enfeebled M.G. Ramachandran presiding, and Information Minister R.M. Veerappan and Propaganda Secretary Jayalalitha Jayaram feuding openly for ascendancy in the party, All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagham (AIADMK) politics continues to resemble the theatre of the absurd. Nobody still knows who will win the battle of succession but at the end of a stormy two-day meeting of the party's executive committee and general council in Madras last fortnight, there was no doubt that the latest round had gone to the chubby and charismatic Jayalalitha.

For the Veerappan loyalists, the meeting was an unexpected reversal. On the upswing of late (INDIA TODAY, February 15), they had hoped to deliver the coup de grace at the meeting. Their strategy had been worked out with great care. Invitations to Jayalalitha's followers were deliberately posted late. Party General Secretary S. Raghavandam, it was revealed, had sent two "secret" letters to Jayalalitha asking her why she was not attending to party work. The activity of rebels owing loyalty to her, it was argued, had brought about the party's rout in the recent local body elections. Jayalalitha, it was rumoured, was forming a new party—the "MGR Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam". There could, then, be only one denouement: she must be stripped of her party post. A resolution to that effect was in readiness.

But when, three days before the party meeting, MGR unexpectedly postponed a cabinet meeting and held a three-hour-long tete-a-tete with Jayalalitha instead, the portents were clear. At the party meeting, attended by 522 members and 142 special invitees, Jayalalitha's role was not even discussed. Instead, the heat was turned on the party's 24 ministers (apart from MGR), among whom only two are her steadfast supporters.

Outside the venue of the meeting, the sprawling Sathya Studios owned by MGR in downtown Adyar, her fans shouted slogans and waved banners asking the party not to remove their "Madam". Inside, invitees were given a form with the list of the ministers and asked to comment on their performance and list their complaints and charges. The forms were dropped into a ballot-box-like container to which MGR alone had the key and which he took to his Ramavaram Garden residence on the outskirts of the city.

At the meeting itself, most speakers lambasted ministers loyal to Veerappan—like P.U. Shanmugham, K. Rajaram, C. Ponnaiyan and N. Nallusamy. Wilting under the onslaught, some of Veerappan's followers turned against each other. A hurt Nallusamy complained that P. Musiriputhan, president of the All-World MGR Film Fans' Association and another Veerappan follower, had launched a tirade against him through the columns of his daily, *Manra Murasu*.

The second day of the meeting showed that Jayalalitha's victory had been complete. Winding up the discussion on behalf of MGR, Finance Minister V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, announced that the chief minister would be dropping 10 or 11 ministers and diverting them to party work. After Nedunchezhiyan dropped this bombshell, the stage was handed over to Jayalalitha to make the concluding remarks. Like an elder statesman, she implored her partymen to forget past differences and work unitedly. Conceded even a staunch Veerappan associate: "Undoubtedly Jayalalitha carried the day at the general council."

And as if to drive the last nail into the coffin of the Veerappan camp, Jayalalitha turned out to be the unexpected star attraction at the historical public meeting held later that day, the first that MGR has addressed after the stroke he suffered in October 1984. "Though I wasn't invited by the organisers (the Madras district unit of the AIADMK) to speak here, I have come at MGR's behest and am speaking at his wish," she told the startled crowd in a brief but powerful speech. In a highly slurred seven-minute effort, MGR warned his ministers that unless they lived up to the expectations of the people, they would be punished. Said he: "I will not hesitate to throw out the corrupt, however big the posts they occupy."

Subsequent events only served to establish Jayalalitha's ascendancy. MGR cancelled yet another cabinet meeting at the last minute, scheduled for the day after the general council concluded, to have a long closed-door discussion with Jayalalitha. While MGR asked his Council of Ministers to clear all their pending files, Jayalalitha made yet another triumphant entry into the AIADMK party office to resume discharging her duties as propaganda secretary.

But it was soon clear that the Veerappan camp had not yet given up, though they were fighting a losing battle. In what was obviously their handi-

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work, a sensational poster appeared in the state secretariat recalling Jayalalitha's alleged anti-party activities when MGR was convalescing in New York. Local Administration Minister P.U. Shanmugham and Industries Minister K. Rajaram initiated a move to collect signatures from party MLA's on a memorandum to the chief minister, requesting that there should be no major changes in the present Cabinet, but signatures were hard to come by. Other ministers tried to put on a brave public front, though not with much conviction. Clearly, however, MGR is unable to contain factionalism in the party. Though 10 or 11 ministers were to be dropped, the only one who actually quit was K.A. Krishnaswamy, who does not belong to either faction. In a defiant gesture, Krishnaswamy sent his resignation directly to the governor, while MGR was in Delhi, when he was stripped of the labour portfolio. Yet, even as Jayalalitha savours her moment of triumph, if the two factions in the party keep battling in the manner they have been doing, there may not be much of a party to eventually inherit.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

KARNATAKA

Water War

EVEN as Karnataka politicians were shouting themselves hoarse that the Telugu Ganga project would rob their state of a share of its water from the Krishna, Andhra Pradesh has opened the floodgates for two more potentially explosive inter-state river disputes. Karnataka officials were taken aback last fortnight when the Telugu Desam Government accused them of trying to corner more water than due to it from the rivers Tungabhadra and Pennar.

The controversy over the Tungabhadra arose from Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's decision to do away with the Tungabhadra Project Board (TPB), set up by the Centre in 1953 to regulate the distribution of the river's waters between the two states. Hegde has been writing a series of letters to Andhra Pradesh and the Centre to scrap the board since it was costing the state an avoidable sum of Rs 46 lakh.

The TBP was set up because two branches of the canal from the Tungabhadra dam irrigate both Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The other branch of the canal serves only Karnataka areas. Karnataka has been arguing that since it maintains the left bank canal, it could also maintain the other branches thus making the board infructuous. But Andhra Pradesh has refused to accept the plea. An irate Irrigation Minister K.E. Krishnamurthy told the Assembly last fortnight: "If Karnataka is suddenly interested in doing away with the board it is because that state is overdrawing the water and doesn't want anyone to know about it." Krishnamurthy's outburst came close on the heels of an angry letter he had dashed off to Karnataka objecting to the construction of a dam across the Pennar river alleging that Karnataka was trying to steal more water than due to it by constructing the dam and diverting some water to a tank at Maralur.

But Karnataka officials hotly denied both the allegations. Spluttered one official: "This is ridiculous. They are going ahead with the Rs 637-crore Telugu Ganga project which will deprive Karnataka of thousands of MCF (million cubic feet) of Krishna waters, and they have the temerity to question a Rs 9-lakh construction which will divert just 16 MCF of water."

It was clear, however, that other factors were muddying the waters and that the dispute was becoming a battle between Kannadiga and Andhra chauvinism. Just two weeks after Karnataka Congress(I) leader M. Veerappa Moily suggested to the state chief minister that he move the Supreme Court and stop the Telugu Ganga project, an agitated Telugu Desam member in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly called on Chief Minister N.T.Rama Rao to move the same court to stop the Pennar diversion.

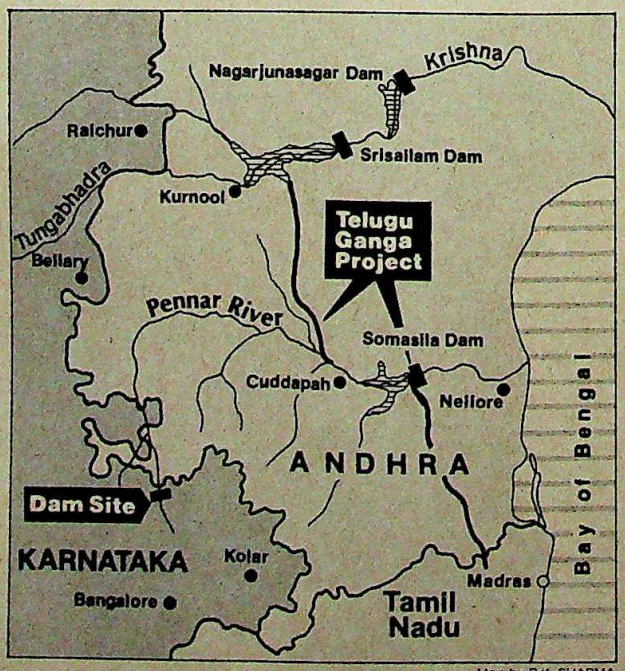
Andhra Pradesh contends that the construction of the dam is against an 1892 agreement which prohibits the two states from taking up any kind of construction on an inter-state river without the prior permission of the other. To this, the Karnataka Government's argument is that the tank existed even before 1892, and the water from Pennar has been diverted to it all along, so that the agreement does not apply to the dam.

The tank at Maralur in Kolar district has a capacity of about 40 MCF. But it normally gets only 24 MCF of water from its catchment areas and the remaining 16 MCF is diverted to it from the Pennar through a 7-km long feeder channel. So far, the Government has put up a crude man-made dam every year with sand bags and mud to divert water to the tank. But following repeated requests from farmers, whose 200 acres of land is irrigated by the tank, the Government decided in November 1984 to have a permanent structure for this diversion.

Getting wind of this plan, Andhra Pradesh wrote to Karnataka in February last year asking the state not to go ahead with the construction. But Karnataka chose to ignore the request. A few months later, Andhra Pradesh sent a telex message repeating the objection.

Karnataka officials were busy drafting a reply to the latest letter, assuring their neighbour that the dam would in no way draw more water from Pennar than the quantity normally diverted. "Krishnamurthy doesn't know what we are doing. We will explain everything to him," Karnataka Irrigation Minister H.D. Deve Gowda said, casually dismissing Andhra Pradesh's objection. In spite of these assurances, fears that Andhra Pradesh would now get less water from Pennar are sure to remain. And Karnataka's declarations are not going to be the last word on the issue.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD



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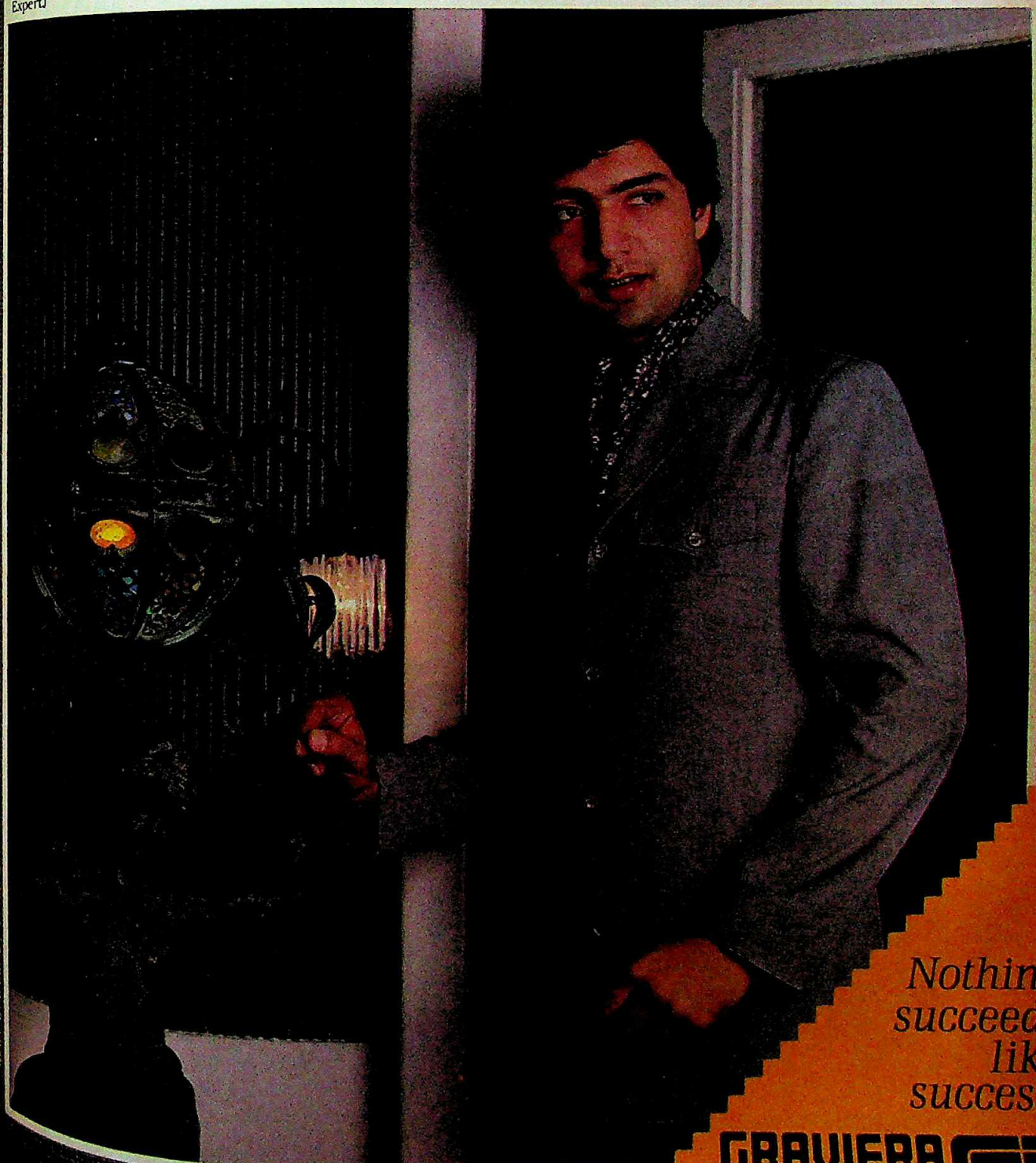

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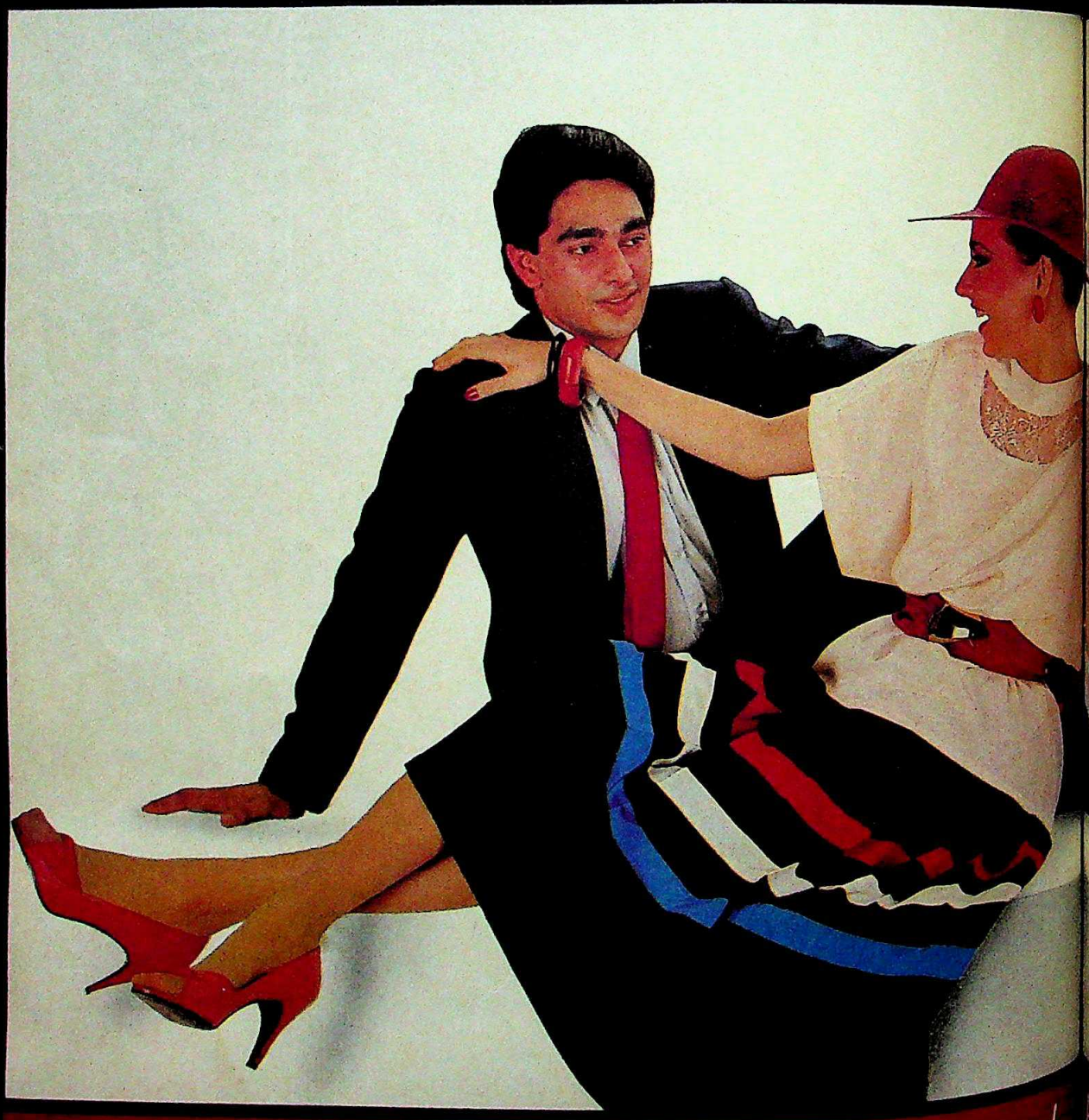

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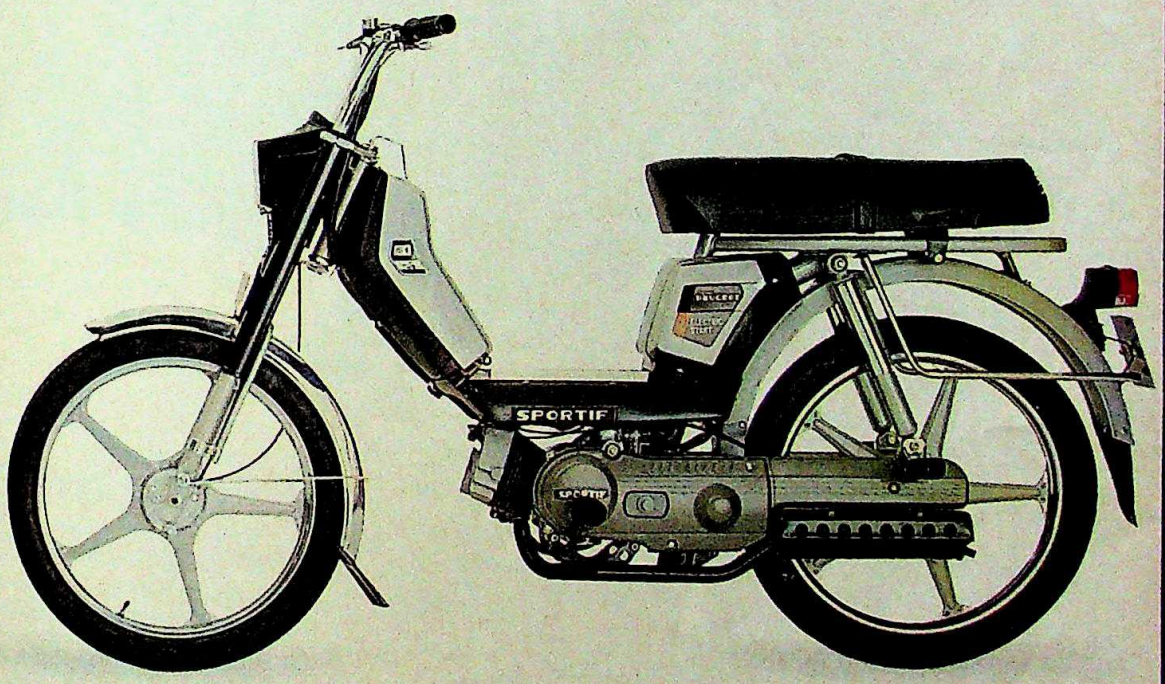

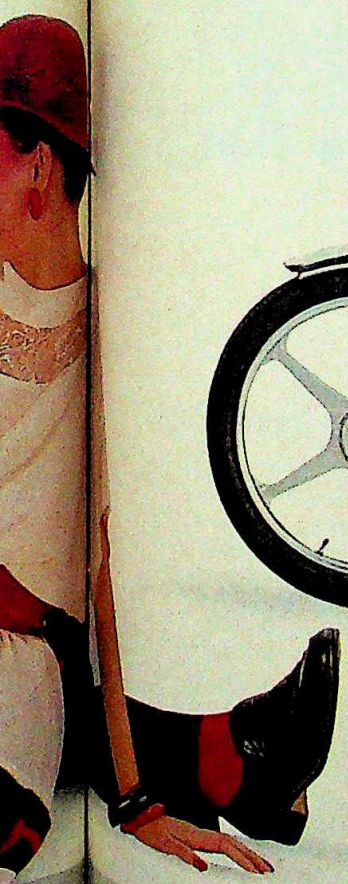

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VERAVAL

Communal Cauldron

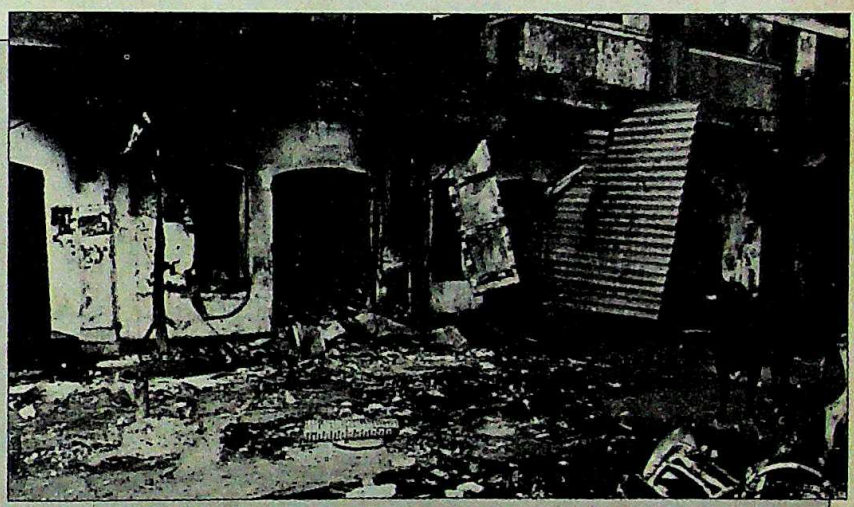
THE COMMUNAL frenzy which swept through the port town of Veraval in Gujarat late last month was surprisingly ignored by the media. The toll was terrible enough; in just one four-hour span on March 27, 13 people were killed, 41 seriously injured, 1,300 rendered homeless and property worth over Rs 5 crore destroyed. But save for brief news agency reports, the tragedy barely received any mention in the Gujarat press. Media representatives justify the distortion by quoting the unwritten code that the press will not play up communal incidents, but the truth is somewhat different. Unfortunately for the victims of the Veraval tragedy, they happened to be mostly Muslims.

Communal tensions have been on the rise in Gujarat—there were minor riots also in Ahmedabad, Borsad and Palanpur last fortnight—but Veraval is a case apart. The cutting edge of the conflict in this bustling fishing town (pop. approximately: 100,000) was almost entirely economic. Muslim businessmen take the cream of Veraval's Rs 30-crore business in fishing since they control the marketing. The fishermen, on the other hand, are Hindus of the 60,000-strong Kharwa community, who have repeatedly tried in the past to break the Muslims' monopoly but without success.

The resentment found expression the day after Holi when violence swept the business localities of Vakaria Bazar, Cutlery Bazar, Lathi Bazar and Machi Pith. Of the 78 shops in the wholesale fish market, 72 belonging to Muslims were burnt.

The Muslims had written to Junagadh Collector R. Suganthan in early March apprehending trouble. But he had brushed it aside saying: "How can such a thing happen? What are we here for?" Muslim leaders then met acting district Police Superintendent K. Cumarasami, only to be given a lecture on the wisdom and need of communal harmony. Lamented Ibrahim Sheikh, secretary, Muslim Majlis-e-Mushavirat: "If our pleas had not fallen on deaf ears, this carnage would not have taken place."

To the Muslims' misfortune, the police also had reason to be displeased with them. The Kharwa head of the Veraval municipality, who had fallen out with his own community, had struck a deal with the Muslims whereby he handed over a 1,000 sq-yard plot of land for a *madrasa* they wanted to build in return for their support. Unfortunately, this land had actually been earmarked for building police quarters. The police got a stay order from the collector.



In four hours 13 people were killed, 1,300 rendered homeless and property over 5 crore destroyed.

Thus, on March 27, when Hindu mobs attacked Muslim shops, the Muslims tried to ransack the police lines. In what led to a total breakdown of the law and order machinery, most policemen left whatever they were doing and rushed to the lines. Confessed a police officer: "To the constables, their homes and families were more important, so they came back in panic leaving the town to the rioters."

When Suganthan drove into Veraval on the evening of March 27, the town was in flames and Saurashtra Range DIG S. Banerjee had been forced to summon help from other districts. An irate Suganthan wanted to know why the Muslims had suffered the most even at the hands of the police. Alleged Sheikh: "The Kharwas were given a free hand, while the police fired at Muslims." Said Iqbal Osman Patanwala, a Veraval resident: "The police were hand in glove with the rioters."

Only 148 people had been arrested even though over 200 cases of arson alone had been registered. The 2,000 Muslims still huddled in the makeshift refugee camp and understandably vented their ire at government representatives who came calling. They even refused to listen to Food and Civil Supplies Minister, Babubhai Sopariwala's pleas to accept the Government's offer of rehabilitation relief till he promised action against the guilty. Admitted Sopariwala: "There is a great deal of anger among the Muslims as they have suffered heavily." And Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary's visit did little to lessen the hurt.

The lack of media attention has increased the feeling of alienation among the Muslims. Said one: "If the Hindus had suffered, hordes of reporters would have gone there. This has really hurt us." But *Sandesh* Editor Chimanbhai Patel maintained: "The issue is delicate so we lied low. It is inadvisable to report on communal riots." But Patel's stand finds few takers. Veraval itself looks like a ghost town with Hindu traders refusing to return to work fearing a backlash. Says Hafiz Ghulam Mohammed, tea wholesaler: "Suddenly people in Veraval are suspicious of each other." With tensions still running high and suspicion and bitterness clouding public tempers, the once bustling port town will take a long time to limp back to normal.

—RAMESH MENON

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MADHYA PRADESH

Legal Strictures

THE SHREWDEST of politicians tend to slip up when it comes to a decision about the flourishing and black money-generating liquor industry. The latest to realise this is Arjun Singh, vice-president of the Congress(I), who was indicted by a division bench of the high court.

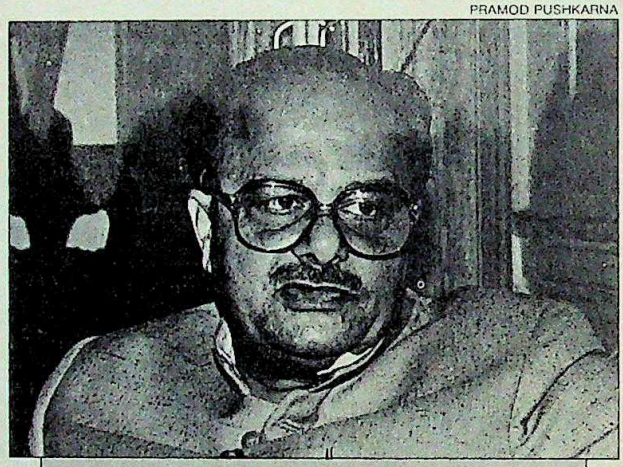
Not only did acting Chief Justice J.S.Verma and Justice B.M.Lal, strike down the state Government's revamped liquor policy, decided in 1984 when Singh was the chief minister, Justice Lal, in his separate observations, passed severe strictures against the Government. Said Lal: "According to the arguments the truth of corruption is peeping out from the record." Calling the new policy a "mischievous device", he said that those responsible for the corruption by virtue of their high office must be severely dealt with as they were the "devils" of society.

Lal's strictures were predictably seized upon by Singh's detractors. While the BJP called for his resignation, Chief Minister Motilal Vora and other silent opponents of Singh in Madhya Pradesh were privately jubilant about Singh's discomfiture. In public, however, the state Government stood by him, filing an application in the high court for deleting the strictures. Said Vora: "We are doing what we have to."

On December 30, 1984, the Government decided that the liquor policy would be changed from April 1, 1986. Instead of distillers working out of government land, they would be asked to set up new plants. Accordingly, in February 1985, the Government gave letters of intent to seven of the existing licensees to construct new distilleries. In return for their investment, the Government gave them a commitment that they would also be given a five-year licence to manufacture liquor from April 1, 1986.

The main petitioner, Sagar Aggarwal, a liquor supplier from Jabalpur, challenged the order on the ground that since he was not given the opportunity to bid for setting up the new distilleries, his fundamental right to enter into a contract with the Government had been violated. In his 32-page judgement, Justice Verma upheld the Government's decision to allow the chosen seven distillers to set up new distilleries, but struck down the policy to give the licence to manufacture and supply country liquor to the chosen seven only, as being violative of the fundamental rights.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Justice B.M. Lal has severely castigated the revamped liquor policy of Arjun Singh's government but Singh's supporters argue that Lal has misread the facts on record.

Justice Lal's 19-page judgement started off by saying that he agreed with his senior judge's "ultimate conclusion", but, crucially, he accepted the other argument of the petitioners that the state would lose Rs 56 crore in the first five years. Accepting this because "the state has no reasonable and convincing reply to it", he then went on to lambast the policy as a "private treaty/agreement", arrived at in the face of "valiant opposition raised by the finance secretary in the interest of revenue." Lal also suspected the bona fides of the Government in changing the new policy from 30 years to five years while the case was being heard.

Singh's supporters argued that all the damaging arguments had, in fact, been satisfactorily countered in the court itself. The Rs 56 crore revenue loss mentioned by Sagar Aggarwal was calculated on the assumption that supplies could have been made at the low rate at which Aggarwal was already supplying liquor to the Government. But state Attorney-General A.M.Mathur pointed out in the court that Aggarwal's low rate was possible because he got spirit from the government-owned Ratlam distillery at a deflated price while other distillers have to buy it from the open market at much higher prices. Ratlam makes barely enough spirit to service two districts, and Mathur argued that to expect it to service the whole state was ridiculous.

Moreover, they argued, the basis of the price under the new policy was not merely more scientific but was merely duplicating the West Bengal practice. Finance Secretary Shivraman's objections had been satisfactorily countered by the separate Revenue Department and, they said, there had been no commitment to give the licence to the chosen seven for 30 years. They had only been given land on a standard 30-year lease; their licence was only for five years. They say that Lal's adverse comments arose from a misreading of the facts on record.

But Lal did not find these arguments either satisfactory or convincing, and his strictures have left a stain on Singh's record. Since Singh is not even a respondent—the state Government is—he does not have any legal remedy open to him. Singh declined comment on the case beyond asking: "Is this an indictment or a judicial assassination?"

The battle is now expected to shift to the Supreme Court since the distillers are planning to go on appeal. This will give Aggarwal's lawyers the chance to prove what they could not convince the high court: that the new policy involved a *quid pro quo* between the distillers and Arjun Singh's government. But they will need hard evidence to damn Singh; and given the former chief minister's astuteness, this will be no easy task.

—AJAY KUMAR with RAJKUMAR KESWANI in Bhopal

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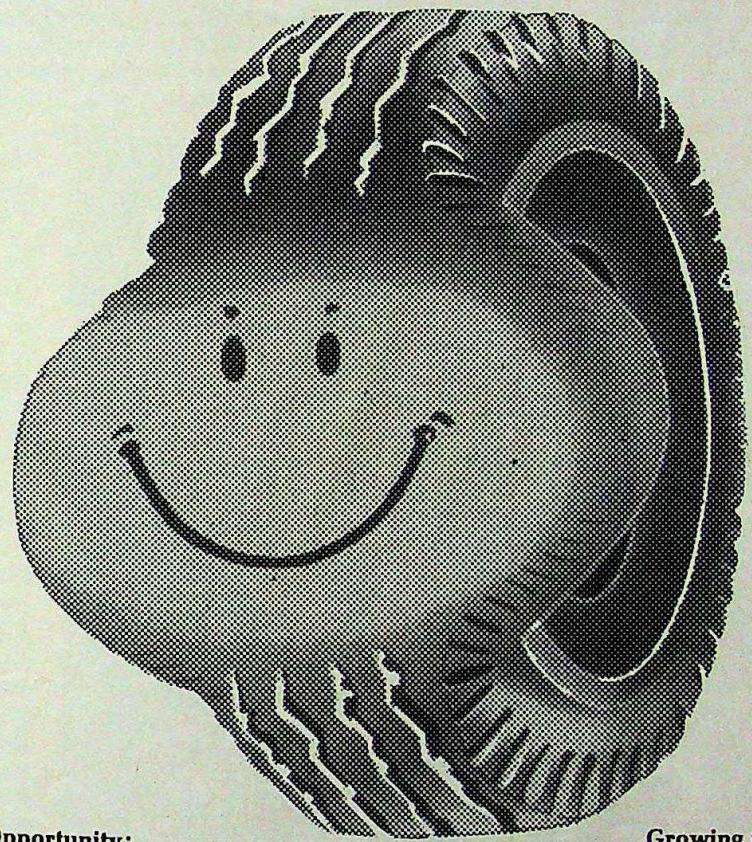

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PUNJAB POLICE

Ribeiro's Challenge

FOR SIX years now the 34,000-strong police force in Punjab has been caught in the eye of an unabated storm of terror. It is today the most harried police in the country.

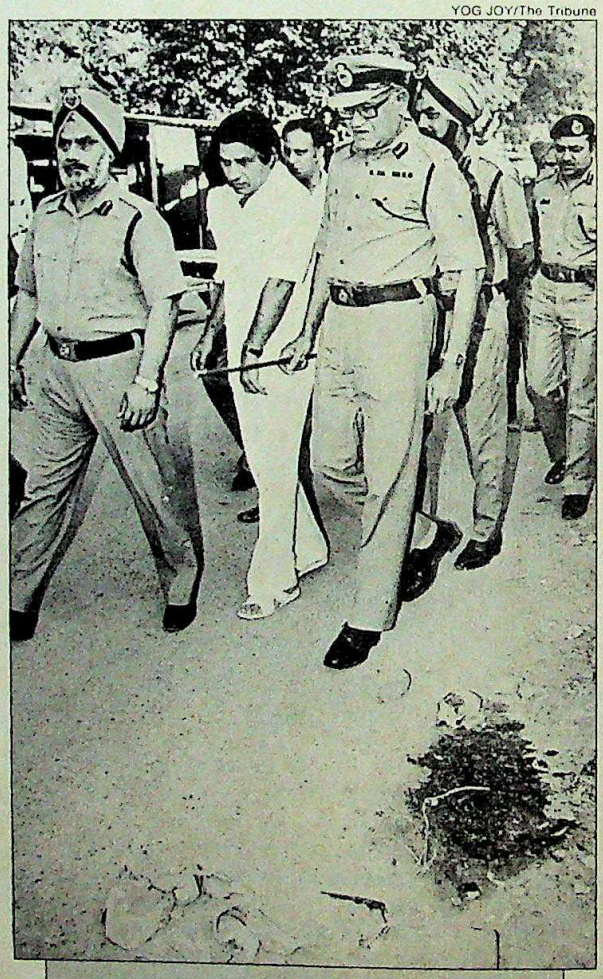
What has made the force, once respected all over and used successfully in Kashmir and elsewhere, so inadequate to the challenge of terrorism in the state? Last fortnight, as this inadequacy became strikingly evident with the terrorist strike at Jalandhar killing six armed policemen and freeing three undertrial extremists from the Jalandhar district courts, Principal Correspondents SHEKHAR GUPTA *and* GOBIND THUKRAL *travelled through the state and talked to scores of civil and police officials to find out what has gone wrong with the Punjab police. Their report:*

FOR ONCE, even the bare statistics tell the chilling tale truthfully: 69 policemen including a deputy inspector general killed, and over two dozen wounded, but not a single person convicted for any of these murderous attacks. Over 100 lethal firearms—including 16 in just one raid last month—snatched from the police by the terrorists. Three daring escapes by hard-core extremists from armed police custody, and suspension or dismissal of at least 100 serving policemen for active complicity with the terrorists. All this in five years of mayhem which also saw the unceremonious departure of as many as eight director-generals from the Punjab police headquarters.

The sorry story continues. Of the 69 slain policemen as many as 13 were gunmen assigned to protect well-known persons on the terrorist hit list; and all but two died without being able to fire a shot. Nine, including Amritsar DIG Avtar Singh Atwal, were specifically on the hit list and could not be protected despite round-the-clock security. The most telling example is that of Giani Bachan Singh, an Amritsar deputy superintendent, who was killed along with his wife, son, daughter and three police gunmen in three separate terrorist attacks for committing the "indiscretion" of interrogating the then AISSF president Bhai Amrik Singh. Also killed, in the same period, were three of his juniors assisting him in the interrogation.

Admits a senior official in Chandigarh: "So nerve chilling is the hit list fear among even the policemen today that it is difficult to find an officer to interrogate the odd terrorist we capture." The three police superintendents who challenged the terrorists in the Amritsar-Gurdaspur belt, D.K. Bhatti, A.P. Pandey and Bua Singh have found remote sanctuaries. Bhatti, who has already survived an attempt on his life, is a recluse in the PAP lines in Jalandhar receiving a dozen threatening calls a day. Bua Singh has been posted in the embassy in Moscow, and Pandey may soon be in Warsaw.

YOG JOY/The Tribune



"For too long now the policemen have been at the receiving end. This will change now. We have to avenge all this."

J.F. RIBEIRO

new Punjab police director-general outside Jalandhar courts after ambush on his policemen

More than anything else it is this fear of the hit list and a belief that they are defenceless before the terrorist that has rendered the police force so ineffective. The rot, officers say, set in with Atwal's murder at the door step of the Golden Temple in May 1983. That feeling finds support even from Amrita, the police officer's widow now appointed an under secretary in the state Government. Says she, barely able to fight back her tears: "So many years have gone past and they have not caught even one person for his murder. Why should anyone want to sacrifice his life and make his family suffer like this any more?" She adds reflectively: "If only they had gone into the Golden Temple that day this demoralisation would not have set in." Even Ribeiro laments: "For too long now the policemen have been at the receiving end. We have to avenge this."

The consequences of the rot are obvious. In each one of three incidents of attacks on the police during the last fortnight, the police patrols lost men and weapons without as much as firing one shot back at the marauding terrorists. "Often, it seems to me that my men's best defence against the attacker is the steel chain tying his weapon to his body. Even if he dies at least the chain discourages the attacker from taking the weapon away. Beyond that, we can do nothing," says an officer pointing out that the men were never trained to face terrorism.

The difference that specialised training can make was evident on March 30 as a large extremist gang

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led by Harbhajan Singh Mand, with a price of Rs 50,000 on his head ambushed a six-man CRPF patrol near Amritsar, tired after a day's hike. The first CRPF man, a naik, was hit. He died immediately. But the one following him was able to jump into a ditch by the roadside and hit the extremist taking the naik's rifle. Similarly, while the third man in the patrol, a havildar, died grappling with three terrorists, the jawan behind him was able to kill one of the three. The last soldier, Sepoy Kali Ram, was one of the select band trained in unarmed combat. Attacked by three extremists, he was able to kill none else than Harbhajan Singh Mand while wounding one more. He also had the presence of mind to sprint back to a nearby police post while his surviving comrades engaged the extremists who fled leaving their dead.

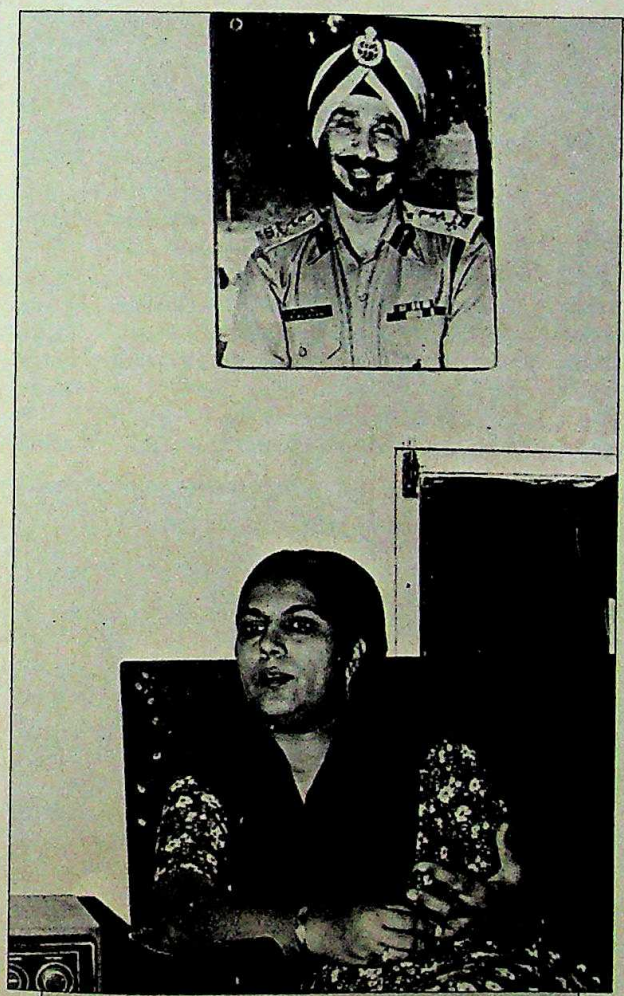
SO SURE had Mand's gang been that a pamphlet recovered from his pocket proudly read: "We have wiped out an entire section of the CRPF. This is the price of joining the Hindus to terrorise Sikhs." But the jawans had turned the tables because they had served in the North-east, had automatic weapons and did not panic. Unfortunately, the Punjab police, without the benefit of specialised training, and an essentially lathi-wielding force carrying bolt-action rifles of ceremonial utility finds terrorism a deathly challenge. "When a policeman dies it obviously affects the force's morale and people's faith in it," admits Ribeiro. This is one of the reasons why the Punjab police "who cannot even protect themselves", have lost popular confidence.

Hard-pressed by the widespread popular demand for Central forces, the state administration has watched helplessly as nearly 200 companies of paramilitary forces have been sucked into routine security duties. But this is at best a temporary arrangement as the Centre will find it impossible to maintain such force levels for very long. "Something has gone wrong with this force. Why is it afraid of casualties? This is war and yet no one wants to risk his life," rues N.S. Phoolka, a retired Punjab police superintendent.

The police force is today stupefied by extremely low morale, poor leadership, lack of direction and, on top of it all, poor equipment. The total lack of brilliance among the top leadership is reflected in the repeated shuffling of the pack, without the Government ever arriving at the right combination. Last fortnight, as Ribeiro set about revamping the police leadership, he was faced with a depressing situation, the kind R.V. Subrahmaniam, advisor to the governor while Punjab was under President's rule, had described in his lengthy report on the state's police force.

He came out with an extremely damning indictment of the intelligence system. Complaining of lack of determination and coordinated action, he had suggested a clear framework for the Intelligence Department with a DIG each for counter-espionage, crime and actionable intelligence under an effective inspector-general. "Subrahmaniam's logic," explains an officer, "was that in the new situation most of the crime in the state was nothing but extremism. He wanted the same department to compile data and information on crime, terrorists and Pakistani agents so that these could be collated effectively resulting, in the course of time, into an integrated intelligence machinery." Two years after the report was accepted this has not happened. This was partly due to the lack of competent officers and partly due to the initial complacence of the Barnala Government which, in its zeal to appease the hardliners, even rehabilitated a number of senior officers who had remained under a cloud in the Bhindranwale phase. The non-availability of trustworthy officers is underlined by the fact that the state has not been able to find an inspector-general who could head the Intelligence Department. This has now been placed under a DIG till the Centre is able to send in an officer from another state to take over the most sensitive police post in Punjab. Nor has it been able to find a durable choice for the newly-created post of DIG (Counter-Intelligence), meant to combat the Pakistani involvement in Punjab. Intelligence, thus, continues to be the weakest link in the security machinery, and the Punjab Government admitted as much last week in a letter to the Centre seeking "actionable" intelligence.

Also, as Ribeiro himself admits, a police force always reflects the state of the society. Not unexpectedly, therefore, even a section of the constabulary—over 80 per cent of Punjab police is staffed by Sikhs—has been affected by the fundamentalist wave. After Operation Bluestar, the CBI had concluded that at least a dozen out of the 50-odd closest associates of Bhindranwale were prodigal Punjab policemen. Two senior Indian Police Service officers, Simranjit Singh Mann and Ajaypal Singh Mann (former Amritsar police chief), were



"If only they had gone into the Golden Temple the day my husband was killed this demoralisation would not have set in."

AMRITA ATWAL
widow of Punjab police
DIG A.S. Atwal assassinated outside the Golden Temple

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sacked on the same charge. Even today, intelligence agencies estimate that at least 30-40 police deserters are part of the extremist hard-core. Ribeiro has been asked by the Government to weed out these elements this time and a purge is on the cards.

Policemen also complain that they are expected to deliver the goods without the right equipment for the job. "Very often we are like the blind man wielding a broom and chasing a wild ass," says a district police superintendent, pointing out how unrealistic it was to expect the policemen armed with the cumbersome, antiquated .303 rifle to fight the highly-motivated, physically-fit terrorists carrying automatic weapons. "Three years ago," says another police officer, "we were asked to set up two-member commando squads riding motorcycles, with the pillion-rider carrying a .303 rifle. Now if that man had any sense he would never fire while the motorcycle was moving, for the recoil would throw the whole commando team off."

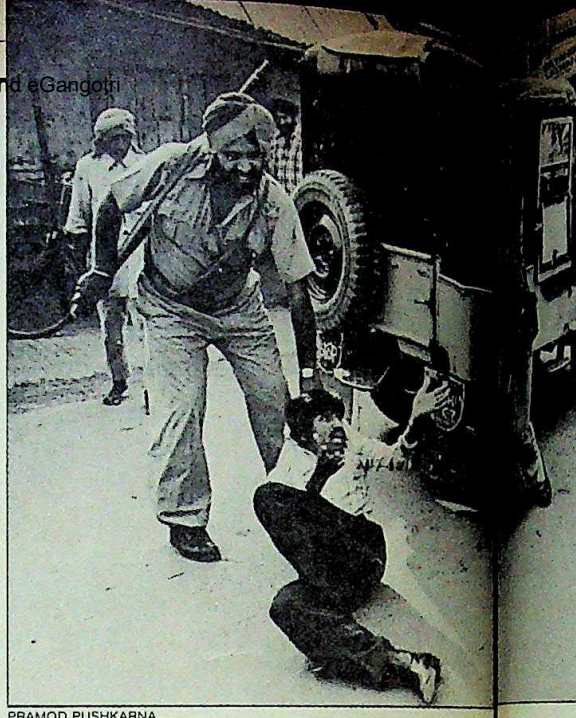
A large majority of the constabulary carries the same rifle and, according to a recent survey, over 20 per cent of even these were found to be incapable of firing a shot. A senior officer explained: "Punjab is unlike other insurgency situations. There are no pitched battles to be fought here and most of the combat is sudden and at a close range.

The weapon of choice thus, is the Sten gun and, with over 2,000 policemen sucked up in VIP security duties, we are so short of that weapon."

SENIOR intelligence officials in Delhi admit that the policeman in Colombo is much better equipped than his counterpart in Punjab. "It is incredible how we have condemned our men so hopelessly to die," a district police superintendent rues. Officers also point out that while the country is spending thousands of crores on modern weapons for the defence forces, the Government was unable to spare even something like Rs 50 crore—the price of two Mirage 2000 aircraft—to refurbish the armoury of the police force now expected to meet the most serious national security concern.

Just like the quality of intelligence, leadership and equipment, the issue of living conditions is closely connected with the police force's morale. There is no denying that policemen have similar complaints all over the country. But Punjab has the relatively recent history of a widespread police agitation in 1978. "Don't forget that all this happened during Prakash Singh Badal's Akali regime. How do you expect the same police force to cooperate with the Akalis now?" asks Ajit Singh, a Janata leader and a former member of the CPI(ML) state committee.

Policemen say none of their grievances have been removed and, living in



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

J.F. RIBEIRO

"We mean business now"

A BLACK-JACKETED book, titled Target Terrorism: Providing Protective Services, lies by the side of the monograph Terrorism and Punjab Problem. Sitting starry-eyed on the sofa are three young probationers of the Indian Police Service. They have good reason to be starry-eyed for they await orders from Julio Francis Ribeiro, the most celebrated policeman in the country today, now assigned to control the law and order situation in Punjab.

Ribeiro has had a controversial career, but few even among his detractors have denied his professionalism and efficiency. He has made palpable impact wherever he has been posted in recent times. It will be tougher in Punjab. Ribeiro, who has accepted a drop in rank by accepting the transfer from his pivotal post of special secretary in the Home Ministry, is aware of this. "Criminals are one thing but I have never been in a situation earlier where my life was threatened. In Bombay when someone rang the bell in my house I went up to open the door myself. But this is different," he reflected in the course of a long interview with Principal Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA. *Excerpts:*

Q. *What is your brief in Punjab?*

A. At the macro level, it is to bring about peace. That obviously means we have to get hold of the terrorists. The whole question is related to this. Communalism, for example, has come up because of terrorist activity and I want to end it. So far the terrorists have just been sitting there creating trouble. Now we will begin to ferret them out. We have no choice but to meet violence with violence.

Q. *Do you feel that as an outsider you will have problems in relating to the police force?*

A. No, that will not happen. I am not an outsider in the sense of being an opportunist who has come and grabbed this post. I was given this job and I have accepted a drop in rank to come here. I was not a figure-head secretary in the Home Ministry. I was a secretary with the power which goes with that office. I have given all that up to come here, and since people realise that there will be no such problem.

Q. *How motivated and well-trained are the extremists?*

A. They are very very strongly motivated. As a matter of fact they are very confident that they will ultimately get Khalistan. People who have trained them—in the camps in Pakistan—have spent a great deal of time in their indoctrination. Our information is that of every three persons who go across the border just one is considered suitable to be sent back after indoctrination and training. The rest, who fail to come up to the same fanatical level of motivation, stay back in Pakistani jails. The challenge now is to similarly motivate our policemen.

Q. *Who is giving the terrorists their orders?*

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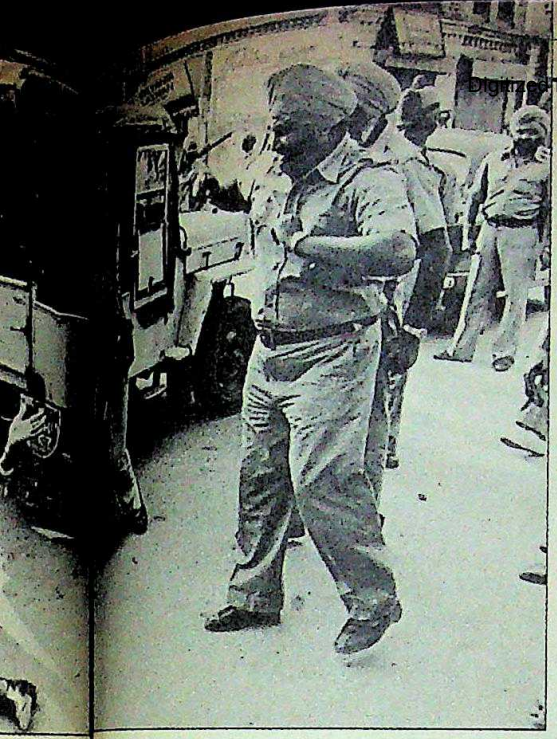


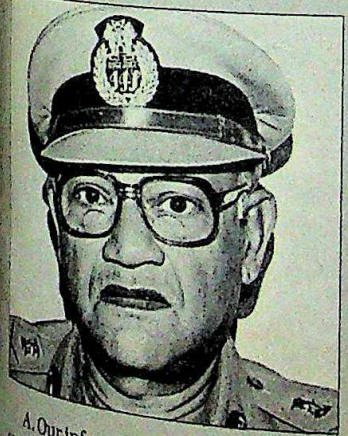
A lathi-wielding police force with ceremonial bolt-action rifles: unequal to the challenge

the dungeons that the police stations and lines are in most of the cities, they can hardly feel motivated to lay down their lives. Only 10 per cent are provided with houses. Three major police stations in Amritsar city are housed in the buildings which were Maharaja Ranjit Singh's stables 150 years ago. "Surely the Maharaja must have kept these in a better condition than we do," says Gurbachan Jagat, once police superintendent of Amritsar and now chief of the state intelligence.

BUT LAST fortnight there was evidence of a new resolve on the part of the Government to reverse the tide. In a spirited speech at the National Integration Council meeting, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi clearly stated: "Basically the (Punjab) problem is a police problem," and said elsewhere that "we are doing everything to better equip the police and the paramilitary forces in Punjab to meet the terrorist threat."

For the police this is a timely statement as it came just when the state submitted to Delhi a long list of demands. First of all Punjab has demanded that the force levels in the state be raised to the same magnitude as they were shortly after Operation Bluestar—when the army had over 50,000 troops on internal security duty. The Centre, scraping the barrel for more armed manpower, took the unprecedented step of sparing 10 companies of the Central Industrial Security Force to do guard duties at vital installations, sparing the BSF and CRPF for operations. The list includes over 2,000 self-loading rifles, an unspecified number of Sten guns, 600 bullet-proof jackets for men involved in special operations or guarding VVIP's and those on the hit list, over a hundred more wireless sets, 138 jeeps and a large number of motorcycles. In the past, such demands were turned down with arguments such as: "The way the Punjab police loses guns to terrorists, we can't trust them with sophisticated weapons."

That was four years ago, and shortly afterwards the Home Ministry had turned down the Haryana police's demand for 300-400 self-loading rifles for their own anti-terrorist squads. But now there are indications of change. Ribeiro means business, and he has not been forced on the state. In fact, he has been brought in on Barnala's own insistence and on the strength of the promise that he will be allowed to run the police the way he wants without interference. With the state Government itself conscious of the need to refurbish the police force, the Centre willing to help and a police chief who means to be tough, the Punjab police may at last have a chance of shaking off some of the disgrace of the past five years.



A. Our information is that the whole operation is being coordinated by the committee of five men based inside the Golden Temple. Two of these are proclaimed offenders. They make the plans and give out orders to execute them. Also, the fresh batches of extremists trained in Pakistan often make the Golden Temple their first hideout after infiltrating into the country and then fan out after getting their instructions.

Q. Do you see the possibility of your having to enter the Golden Temple to capture them?

A. This is a peculiar situation. Somehow the very idea of entering a shrine to take out criminals has become taboo, unacceptable to any religion. Also, in certain situations it can be counterproductive, as it was in the case of Operation Bluestar. At the same time, unless you act there will be no way of stopping the terrorists. We have to decide on that very carefully. Either we will have to ensure that the people inside the temple are left with no one outside to order about, or we will have to get the fellows who give the orders. We absolutely mean business now.

Q. Using the same Punjab police with its inefficiency, weakness and low morale?

A. Yes, absolutely. If the Punjab police cannot do it no one can. Neither the paramilitary forces nor the army. It is a local matter for the local police to sort out. It is only a question of raising the police morale and giving them a feeling of pride in doing this job. Let us face it. Any police force represents the society it belongs to, the society for which it has been created. I as a policeman was shamed by the Bhagalpur blindings. But people in Bhagalpur came out in the streets supporting the police. That only proves the point that a police force moulds itself according to the society.

Q. So what are you telling your men to do now?

A. To be courageous and to remember that the main thing about not being a coward is to face danger sensibly and not in a foolhardy manner. I do not want my policemen to go on dying. I tell them, die if you have to. It is an occupational hazard for us. But please ensure that if you lay down your life you should get four of them. After all, the police cannot always remain at the receiving end.

Q. But are they equipped to do that?

A. Well, there are some gaps there. We have asked for more weapons, radio sets and jeeps to beef up fire-power, equipment and transport. In any case, even now we have many more weapons than they have. As you know every defending force in such a situation has to be five times the size of the attackers.

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ALCOHOLISM

THE GROWING MA

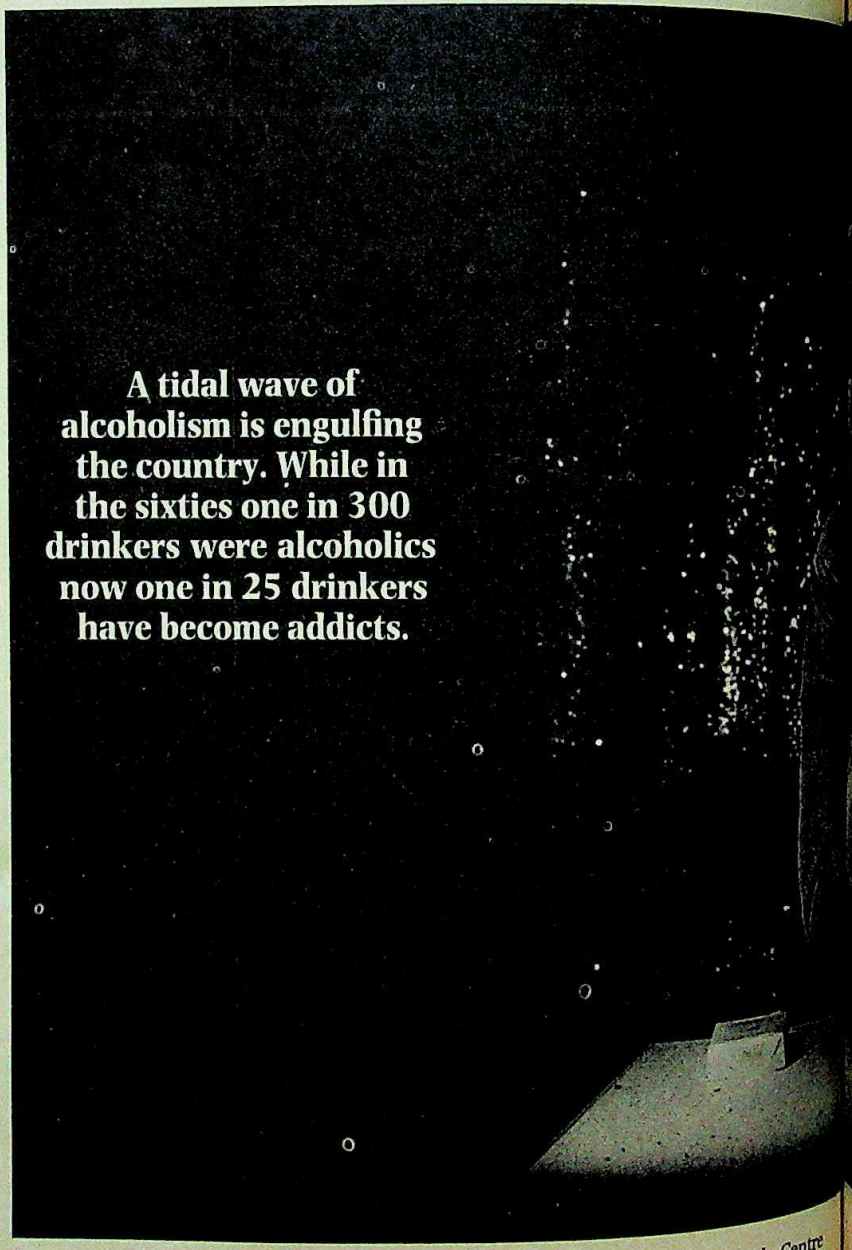
POUR yourself your favourite drink. Sit down, loosen your shoe laces and relax. Take a large swig. Feel the warmth flow into your system. Let the surge of confidence envelope you. Then answer these questions:

Do you prefer to drink alone?
Do you drink daily?
Does drinking spoil your sleep?
Do you drink to bolster your confidence?
Is drinking affecting your work?
Is your family affected by it?
Have you ever had a black-out?

If you have answered yes to any three of these questions then it's bad news. You are either an alcoholic or well on your way to becoming one. Worried? Then push your glass firmly away and listen. You are not the only one.

At exactly 7 p.m. every Saturday in the annexe building of a church on the busy Parliament Street in New Delhi, 20-odd people sit around a hexagonal table lit by candles. Among them are salesmen, businessmen, armed forces officers, government officials, factory workers and even a doctor. As the meeting progresses each one narrates how alcohol has destroyed his life. Choking with emotion, Mathew, a copy-writer in an advertising agency, says: "After a drunken bout I was like an animal. I messed my pants, vomited on the floor and crawled on the floor, unable to pick myself up." A tremendous feeling of empathy builds as the session ends, because each understands the others' sorrows, and many of those present weep openly. The meeting is typical of those held regularly across the country by 100 such Alcoholics Anonymous groups, a rapidly growing organisation of ex-drinkers trying to reform addicts.

A different kind of scene is being enacted in a white-tiled room at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore. Krishnappa, a 38-year-old coffee planter, has his left arm strapped to a 40-volt transformer and is given a glass of whisky. As soon as he takes a sip he is given a mild shock that makes him grimace in pain. This aversion therapy is designed to make Krishnappa's psyche reject alcohol. Krishnappa started drinking when he was 16 and today he does little other than drink. His disgusted wife brought him for treatment last month.



A tidal wave of alcoholism is engulfing the country. While in the sixties one in 300 drinkers were alcoholics now one in 25 drinkers have become addicts.

In more homely surroundings inside a sprawling house in Madras, Swaminathan, a 55-year-old former bank manager, struggles with a picture puzzle given to him by psychologists at the T.T. Ranganathan Clinical Research Centre (TTRC) in Madras. The puzzle is designed to test how badly Swaminathan's brain has been damaged by alcohol. Swaminathan never drank when he was young, and was introduced to liquor after he was promoted as regional manager in the bank and forced to attend 'wet' parties. Soon he was hooked. At home he became irritable

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NG MALAISE

RAGHU RAI

and constantly abused his wife, throwing the food she served and breaking crockery. His drinking affected his son so badly that he dropped out of college.

Mathew, Krishnappa and Swaminathan are only the froth on a tidal wave of alcoholism engulfing the country. And there is a cask-full of statistics to prove the point. In the '60s only one in 300 drinkers was considered an alcoholic. Then the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that by 1980 an estimated three million—or one in 25—of the 80 million Indians who consume alcohol had become severely addicted.

Last year the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) surveyed the problem in four regions—Bangalore, Delhi, Dibrugarh and Ranchi. It found that 20 per cent of urban consumers had become totally dependent on it, while in villages the figure went as high as 30 to 40 per cent. Davinder Mohan, who coordinated the ICMR survey and heads the Department of Psychiatry at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi, says: "Alcohol is already taking a heavy toll in the country. It's soon going to be evident even to a blind person."

The toll, in fact, has already become starkly evident:

► In major hospitals alcoholics now form 20 to 30 per cent of the patients in psychiatric wards when five years ago they constituted only 0.2 per cent. In Bombay's KEM Hospital, which treated 309 patients in the past two years, sociologist Hema Shah says: "Initially we got people only from the slum areas. But soon bank officers, managers, factory workers and even government officers started coming for treatment. The middle class too seems to be affected in a big way."

► Last year's ICMR study indicated that half the industrial workers surveyed drink regularly, and companies report that alcoholism has become one of the major causes of absenteeism and falling productivity. At Ashok Leyland in Madras, for instance, managers estimate that atleast 500 of the company's 7,500 workers are problem drinkers. Says Executive Director J. Joseph: "We used to have 10 per cent absenteeism, but now we find it going up to 22 per cent and we think alcoholism has a great deal to do with it."

► Alcohol is a major cause of broken marriages. Relationships with wives were seriously disrupted in 64 per cent of the alcoholics. In Bombay, Bagashri Parikh, a marriage counsellor at the city court, says that one out of 10 divorces is because of alcoholic husbands and adds: "Most of the alcoholics beat their wives regularly."

► The country's road research institutes estimate that 25 per cent of road accidents are alcohol-related and that a third of the drivers on the highway are under the influence of alcohol. In Delhi, when the AIIMS did a study of accident victims suffering from head injuries, it found that 20 per cent had consumed alcohol.

Surveying the damage Hira Singh,

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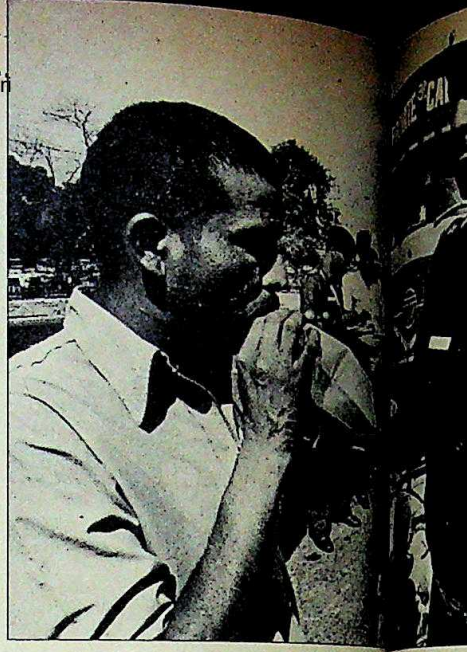
director, National Institute of Social Defence (NISD), the Union Welfare Ministry's striking arm against drug abuse, says: "There is no doubt that alcohol is the most widely abused drug in the country." That's certainly true. Alcoholism has traditionally been associated with the tribal areas in the country, where people brew their own liquor. Then the problem spread to the hilly areas and the northeast, and to industrial townships and the coalfields. Now other areas too have got ensnared, hitting people from all walks of life: professionals, businessmen, industrial workers, government servants, armed forces officers and farmers. The statistics reveal that most of the patients (98 per cent) are predominantly male, and usually in the prime of their lives at 25 years and above. A majority are married and have children. In most cases they are the only bread-winners in the family. "It's hitting the most productive section of our society and is creating havoc," says psychiatrist J.V. Devar in Madras.

Researchers are hard put to explain the dramatic rise in alcoholism in a country that has prohibition enshrined as a Directive Principle of the Constitution. But prohibition as a policy has been steadily given up by one state after another, and liquor is now as easily available as tea leaves in most parts of the country. Alcohol consumption, inevitably, has gone up quite dramatically. In 1976, liquor manufacturers used up 169.4 million litres of pure alcohol, enough to manufacture 350 million bottles of rum.



Police test driver for drinking:

CASE STUDIES

Shattered Lives

BHASKER Maben, 49, a machine operator in a Bangalore factory, began drinking heavily 15 years ago after he was superseded at work and his youngest son, Dinakar, died the same year. Maben recalls: "At work I had no peace and at home I was unhappy. Booze was the only way I could forget my sorrows." Instead it brought him more.

Maben became a chronic alcoholic and began sleeping with a bottle under his pillow. He started absenting himself from work regularly. His increments and promotions were stopped.

With liquor burning up all his money, Maben was invariably broke. His favourite clarinet, guitar and camera found their way to the local pawn shop, as did his wife Evelyn's jewellery, including her *mangalsutra*. The worst came when he was evicted from his rented two-bedroom house. Arun, his son, remembers that incident with a shudder and says: "I can never forget how ashamed I was. All our furniture and clothes were lying on the footpath. I just ran to my friend's house and hid."

Someone suggested that he send Rs 50 to St Francis Xavier's tomb in Goa, but that did not help. Nor did money sent to Tirupati Temple, or consulting a *Mantravadi*, who made him wear a charm around his waist and charged him Rs 1,000 for his pains. He was admitted to NIMHANS as many as 18 times for treatment, and the doctors refused to admit him any more.

Frustration and desperation drove him to drink a bottle of varnish last year, which nearly killed him. After that he vowed to give up drinking and over a period of one year, Maben's transformation has been dramatic. He has started doing yoga, which helps him sleep well. He goes to work regularly.

BHAWAN SINGH

Maben: back from the brink

At home things have improved considerably, and Evelyn now goes shopping with him—something they had not done for years. Every Sunday all of them sing *bhajans* at a nearby spiritual centre. Daughter Chandrika says: "There is so much peace at home now."

■ Narayan, 44, a peon in a bank in Madurai is not so happy. An alcoholic for the past 10 years, Narayan was brought in a delirious state to the TTRC for treatment last month. His office had suspended him for coming drunk to work and warned him that unless he gave up drinking they would dismiss him.

While Narayan is still unable to speak coherently about his addiction, his wife Malini, who faced the brunt of his drunken bouts, has a sorry tale to narrate. She remembers that initially when Narayan drank she thought he was just trying to forget his worries. But soon he was coming home drunk every day, beating her regularly, and always in a foul mood. He threw away the food she made for him, he was nasty with the children and prevented them from studying at night. He did not give her money and pawned all her jewellery.

She was forced to take up work as domestic help to feed the children. And when her children worried her

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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

But despite tough measures by the puritanical Janata government and the Congress(I)'s resolve to hold production at the 1981 level of 207.9 million litres, the consumption of pure alcohol climbed to 331 million litres last year—sufficient to produce 1,134 million bottles of rum!

Indians now have more than 200 brands of whisky, 50 brands of rum, 30 kinds of brandy, 10 brands of gin, 15 of wine, 50 beers and a couple of hundred varieties of country liquor to choose from. "People have become more brand conscious and are willing to pay more for better quality liquor these days," says Ravi Jain, general manager of McDowells, a subsidiary of United Breweries, which is among the big five in the liquor business. McDowells has registered a 10 per cent growth every year.

That Indians are drinking more than ever before is evident by their revolutionary change in attitudes towards drinking. The traditional taboo against liquor is rapidly vanishing. More and more homes serve liquor to guests, 'dry' parties are considered boring, and traditional festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali and Holi are used as excuses to go on drinking bouts. Salesmen and businessmen prefer to do business over lunch lined with liquor. Among youngsters, to drink is to be manly. "We are becoming more of an alcoholised society," says psychiatrist Rajat Ray of NIMHANS. And in Lucknow, psychiatrist B.B. Sethi says: "A house not serving liquor is now an exception."

Drinking in bars, once the haunt of only the hardened alcoholic, has gained increasing acceptance. In the outskirts of

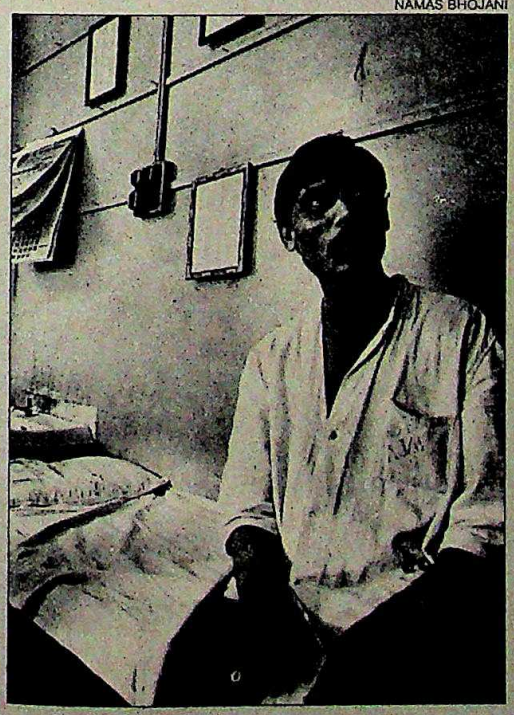
for money to see films, she told them sharply: "Your father is taking my life out of me, now you don't start." The office suspended Narayan several times, but Malini used to go and fall at the bank manager's feet and beg for mercy. Meanwhile Narayan became so weak that according to Malini "he is now only eyes and stomach. I don't know how much longer he would live."

■ Anand, 33, unlike Narayan who has not yet lost his job, finds his life has been completely shattered and is only now beginning to pick up the pieces. Anand has been an alcoholic for the past 13 years. Last year his wife walked out on him, taking their two children with her. Immediately after that he lost his job as a sales executive in a Delhi travel agency.

Anand, the son of an air force officer, started drinking when in his second year at college in Nagpur. Since his father was in the armed forces, drinking was considered normal. Anand found himself increasingly attending parties where liquor was served and he says: "I used to be the first to start drinking and the last to leave. I had a tremendous capacity, and even if I had five large pegs I would never get drunk." After graduation, his job as a sales executive offered even more opportunities to drink and, as he puts it: "It was an ideal job for an alcoholic. I became a 24-hour drinker."

For a while he thought he could handle his liquor and he made sure that his work was not affected. When his wife, a doctor, told him to give up drinking, he said: "I thought she was a bloody nag and I used to get the feeling that the whole world was after my blood." Soon he became irregular at work and extremely irritable at home, hitting his wife once in anger. That's when she left him. He was forced to give up his job because, as he says: "I couldn't handle two careers at one time: my drinking and my job." Last year he touched rock bottom: "I had become like a caged tiger. I didn't know how to escape and all I did was hide myself in the bottle." He finally joined an Alcoholics Anonymous group in Delhi, and now he says: "My obsession is gone. But I'm not going to take up a job till I'm fully recovered."

NAMAS BHOJANI



David: groping for help

■ **David**, 32, a packer in a Bombay firm, has had equally traumatic experiences with alcohol. Living in a dirty slum in Ghatkopar, David, who looks older than his age, is slowly recovering from the damaging effects of alcohol. His speech is still slurred and he gropes for words. His hands tremble uncontrollably. Doctors attending on him say his brain has suffered some damage and it may be a year before he is able to recover.

David, who is married and has two children, remembers that he started drinking when he was around 15 years old: "At that time we drank because after a hard day's work we had nothing to do and we wanted to forget the strain of living." Initially he drank only on week-ends, but: "After some time all I did was to drink, drink and sleep."

He refused to go to work, and last year was absent for 140 days. His office sent him a charge-sheet, which he ignored. His entire pay packet of Rs 1,000 went towards liquor: "I used to be so desperate that I even sold my shoes and shirt." His wife left him twice to go and live with her father.

David was admitted last month to the KEM Hospital for severe withdrawal symptoms of alcohol like hallucinations and shakes. Says David: "Alcohol has ruined my life."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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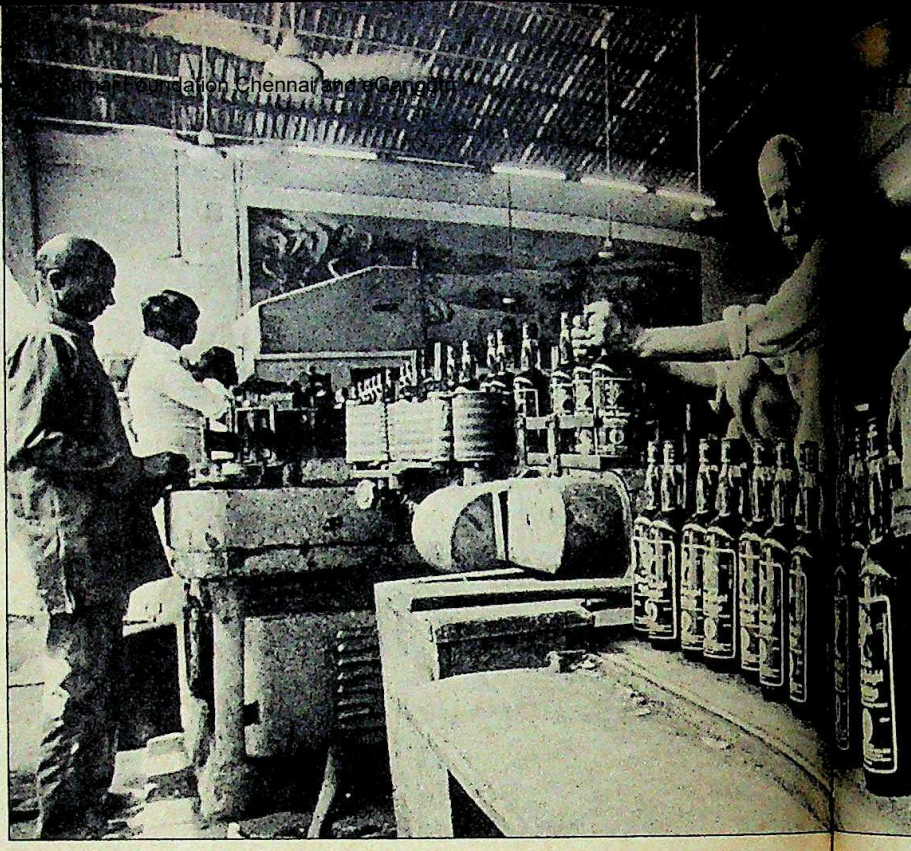
Patna, for instance, roadside *bhattis*, the poor man's bars, have become popular drinking places. One of them on the by-pass road to Patna is a huge, sprawling dimly-lit shack reeking with the stench of liquor, rotten fish and frying eggs. Around 250 people, among them teenagers, sit around in groups chatting and shouting. They come from all social groups—rickshaw-pullers, factory workers, professionals and even police constables in civilian dress. Babu Lalrai, 35, a tailor, chirps up: "Yes, I drink daily and go to the Ganga for a holy dip daily."

THE WAVE of alcoholism is by no means confined to the cities. While the sale of country liquor in most states has risen slowly, this masks the fact that people have increasingly moved to cheaper, illicit liquor because even country liquor costs as much as Rs 8 for a bottle. In Bangalore, arrack king H.R. Basavaraj estimates that "illicit liquor sales equal that of country liquor". The repetitive liquor tragedies testify to this. In Bangalore more than 300 people died of liquor poisoning in 1981. The next year in the island of Vypeen in Kerala, 72 people were killed. On an average more than 200 people are killed in the country from liquor poisoning every year.

What worries many psychiatrists is the widespread acceptance of beer and the current boom in beer sales. In Maharashtra, beer sales have jumped from 14 million bottles to 24 million bottles in the last five years. And in West Bengal, more beer is consumed than whisky, rum and brandy put together; last year's beer sales totalled 12 million bottles. But if people regard beer as some kind of milk product, the harsh truth is that one bottle of beer has about the same alcohol content as a peg of whisky, and psychiatrists say that beer drinking not only opens the floodgates for more potent liquor but is addictive and in the long run can do as much damage as whisky or rum.

The splurge in drinking is reflected in the high per capita consumption of liquor. While the annual per capita consumption of alcohol by adults in India hovers around one litre of pure alcohol (equivalent to two-and-a-half bottles of rum), a little lower than Australia's 1.5 and a lot less than the US's 4.1, this figure is misleading. Unlike Australia and the US, women in India hardly drink. So if only the male population's consumption is calculated, the figure jumps to around two litres of pure alcohol. And if only the drinking male population is taken into account, the figure is as high as 4.1, or 10 bottles of rum per head annually: high enough for the alarm bells to be ringing. Even this excludes the millions of litres of illicit liquor that goes down parched gullets. And in states like Punjab, the per capita consumption is 6.5 litres of pure alcohol, or 16 bottles of rum.



On the production line: 350 brands to choose from

All drinkers are not drunkards. So when does a normal drinker turn alcoholic? The popular concept of the drunk is one who falls into gutters or staggers around on streets mouthing obscenities. But that, say psychiatrists, is only the last stages of alcoholism. A social drinker becomes a problem one when, according to Shanthi

INTOXICATION

The Effects

ALCOHOL is formed by fermenting sugar with yeast spores. Ethyl alcohol, or pure alcohol, is the basic raw material for the various liquors available. It has no nutritional value but produces feelings of sedation, euphoria, intoxication and finally unconsciousness. Whisky, rum and gin have around 40 per cent pure alcohol, wines 8 to 15 per cent and beer 4 to 8 per cent alcohol content.

Depending on what the person has eaten, 20 per cent of the alcohol that is drunk is absorbed immediately by the blood stream through the walls of the stomach and the rest from the small intestine. Eating peanuts or cheese helps line the stomach walls and slows down the absorption of alcohol.

Until the liver oxidises all the alcohol it keeps coursing through the body, including the brain. The effects of alcohol depend on the blood alcohol level (*see illustration*). It is in the brain that the effects of intoxication are produced. Research has shown that alcohol primarily depresses the central nervous system resulting in thought becoming jumbled and disorganised and the faculties of discrimination, memory, concentration being dulled and then lost.

The early warning signs of alcoholism include an increasing tolerance for alcohol, the quick gulping of pegs, blackouts or temporary amnesia and an intense preoccupation with drinking. The crucial stage comes when the drinker loses complete control over the amount of alcohol he consumes and when to have a drink. He has ready excuses for his drinking. He exhibits grandiose behaviour, spends money lavishly and starts showing signs of aggres-

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RAGHU RAI

Ranganathan of TTRC: "His drinking starts affecting on a continuous basis his health, his job efficiency and his relations with his family and friends." The WHO estimates that one out of 10 drinkers turns alcoholic.

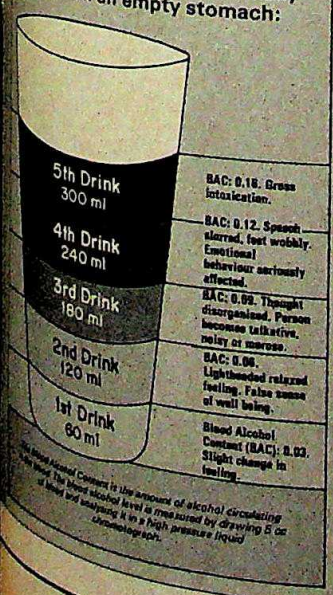
Most drinkers do not realise when they have crossed the thin red line between social drinking and alcoholism. In Madras, Udayakumar, 37, a former packing manufacturer, thought he had his drinking well under control till one day he realised that "a quarter of a bottle of rum was a mosquito bite". In Bangalore, a salesman remembers that while initially he could hardly hold a peg of whisky he suddenly found himself going on long drinking bouts. Says he: "Every cell in my body craved for alcohol and when I took a drink it was like setting off a nuclear reaction. I didn't stop drinking till I became unconscious." And in Bombay, a factory supervisor initially started drinking during week-ends with friends. Then, as he says, "after a while I drank once in three days, then every alternate day, then every day and then every hour".

Researchers now agree that alcoholism is a disease, because alcoholics exhibit predictable symptoms and suffer the same physical and mental trauma: severe shakes, damage to vital organs like the heart and liver, and psychological breakdown. Society, which always dismissed alcoholics as weak-willed or immoral people, is only now reluctantly beginning to accept this home truth. In Bangalore, Malavika, a 30-year-old management consultant married to a lawyer, confesses: "I thought all drunkards were bums till my husband became an alcoholic. Initially I was bewildered and thought he drank because he was not happy with me. But I soon realised that although he desperately wanted to give up alcohol he couldn't. It was as though he had caught a disease."

ONCE the disease catches on it moves with terrifying rapidity, reducing its victims to physical, mental and moral wrecks. Try as they will, they find it impossible to kick the habit even though they know that it is steadily destroying their lives. A Bombay naval officer remembers with tears how he tied his favourite Labrador and whipped it mercilessly in a drunken fit. The next morning the dog seemed to forget the beating and wagged its tail, but he was so insane that he whipped it again. Mathew, the Delhi copy-writer, remembers how he threw up a Rs 5,000 job in a leading advertising agency when he quarrelled with his employer over a trivial matter.

Probably the most damaging effect of this wave of alcoholism, according to a doctor, is that "not only the drinker but everyone in the family suffers. Alcoholism is a family disease." As the alcoholic becomes more and more obnoxious, the wife and children get seriously affected. Malavika, the lawyer's wife, recalls the traumatic experience when guests dropped in one morning and found her husband lying on the floor dead drunk. The naval commander's wife once tried to jump out of a fourth floor window after he slapped her in a drunken rage. Children too are badly affected. In a typical case in Bangalore, Arun, 17, whose father has been a chronic alcoholic, dropped out of school and took to drugs and alcohol. In

How alcohol affects a normal drinker weighing 60 kg who consumes more than 60 ml of whisky an hour on an empty stomach:



sion. He begins to stock up alcohol and if threatened hides his stock. He drinks to prevent withdrawal symptoms.

The chronic stage is reached when the drinker goes on binges for days together, followed by abstinence for a short period. He develops suspicious ideas, fears and doubts about both himself and his family members. He loses his tolerance for alcohol and gets highly intoxicated on small quantities. If he does not take alcohol his body develops severe withdrawal symptoms like hallucinations, tremors and shakes, profuse sweating and irritableness.

In the chronic stage, apart from the severe breakdown of relationships with his family, friends and colleagues at work, the alcoholic also suffers from acute physical damage. Prolonged drinking can lead to cirrhosis of the liver, jaundice, stomach ulcers, heart and brain damage. Little wonder then that alcohol is called the demon drink.

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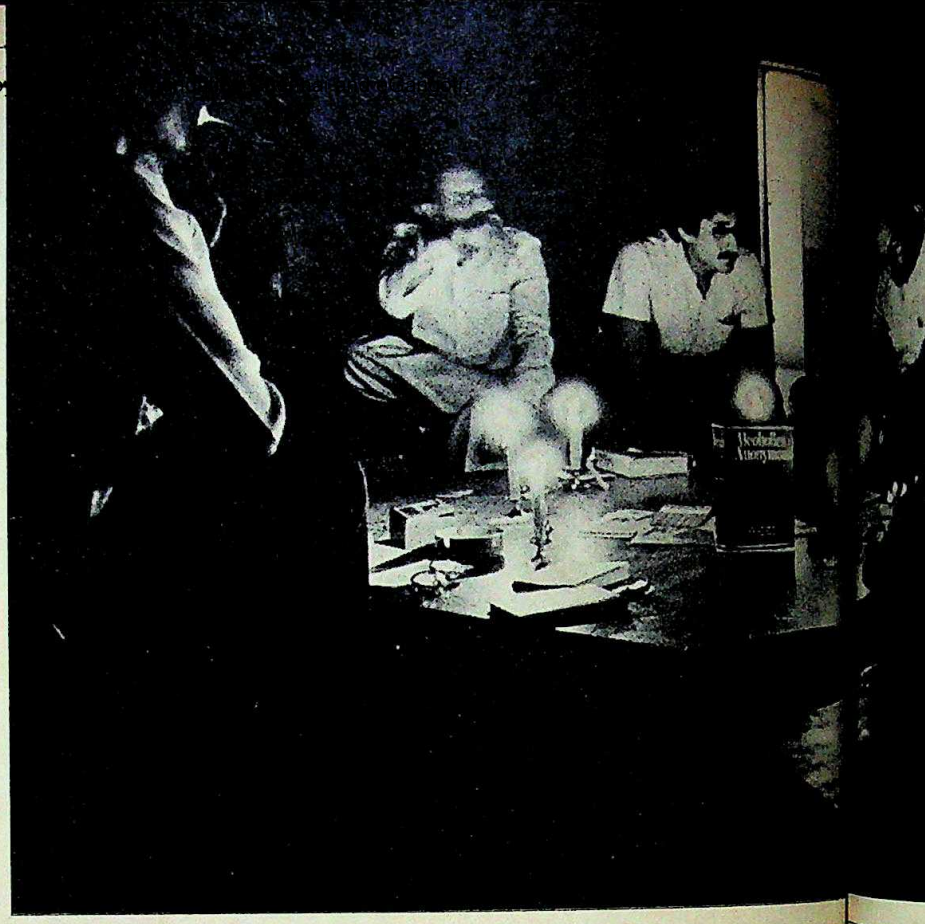
fact studies abroad indicate that alcoholism could also be a familial disease, with children of alcoholics being more prone to becoming alcoholics themselves.

If more families have not broken up, it is because most Indian wives fear the stigma attached to divorce. Last fortnight Malathi, 38, the wife of a former supervisor in a printing press and mother of five children, came to social workers at the Maharashtra State Women's Council for help. Her husband had beaten her so badly that her cheek and shoulder were blue-black. She said her husband had lost his job because of his drinking, and when she wanted to take up a job her husband refused to allow her and suspected her fidelity. Her eldest son had become a vagrant and a petty thief. But when the council suggested she divorce her husband, she flatly refused. Says the council's social worker Anila Merchant: "For most sufferers marriage provides some form of security."

A just-published study of workers at the Madras Port Trust, done by sociologist Saraswathi Sankaran, shows how damaging alcohol can be. Of the 162 workers surveyed, more than half of them drank heavily, and a third were addicts.



DE-ADDICTION

Creditable Successes

WHEN Shanthi Ranganathan, a Madras housewife, decided to set up an exclusive centre for the treatment and rehabilitation of alcoholics five years ago, many people dismissed her efforts as the desperate actions of a grief-stricken wife. Her husband, an industrialist, had just died from alcoholism and Shanthi recalls: "People thought I was crazy. They could not accept that alcoholism could be cured, and doctors warned me that it was a disease of only relapses and remissions." But Shanthi was determined. She did a course in the US on the treatment of alcoholics and started a centre in her sprawling home on the quiet Santhome High Road in Madras.

Today the T.T. Ranganathan Clinical Research Centre (TTRC) has grown into an institute of national repute and is the only one of its kind for treating alcoholics. Given the excellent cure rate of almost 60 per cent, the annual inflow of patients has gone up from 62 in 1981 to 320 last year.

Before the centre was established, there were hardly any treatment facilities for the country's three million alcoholics, most of whom were admitted to the general wards of hospitals and treated for symptoms like jaundice or hallucinations. The centre's success lies in the fact that it offers treatment for the basic problem of alcoholism. It first admits patients to a nursing home for withdrawal symptoms like hallucinations, vomiting and severe shakes.

Once the "detoxification programme" is over, patients undergo intensive individual and group therapy sessions. Surprisingly, most patients blame their problems on others. A bank manager undergoing treatment blamed his son who dropped out of college as the reason for his heavy drinking.

The group therapy sessions help patients to confront their problems head on. In these sessions, recovering alcoholics narrate their problems, providing hope and making it easy for new patients to identify with them. Says psychologist Christina Chakravarthy: "Group therapy helps in assuaging their guilt and releases their bottled-up feelings." The patient is able to admit both to himself and others that he is an alcoholic.

But to ensure that he does not yield to fresh temptation, the patient is put on a drug called Antabuse which causes a violent reaction if he consumes alcohol while on the course. The reactions could even result in death unless an antidote is administered within 24 hours.

However, getting an alcoholic to admit that he is one and keeping him off liquor for a month is, as psychiatrist J.V.Devar puts it, "only half the battle won". The more difficult part is rehabilitating him so that he can start living a normal life. Most alcoholics have snapped ties with their family and friends and have probably lost their jobs too. One of the major hurdles psychiatrists face is in getting the family to be more understanding towards recovering alcoholics. This is easier said than done as the wife of a salesman-turned-alcoholic narrates. Her husband found that he hardly had any role to play at home because she did all the work and the children held back

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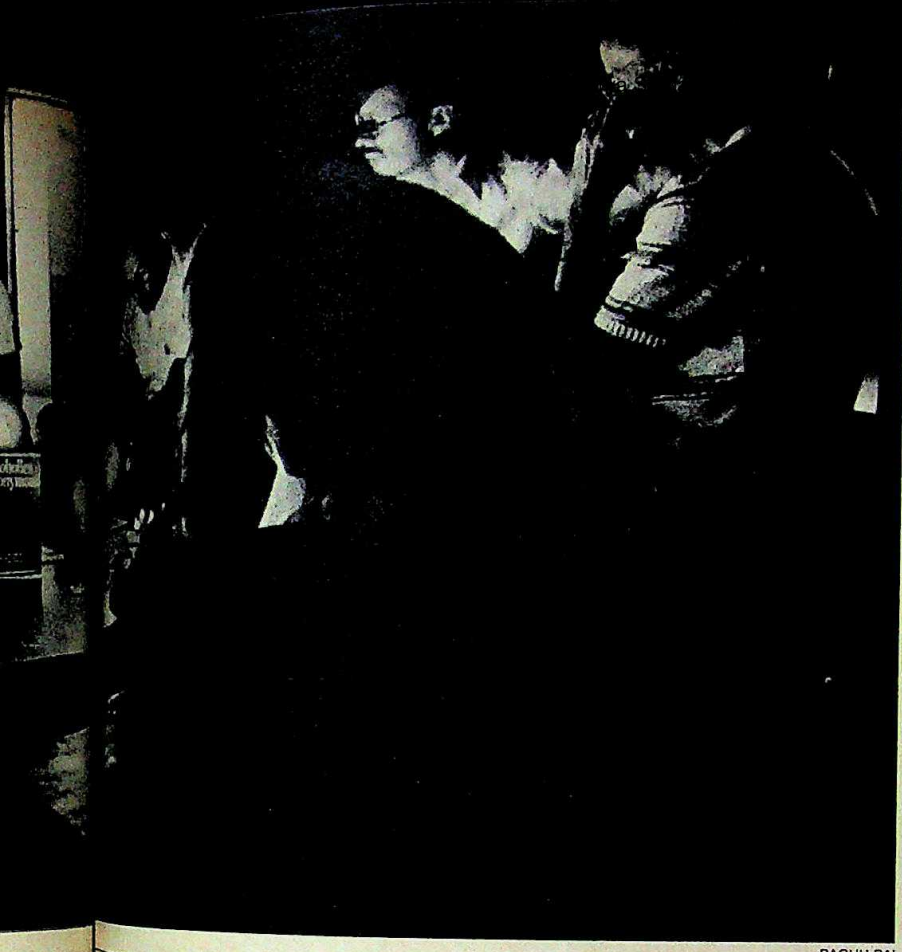


RAGHU RAI

Alcoholics Anonymous meeting

Sankaran compared the work performance of the drinkers and non-drinkers and was stunned to find that the heavy drinkers were absent every sixth working day. As a result, the non-drinkers took home 50 per cent more money than the drinkers, spent 8 per cent more on food, 30 per cent more on clothing, 168 per cent more on health care and a whopping 300 per cent more on children's education. Says Sankaran: "Whether it is poverty, malnutrition, marital disharmony or delinquent children, alcohol seems to have been the major cause of all their miseries."

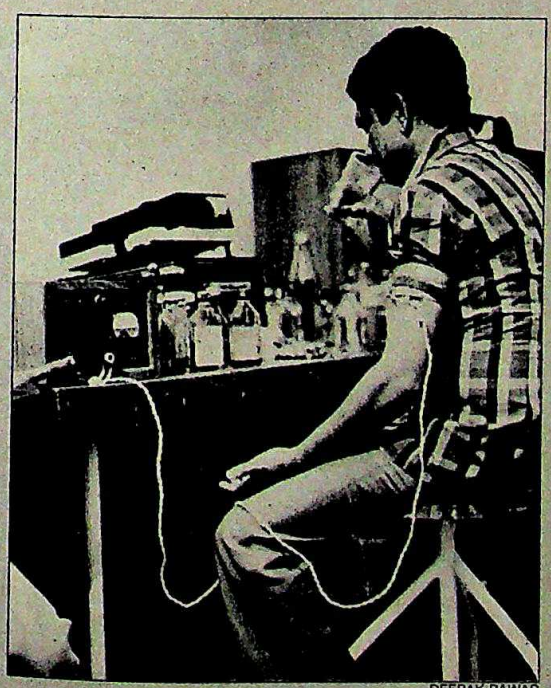
While alcoholism and its related problems increase alarmingly, progress on the treatment of sufferers has been tardy. Most alcoholics find that doctors treat the problem as a moral issue. Said one alcoholic: "My whole world had crumbled, and here was this doctor telling me I must develop the will power to stop drinking." Only now are hospitals recognising alcoholism as a major problem and setting up specialised clinics for treatment *(see box)*. As a consequence, there are facilities for treating hardly 3,000 of the estimated three million alcoholics in the country.

from him. To overcome these problems, the centre holds regular family counselling sessions where the families are taught how to cope with recovering alcoholics.

While centres like TTRC may be difficult to replicate in the country, elsewhere, hospitals which have set up de-addiction clinics (and there are very few) have also been reporting encouraging results. One of them is the de-addiction centre run by the KEM Hospital in Bombay. Using a judicious combination of group therapy, individual counselling and an Antabuse course, the clinic reports that in the past two years it has been able to achieve a cure rate of 46 per cent. And in Bangalore, NIMHANS psychologists using aversion have reported an encouraging 45 per cent cure rate. Says psychologist T. Kumaraiah: "We found that married people responded to treatment better than the rest, and the recovery rate was the highest among the older groups.

But probably one of the most successful ways of treating addicts is the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) programme which is fast gaining popularity in the country. AA is a non-profit world-wide organisation of recovered alcoholics trying to help others in the same plight. There are already 100 such groups in the country, with Bombay alone boasting 55. Other cities with AA groups are Bangalore, Goa, Madras, Secunderabad, New Delhi, Cochin, Mangalore, Nagpur, Pune and Mysore.

Aversion therapy: effective



DEEPAK PAWAR

AA members find that the group sessions help alcoholics to come to terms with their problems. In fact the first step for all AA members is to admit that "we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable". The sessions also help other recovering alcoholics by constantly reminding them of their earlier plight. Said an AA member: "By trying to help others we are actually motivating ourselves to keep away from liquor." For the families of alcoholics, the AA has a separate group called Al-Anon where members hold similar group therapy sessions. Rather than impose a set period of abstinence, the AA's golden rule for its members is: Get up every morning and tell yourself that you will remain sober for the next 24 hours. It seems to work.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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But even hospitals that have clinics are faced with problems like the lack of professionally trained staff.

The problem is compounded by the fact that most alcoholics do not get themselves treated till at a very late stage, because most people do not like to admit they have an alcoholic in their family and try to conceal the fact as long as possible. A factory supervisor in Bombay, who had been an alcoholic for five years, first tried to give up drinking himself. When that failed his wife sent him to the local *mantravadi* to exorcise the spirit that seemed to have possessed him. It was only when he was admitted to the KEM Hospital with an attack of jaundice that he learnt the hospital had a de-addiction programme. In fact, most of the patients usually go to hospital when they have serious health problems such as cirrhosis of the liver or fits of delirium.

If the psychiatrists find it difficult to cope with the problem, the Government seems equally helpless. The state governments, which control alcohol supply and distribution, indirectly encourage people to drink more because revenue from excise forms a major part of the income of most states. In Karnataka liquor is the second biggest money-spinner for the state, netting Rs 50 crore last year, while in Tamil Nadu it accounts for a good 8 per cent of the revenue. Total liquor sales in the country would amount to something like Rs 3,000 crore, and liquor companies form a powerful lobby group.

Ironically, although the Constitution has made prohibition a Directive Principle, the states have made only feeble attempts to make prohibition effective policy. Most governments in fact have given up prohibition altogether. Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, which had imposed prohibition at different times, ran into trouble and were forced to relax their rules.Tamil Nadu needed the excise revenue to run its midday meal scheme. Maharashtra, which strangely enough has placed prohibition and excise under the same department, is quite happy counting the take from liquor sales while running a prohibition programme to educate people on the evils of drinking. Bihar was forced to lift prohibition after a large number of people died in of illicit liquor in the Dhanbad coalfields. Right now Gujarat is the only state where prohibition is enforced, but liquor is still easily available and the policy is commonly seen as a farce.

WISER from these experiences, many states have set up temperance boards in the fond hope that if they cannot prevent people from drinking they can convince them to drink moderately. But most of these boards do little more than release advertisements in newspapers showing a bottle marked with the familiar skull and crossbones.

With governments unable to curb the menace, people have taken matters into their own hands. In distant Imphal in Manipur, women were so disgusted with their menfolk's excessive drinking that they formed themselves into an association against drunkards and kept vigil at nights in front of liquor shops and bars. Any drunkard they catch is publicly humiliated by making him walk with a string of bottles tied around his neck, and then handed over to the police. In the hills of Uttar Pradesh and tribal areas of Bihar similar people's movements have met with notable success in an area where drunkenness has become a major social problem.

Meanwhile, to formulate fresh strategies against drinking and drug abuse, the Welfare Ministry two years ago set up a working group chaired by its joint secretary. This is likely to stress education programmes on the evils of drinking. As Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, minister of state for welfare says: "A stroke of the pen, like imposing a total ban, is not going to help. If we have to bring alcoholism under control we need to use persuasion, create awareness and show a strong determination to implement our programmes."

But with both the Central and state governments failing to make a serious dent in the two vital factors that the WHO says leads to an increase in alcoholism—easy availability and increasing demand for alcohol—the battle of the bottle may be well and truly lost.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA with bureau reports

Youngsters drinking: vulnerable age

RAGHU RAI

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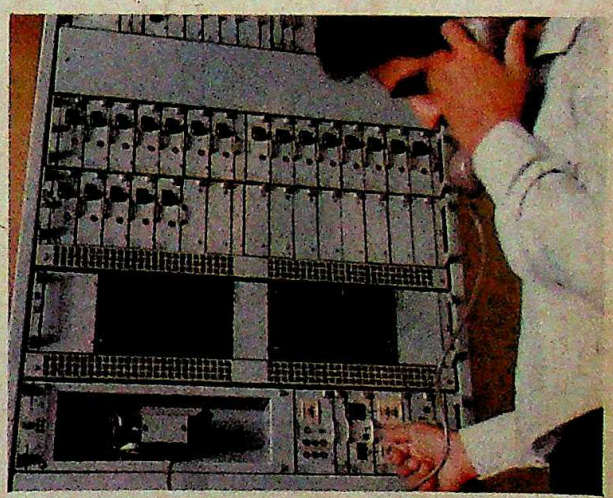

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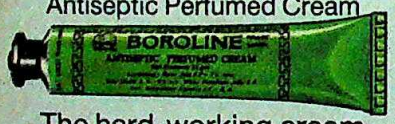

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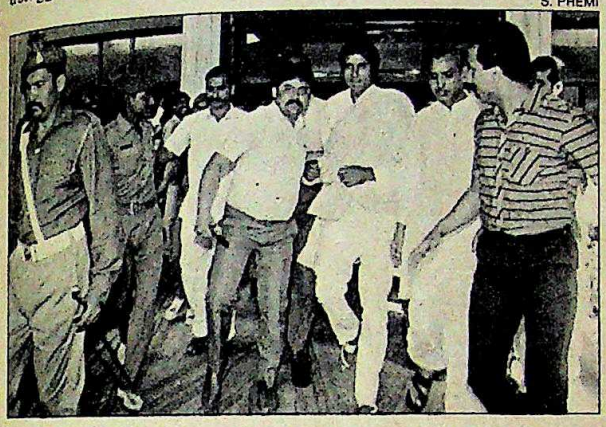
Money Spinner

TIME is money. Superstar-turned-MP Amitabh Bachchan, after raking in crores from films, garnered Rs 1.30 crore for his constituency at a 180-minute meeting with the Uttar Pradesh chief secretary—a figure which works out to a staggering Rs 1 lakh per minute prompting a Congress wag to

S. PREMI



Amitabh Bachchan: star appeal

remark: "It is perhaps the first and last time that an MP has been given this VIP treatment." And his meeting with Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh had all the trappings of a house full matinee show. Peons and security guards, liftmen and clerks, typists and junior officials crowded outside the conference room, autograph books in hand to get the star's signature or even a glimpse of his silk churidar-kurta clad form.

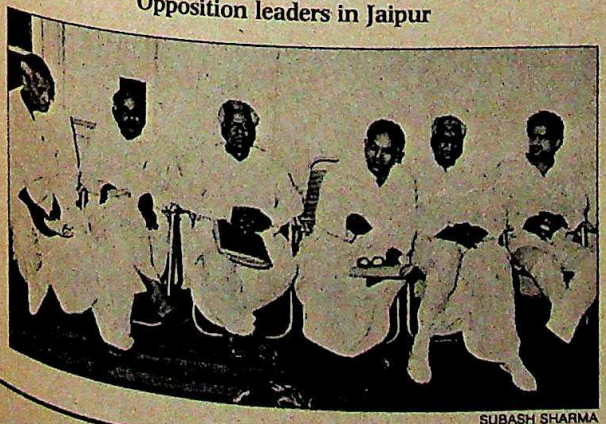
But the problems were less glamorous—right from construction of new roads, bridges and improvement of drinking water supply for Allahabad to a 32-bed hospital for Ramnagar. A piffling deficit of Rs 5 lakh is being made good by Nirman, an organisation promoted by Bachchan for Allahabad's development. Nobody missed out on the political undercurrents either. Only two of five MLA's of his area turned up for the discussion.

Shared Interest

TWO IS always better than one. Opposition leaders of Haryana and Rajasthan, convinced that their states stand to lose their legitimate share of the river waters as an outcome of the Punjab accord, met in Jaipur last fortnight to wage war together. But before girding themselves for battle, they intend seeking answers to some questions from one of the architects of the accord—the prime minister himself.

Briefly, these revolve around why the Supreme Court has not been brought in to work out specifics of the power to be shared from five Punjab power projects. Even more important, how serious is Punjab Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala when he says that they need not construct the SYL canal and finally, what exactly do Central assurances amount to when a commission has already been appointed to decide on the sharing of waters. If the combine works smoothly, the Centre is likely to have a lot more on its plate in the coming months.

Opposition leaders in Jaipur



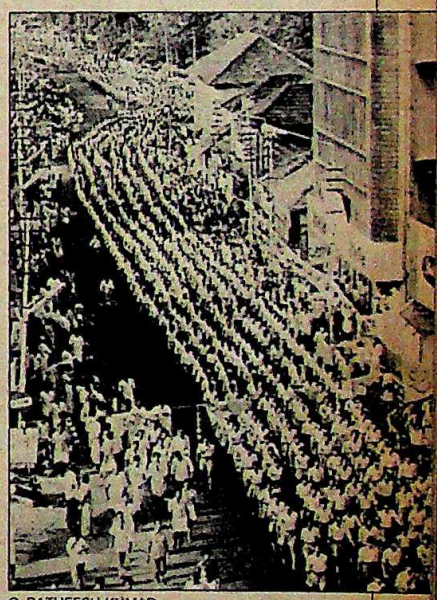
SUBASH SHARMA

Solidarity Show

AS AN impressive show of Hindu solidarity, it had few equals. The RSS-organised Hindu Sangamam in Kerala, held to coincide with its 60th birthday celebrations, saw two lakh of the faith congregate at Ayodhaya Nagar in Trivandrum and patiently listen to Balasaheb Deoras insist that Hinduism was " an identity, even Marx referred to India as Hindustan". The recent "Kuwaiti Scandal" in the state provided him with more ammunition, according to him, "showed the Government's dependence on communal forces".

A "long march" through the streets of the capital by uniformed RSS volunteers drew appreciative comment for its discipline, but the Sangamam created major ripples in its wake. The massive Hindu turn-out and the repeated proclamations of Hindu unity left local political leaders uneasy as to the possible political fall-out from the impressive show of solidarity.

Sangamam marchers: creating ripples



C. RATHEESH KUMAR

Home Truths

STRANGE are the ways of the world. When T. Prakash Rao contested the elections to the Hyderabad corporation on a Majilis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen ticket in February, the poor man prayed fervently that he be elected a corporator and not be in the unenviable position of losing his deposit. But his misgivings were unwarranted as a month later, on March 14 to be precise, Rao to his surprise was elected mayor. As luck would have it, a report in the papers a few days later, informed the new mayor that he would be going on a tour to Europe in May. The occasion was an international meeting of all the mayors of cities whose population is expected to be four million by the end of the century. Rao's future seemed suddenly promising but unfortunately things were'nt going so well closer to home. His efforts—eight calls in four weeks—to meet Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao and talk to him about the Rs 100-crore promised to develop the city, have been in vain. Rao it appears has a lot to learn. Pre-election rally promises are not to be taken so literally.

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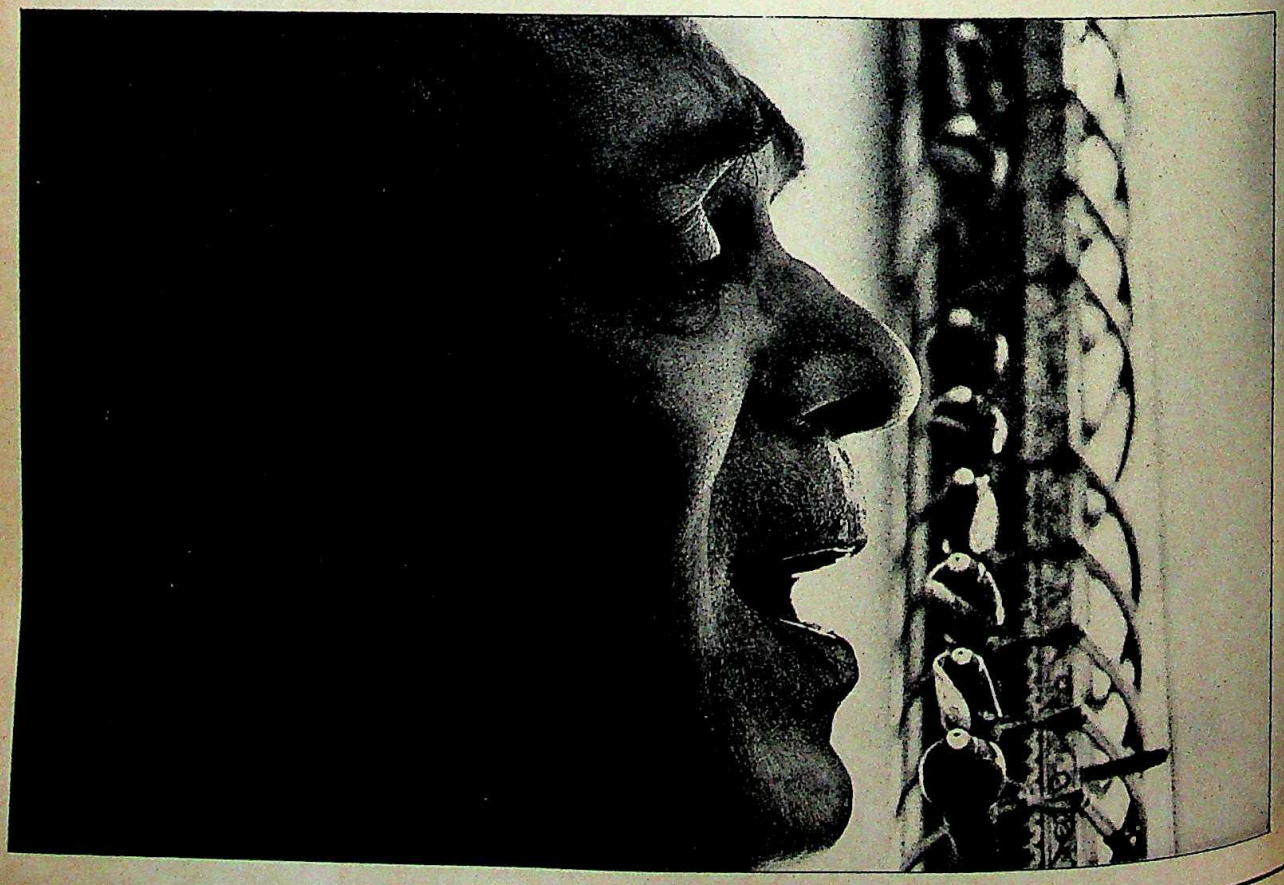
WITH this issue INDIA TODAY introduces a new series of photo essays—to be carried periodically—on the living legends of Indian art and music. The purpose is to explore the inner lives and motivations of these great masters through their own thoughts and words. We begin the series with sitar maestro Ravi Shankar who although acknowledged as a giant in his own field, is nonetheless a lightning rod for controversy because of his experimentations with new and non-traditional forms.

RAVI SHANKAR

A LONELY JOURNEY



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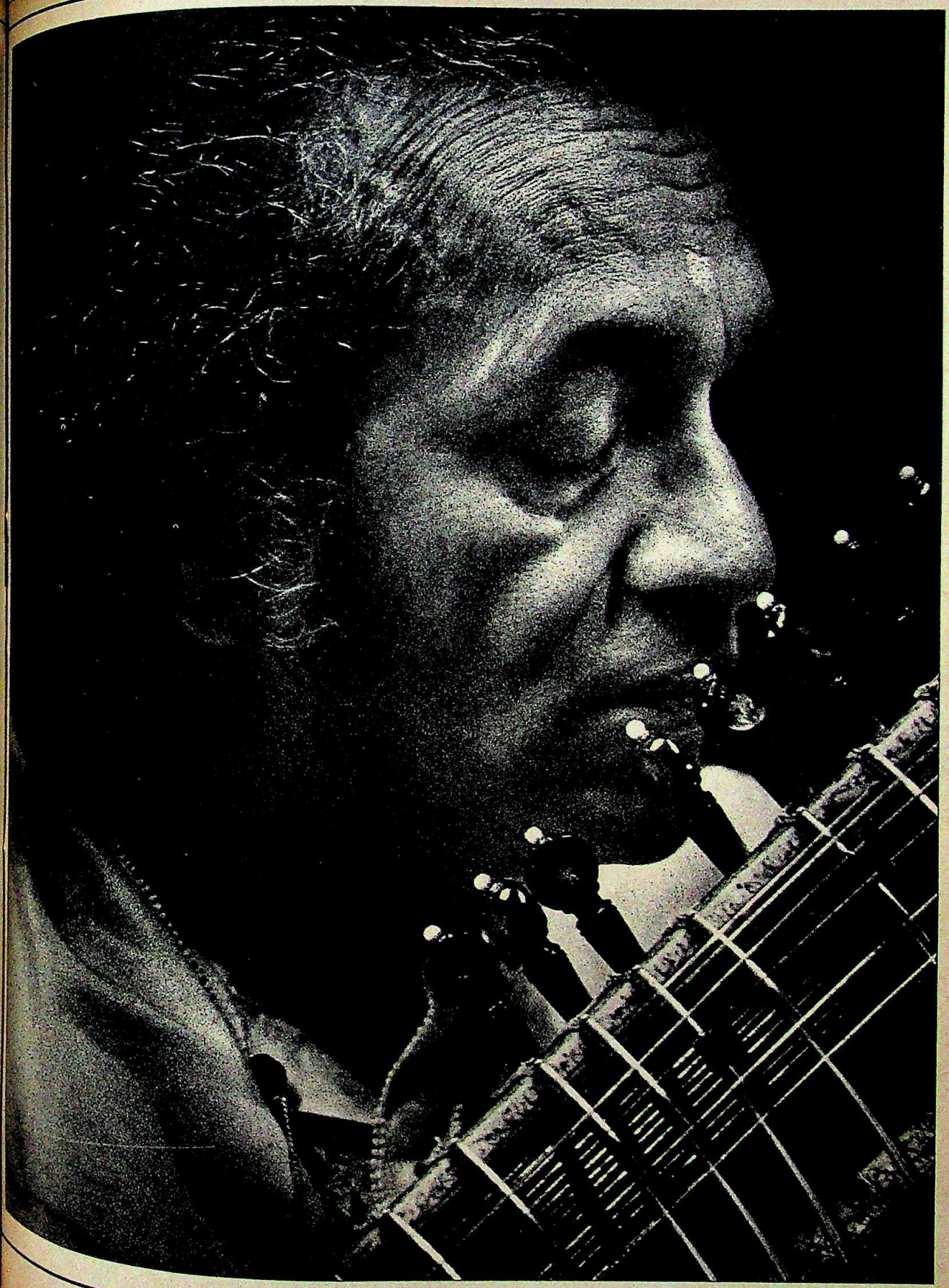

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ON THAT cold February night in Delhi he had played until dawn to a packed auditorium. He had played well and he had played to his heart's content. The audience knew that. But more importantly, Ravi Shankar knew it. An upcoming young musician, who had recently been quoted as saying that Ravi Shankar was "out", along with hashish and the Beatles, ran up to the aging guru of the sitar to congratulate him.

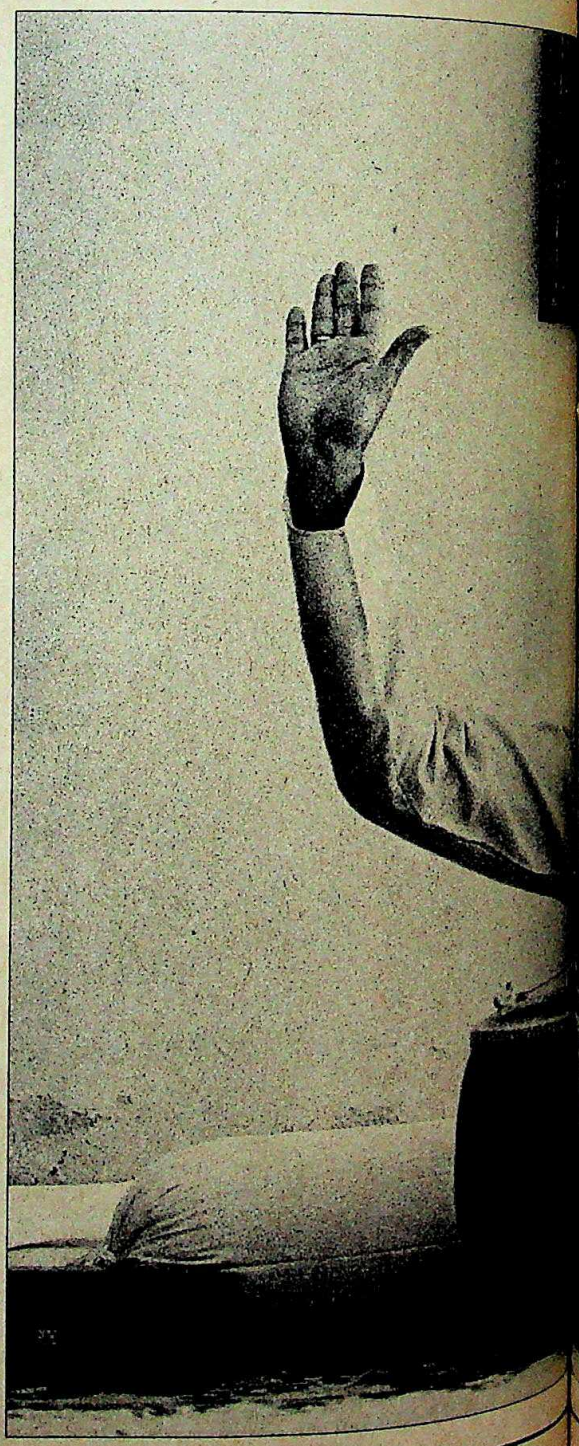
"The youngster praised me. I said, beta, why do you praise me? I'm "out" with hashish and the Beatles. But I blessed him before I got into my car. It is true that the period of the '60s has finished. But my music is still alive. It still fills houses. But according to them, I'm finished. I feel hurt sometimes. After all, I am a human being."

At 66, his face is mobile, ever-changing. The eyes can blaze like meteors or descend into a limpid pool of sadness. The mouth is sensual, far younger than the rest of his face. In profile, his hair swept back, he is an aquiline figurehead delicately carved on a totem pole. He has blazed a trail of Indian ragas across the globe several times over and he is starting the journey all over again. But all the time, he nurses within himself a wound the size of the universe.

"It is a ruthless thing after you reach a standard or if you are seen as having arrived at the top. It is ruthless. I have to listen to unlettered, ordinary people say things that are so humiliating. They constantly try to tear you down. Our so-called critics think that to play short pieces is sacrilege. But I have never compromised my integrity. The great musicians of our time, Onkar Nath and Abdul Karim Khan have performed short pieces when they made records. But my critics call me impure. They say my music is all commercialised and jazzified and mechanised....

"Sometimes I wish, like my other musician brothers, that I had done only one thing. But I've always had other interests. Sitar and music has been my main thing. I loved dance and painting, but I've left those. But I still have another creative side—that of a composer. This side no one understands in India. Outside India, they do. Take Leonard Bernstein. He is a conductor, a pianist, a composer. And each facet is recognised as a different side of him. He is a classicist, yet he composed *West Side Story*. I've done the same thing. I've experimented with Indian classical music, folk music, popular music, symphony orchestras, electronic synthesisers, jazz. I've never been frightened of it.

"But people here don't understand this. They like their old ways, yet they can wear any dress. They themselves live a bastardised existence. A *khichree* culture. Yet these so-called purists have prejudiced minds who say Ravi should only stick to the sitar. Leave alone accepting, they do not even try to listen. These purists have a warped sense. What is their measuring yard? Are we still singing the Vedas? Our music has continued to develop for a thousand years. Creative artists have always experimented and always suffered abuse. I am conscious of the fact that not all my experimentation has been good. But the die-hard purists still want their *rasam* and their chutney and their *pappad* served the same way. They don't even want to know what spaghetti tastes like.



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"Even when I played in the West during the days of the hippie generation I told them I don't compromise. You have to hear this music as it is, I told them. But the music was new to them. I had to give it to them in doses. I couldn't give them so much that they got indigestion. They were not used to it then. But now when I play I go on for hours. I am hurt because I did that pioneering work, and all my brother musicians who went there later took full advantage of the groundwork, and now they attack me. They blast me here. They say they play pure music, pure sitar. Musicians are getting the Muhammad Ali syndrome of 'I'm the Greatest, I'm the Greatest'. Why is this happening here? They cannot bear to see anybody soar. They want to clip their wings.

"What I have tried to do is to keep the Indian base. Keeping that base I have tried to exploit new sounds, new tonality. Instrumental sounds are different, sitar, sarangi, shehnai, bansuri. But when you add the bassoon, French horn, violin, double bass, and the cello, the sound quality is different. I've experimented with that more as an

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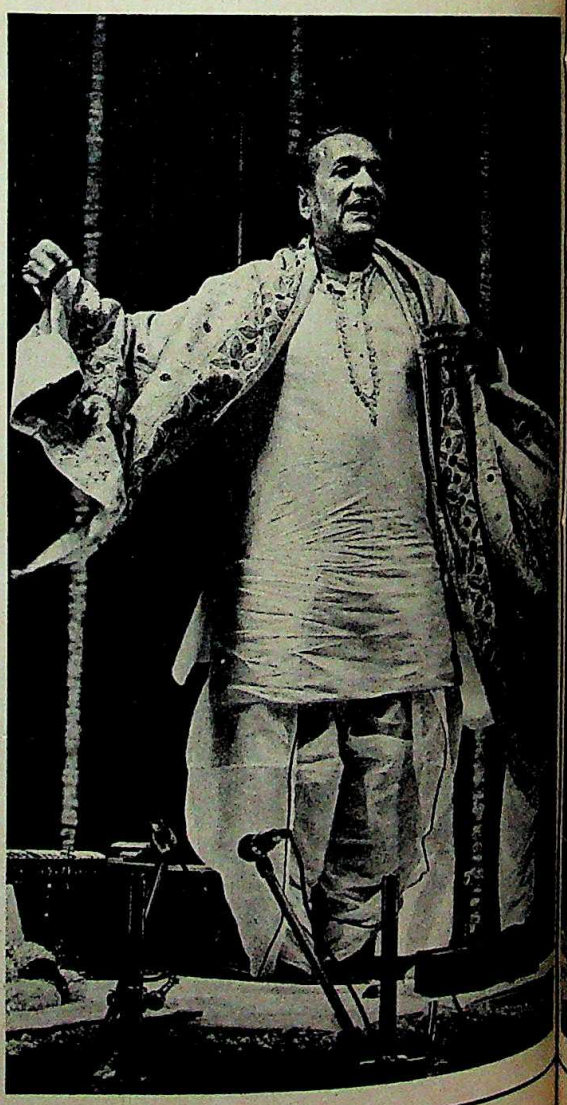
extension. But people call this a sacrilege. We must always maintain our tradition—the Hindustani and Carnatic systems of music. They have to be preserved. Just like Bach has to be preserved. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't be doing anything else.

"Look to what heights, to what distances we take our *ragas* and music. But we always come back to the basic structure and mooring. I have experimented but I don't try and just mix a cocktail. That's only gimmickry, a part of the pop world that lasts two days and is gone forever. Today Madonna, tomorrow Bruce Springstein, twenty-day wonders."

The experimental side of Ravi Shankar, the "West" inside of him goes back to his childhood. It is not something he inherited in the '60s when, as George Harrison's guru, he became the only classical musician to gain world-wide pop and poster attention. He was barely 10 when he went to Paris from his home in Varanasi to perform in his brother Uday Shankar's (Dada's) fabled dance troupe and came into contact with Pablo Casals, Gertrude Stein, Segovia, Romain Rolland, Cole Porter. In dada's troupe he danced and played the flute and the *dilruba*. At that young age he came to a crossroads in his life when Ustad Alauddin Khan (Baba) joined the troupe for a year as a soloist.

"Baba, then in his mid-fifties, was a court musician from Maihar state, a disciple of Swami Haridas of the Tansen Gharana. He began loving me like a son. Baba was a sufi. He had a bad temper while teaching. When he was gentle, you could not find a gentler person. But when he was angry he erupted like a volcano. I was then a spoilt brat. People called me a prodigy and a genius. My head was stuffed with self-love and self-pride. I thought I was the cat's whiskers. But Baba taught me that I was a nothing. You're like a peacock, he said. A jack of all trades. He brought me to my senses. Before that I was in love with myself. Like a flower child. I suppose when I associated with the hippies I saw in them something of myself from those early days. Before Baba left the troupe he told me that if I wanted to learn music I would have to leave everything.

"When he left the troupe I went through a period of great uncertainty. I was becoming better as a dancer. I was having a lot of fun, staying at the best hotels. But Baba still haunted me. About two years later, I left for Maihar. I shaved off my hair, bought khadi clothes. I got a hut next



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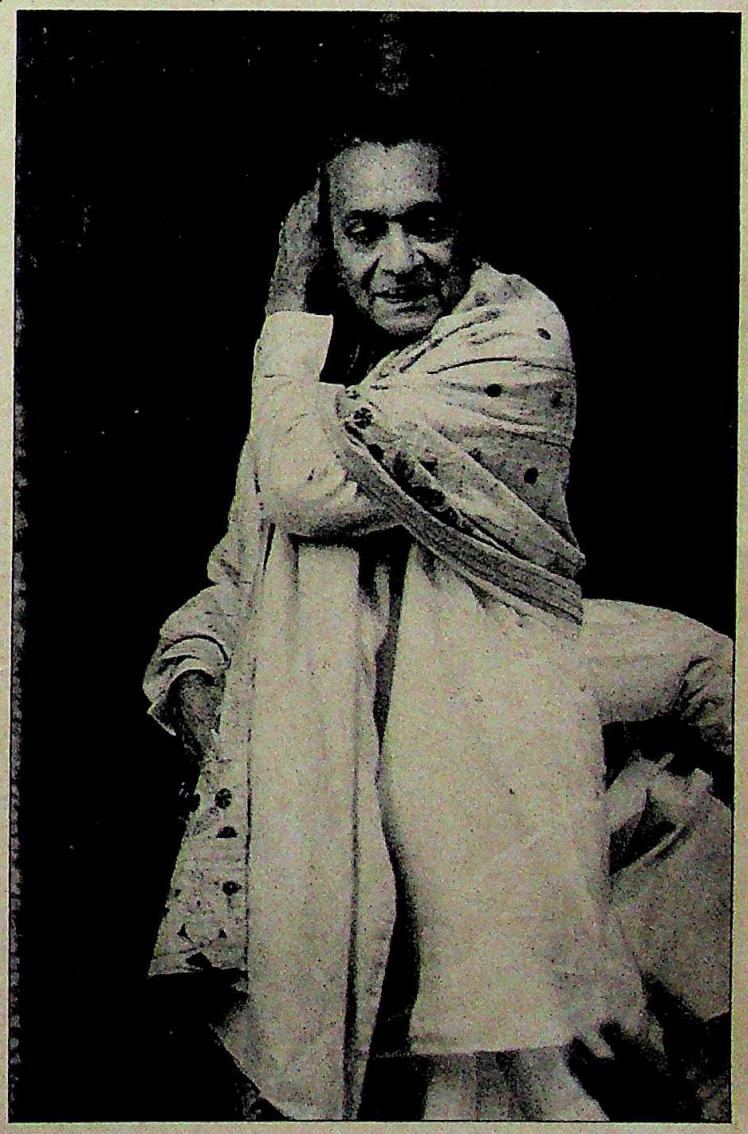
to Baba and slept on a *rassi ki khatia*, with snakes, rats, cockroaches, flies and jackals outside. I said to myself, where on earth have I landed? I began cursing. But I was determined to stay. I stayed for seven-and-a-half years with him.

"Baba was a hypersensitive person in public. His real playing was when we used to listen to him in private. He would have us in tears within two minutes. He had that strength. The gift he gave me was the appreciation of the spiritual aspect of our music, drenching it with its own purity, bathing the heart with the music.

"You can weep to a folk song, to Simon and Garfunkel, the Beatles, Beethoven. In Vivaldi there's beauty. But in Baba's teaching and music there was spirituality. The purpose of music was to attain God. To please God. But I still don't know, even after my *tapasya* with Baba, where I am on my journey. No matter how far one reaches, the destination seems to be farther and farther away. That's the whole problem. In Western music there's a beginning and an end in black and white. Baba used to say till his very end that he had not really made it as a musician. He used to cry like a baby that he had worked so hard and achieved so little. He used to say that may be if he were born again he would be able to achieve his dreams—only if he were reborn still armed with his musical gifts. At that time I really didn't understand. But now it is clear. I feel the same way.

"Our music has eroticism and spirituality at a very high level. It combines an enjoyment of life with an awareness of God. But somewhere we've lost that duality. My main message is to reach, to achieve that tranquillity which is only in our music. To reach the synthesis. Sometimes I come close. But I suffer because I am not there. When I'm close to it my hand moves along the sitar but I don't notice it. The audience becomes one with us. There is no audience, no musician. I don't even feel the sitar in my hand. Then, you sing. You don't play. It is like singing.

"To try and achieve this I still live in the past quite a bit. I try and keep the past within me, through my music, my tradition, my gurus. But I still feel alien today. The thought of nuclear war frightens me. I abhor pollution. As a human being, to live in the present, my music has saved me. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to live. Along with the music I can immediately switch myself to a higher level of awareness. It is like a tonic—these



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moments, even for four hours—it keeps you going for the next few days. Then it is gone.

"What is left is pain and sorrow. You are giving all the time, and not only the physical energy. But you are excavating your own guts and giving from the lowest to the highest levels. Sure, you get some materialistic comforts. Then there's the ego satisfaction. And those moments are terrific when a performance goes well. When that finishes, you are alone. Alone with your own thoughts. It is a feeling of great loneliness, of having everything and having nothing. It is my constant company.

"I have lived my life like a sailor. I had a marriage, children. But there was never enough time for them. I got divorced, and that hurt. I have shared my life in so many different places. It has always been like that. Now, I'm really alone in the true sense of the word because I've thought that for some time now I don't want to be involved. I'm experimenting with myself. Trying to enjoy the loneliness with my students. They're like my children. It's not that I'm not having affairs or anything. They're like a passing phase. But I'm trying not to get involved with anybody.

"In a way I have also become scared of commitment.

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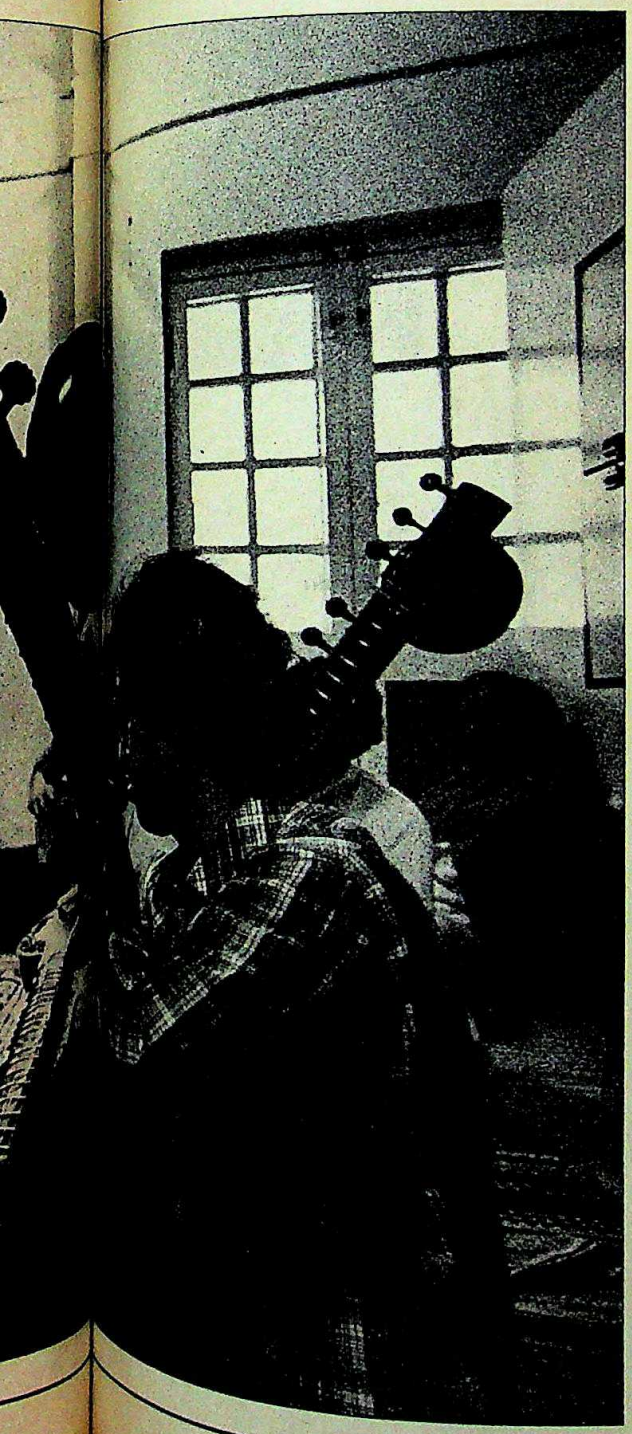
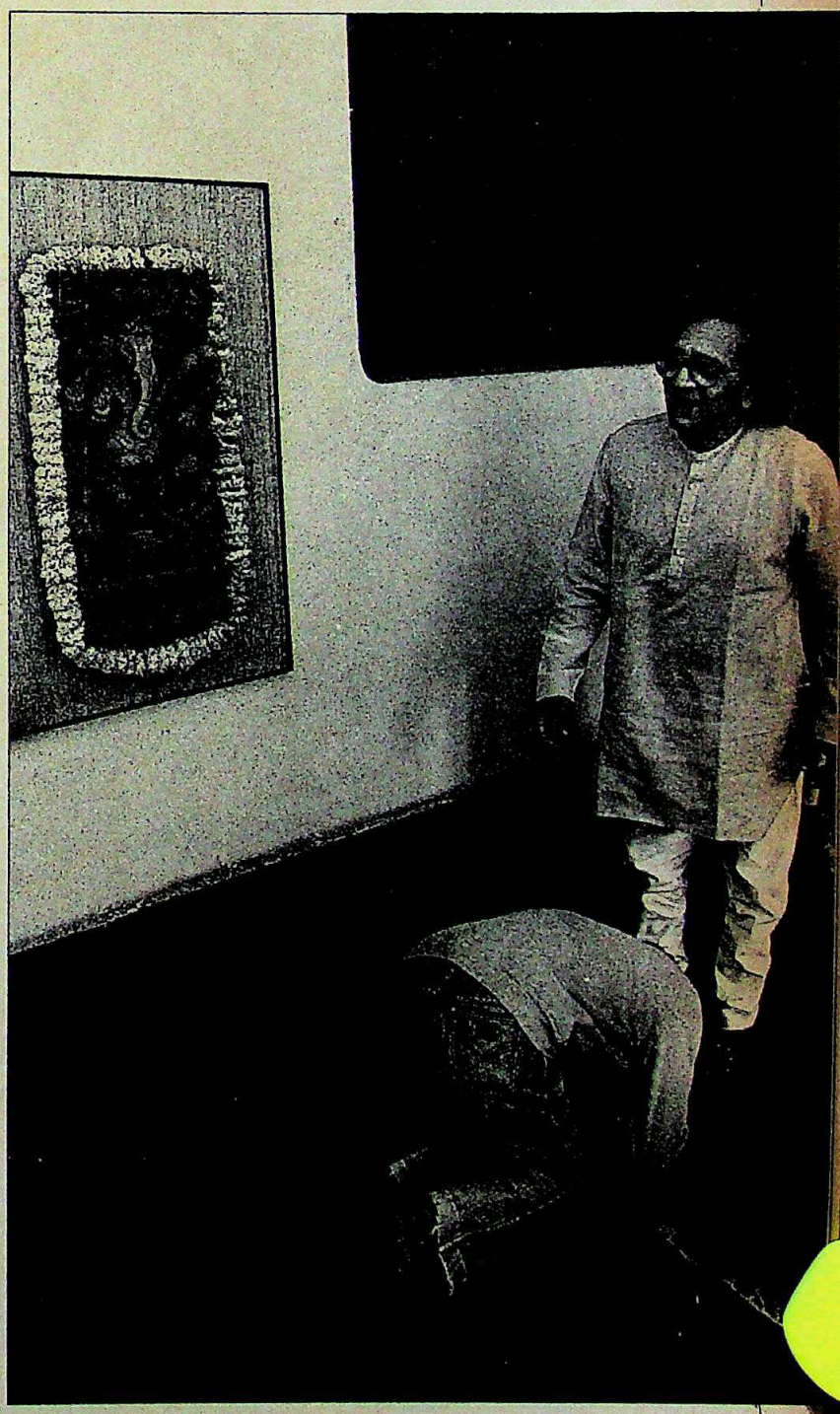
I have become frightened of commitment. I have not been able to give. I have seen my family suffer. I have a very strong guilty conscience. No matter what heights I may have reached, in my depths I feel pain. Yet, there are things I have had to deaden within myself. I deaden certain things, that flowering, that feeling of being in love. Somehow, I have constantly been in love. Sometimes strongly with one person, sometimes with two, sometimes with 10. But now I'm going through a dry period emotionally. And I'm a little afraid now. Afraid of involvement. True, there are some parts of me that are dead. Some parts of my inspiration suffer because of this. But I try and get involved with other things.

"I have this strange nature. I always feel I'm being chased. I mean, why the hell am I doing so much? I can sit here comfortably, eat in peace, love my disciples. But I'm constantly being chased. What is it? Often I panic at this and ask, why, why? I have to travel, with all this jet lag, all the arrangements, do this documentary, do that orchestration. I have committed myself for the next two years all over the world.

"Why the hell? But what can I do? I cannot find the answer. Am I trying to prove myself? I have much to be grateful for. I have received abuse but also more than





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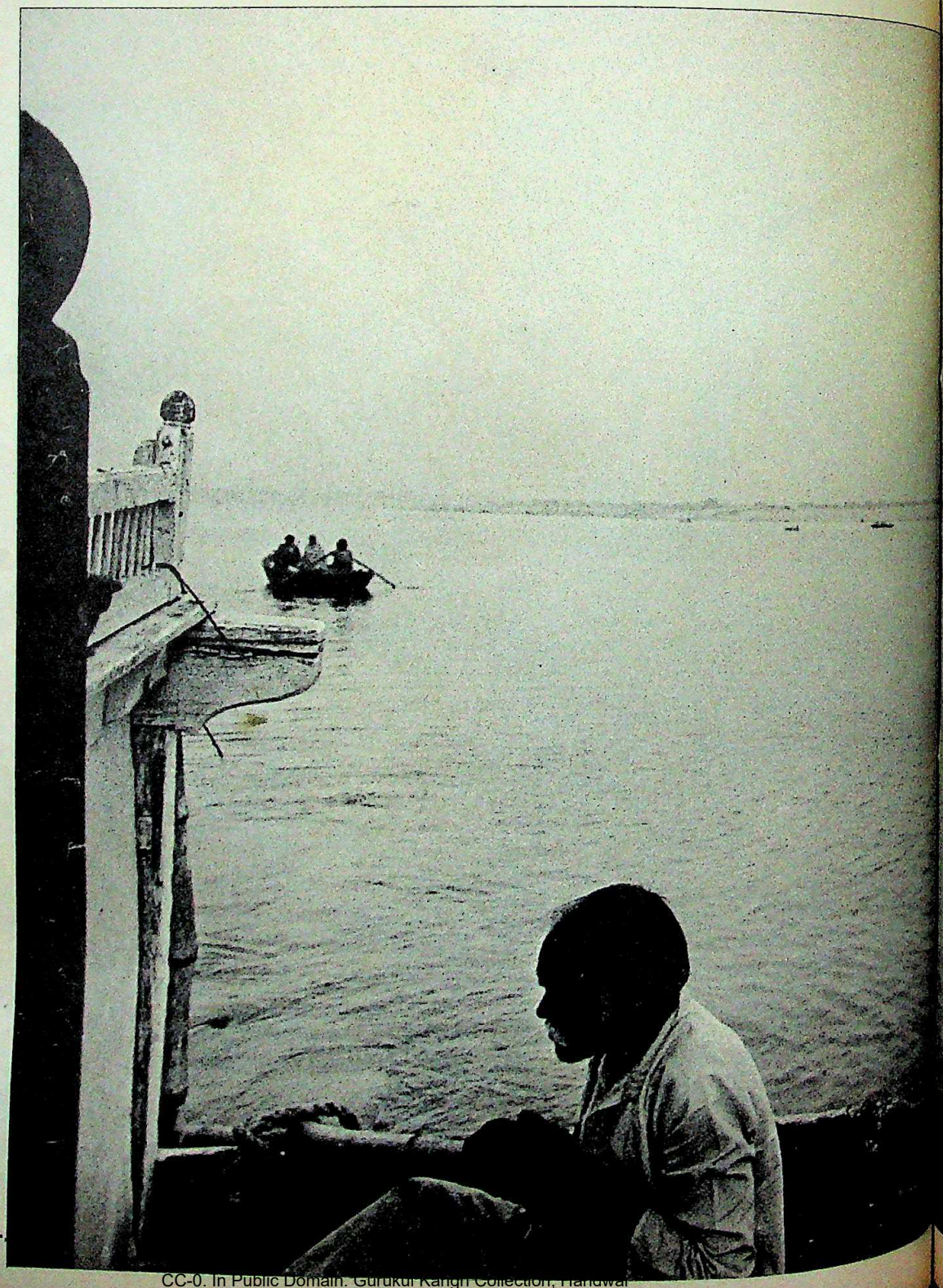
enough praise to make up for it. But I have this dilemma. I'm just like a little one, believe me. You'll be surprised to know that within me is this little child who refuses to grow up, who is still immature. He won't heed me. That's the whole problem.

"I have an ego. I want to be remembered as one of the best who gave his best. That I was taken seriously. The musicians I loved with all my heart—Ustad Fayaz Khan, Amir Khan, D.V. Paluskar, Nikhil Bannerji—have all died. I often think of what I will leave behind. I think of great people like Abdul Karim Khan. We all think of Tansen, we sing his music. But it is not really his music or his sentiments or his tunes. I think that the Indian musician, no matter how great, no matter how high he has reached, when he dies, he's done with. Maybe he leaves behind a 78 RPM record, or a few LP's. That's the



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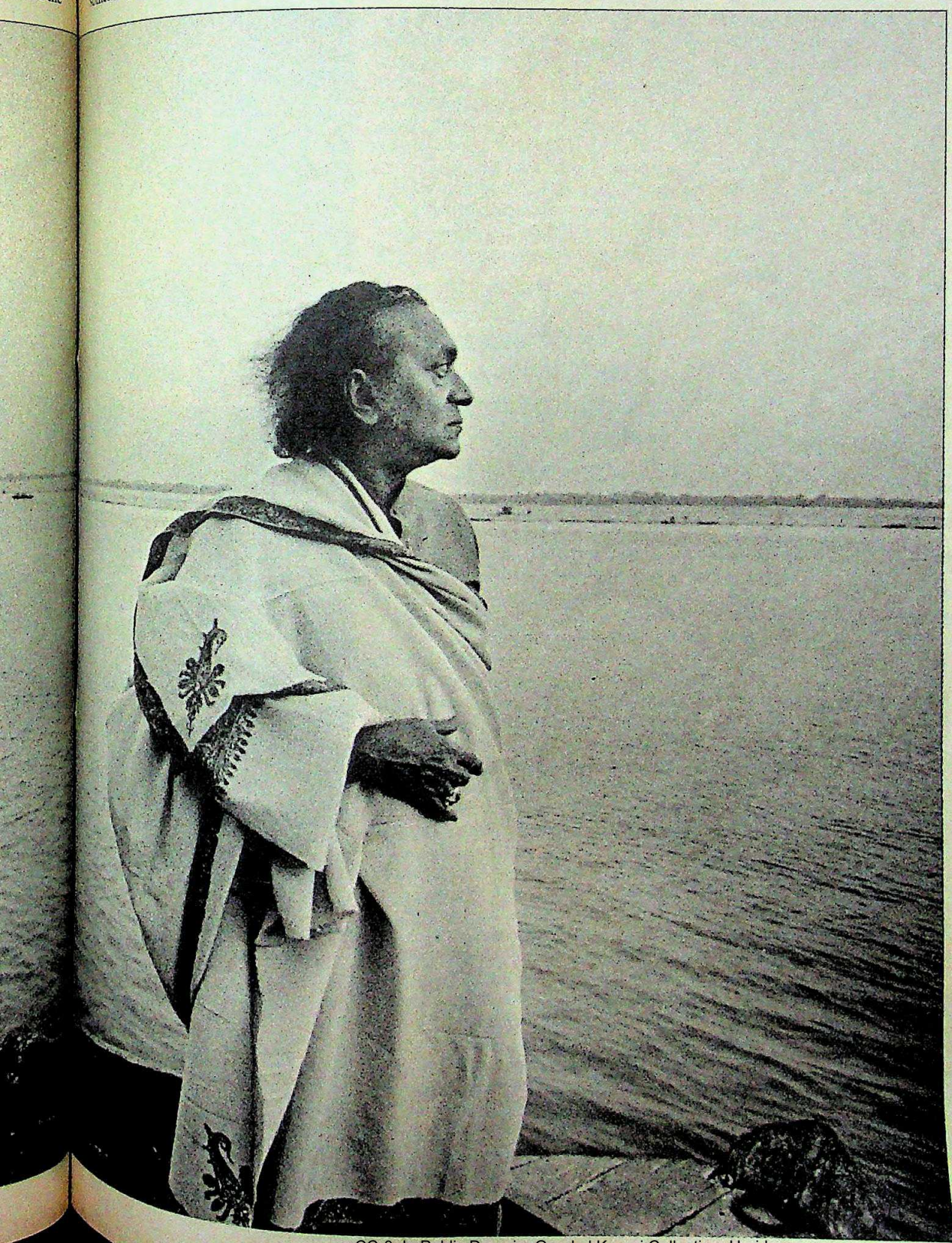
only thing that will stay.

"But take Beethoven or Wagner. Their greatness, their spirit will never die and they will never be disputed as great. The proof is there in black and white. With me, it's not so much that I want to be remembered. It's not that I want to preserve myself for posterity. But I want to do something that will stay as a compositional work, something that just does not end. Something people can listen to. A painter paints and he leaves his work behind. We still talk about and see the works of Rembrandt. That is why I like creative and compositional works. It is to convey the joy you receive while creating it to an audience much later on. Maybe, mentally I feel that these compositional works will remain behind—only if they are good. The bad never stays."

—INDERJIT BADHWAR in Varanasi



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INDIAN RESTAURANTS

Currying Favour

AS IF the unflagging nostalgia for the Raj exemplified by films and television serials were not proof enough of Britain's unconquerable obsession with its former colony, now comes documented testimony that Indian cuisine has overtaken Chinese in popularity. According to "The Good Curry Guide 1986/1987", curry is Britain's most popular dining-out food. Consequently, with every *roomali roti* tossed over the wok, Indian restaurants are raking in the shekels.

The guide is edited by Pat Chapman, founder of the "Curry Club" which claims 8,000 members. Unlike in the Indian sense, the term "curry" for the British is a handy, all-purpose vogue word that spans the boundless range of Indian food. The guide lists more than 700 recommended curry restaurants in the UK, and, besides covering Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan restaurants, also includes the odd Nepalese, Burmese, Thai, Singaporean, Malay and Caribbean establishments that offer their own idiosyncratic versions of "curry". Chapman, an unwavering curry aficionado, says: "Once one acquires the taste for curry there seems to be no going back. One simply has to have a curry and too long without leads to a craving. Social historians may in time write tomes about the mild, harmless addiction to curry which has swept Britain and is about to hit the US."

The curry rage that has gripped Britain is certainly startling and, according to addicts, due to a variety of reasons: the abiding interest in India is one. The durable media focus is another. The numerous "India festivals" have helped it along. And the presence of a huge Indian community has indubitably contributed to the panache with which an Englishman now orders a sizzling beef *masala* without furtively looking for the nearest fire hydrant. There are those who publicly pronounce that in 1986, India is "no more fashionable" and this is the "year of Africa." But Karen Blixen notwithstanding, when packed movie houses featuring *Out of Africa* empty out into London's West End, smart young Britons still head for Thames Tandoori or Gaylords.

Those who have featured Indian food programmes on television or written books like Madhur Jaffrey have attained celebrity status. But 20 years ago the story was quite different: a handful of sleazy Indian restaurants tucked away in the shabbiest end of town catered to a woozy, well-lubricated clientele. This period also saw the birth of the famous Indian "standard menu", still a feature in many curry houses: it grouped curries into "heat strengths"—from mild through medium to hot and very hot. In each grade, there was a selection of meat, chicken and sea food curries. Curry historians say it was inevitable that with the success of the standard menus, Indian restaurants were to proliferate in clone-like fashion. Standard menus usually also meant standard decor: red wallpaper, coloured table cloths, small oil lamps and the odd kitschy brass idol. And as young Britons became curry gourmets, their expectations from Indian restaurants changed.

Curry is Britain's most popular dining—out food. And consequently Indian restaurants are raking in the shekels.

Today—thoroughout Britain—there is a "new wave" of sophisticated Indian restaurants in prime locations, tastefully designed, serving quality food from a meticulously selected menu. Chapman's guide favourably compares these restaurants with the finest French and English restaurants in town—both in terms of elegance and quality of cuisine.

The etymological chart of Indian restaurants is in itself a fascinating read. There is a Taj Mahal in almost every high street. Names of places and rivers are popular choices: Agra, Asia, Bombay, Ganges, Indus, Khyber, Rawalpindi, Malabar and Goa head the table. There are safer bets: Light of India, Star of India, Gateway of India, and Emperor of India. Others are redolent of the Raj: Viceroy of India, Last Days of the Raj and Memsahib.

In a bid for respectability, restaurateurs have shrewdly renamed establishments after the towns in which they are located—such as the Glasgow Tandoori. Curry-watchers say this is a typically imaginative move by the Asian restaurateur. Apparently no other cuisine has adopted this method: there are no Peterborough Pastas, Hull Hamburgers, Chatham Chinese or Dublin Doners. And now, restaurants are being named after successful films or television serials. There is a plethora of Far Pavilions, Jewels in the Crown, Passages to India, Eastern Eyes

Popular curry restaurants Mumtaz (top) and Gaylord: acquired taste

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and even one basement bar aptly-named Jewel in the Ground. At last count there were 14 Gandhis in Britain—some of them, uncharitably, non-vegetarian.

A number of these "Indian restaurants" are non-Indian owned. Many are run by Bangladeshis and the owners' list is chockful of Choudhurys, Islams, Alis and Mohib-ur-Rahmans. Most of these are distinctly downmarket, but as exotic as the spices with which they curry their clients' favour. At the Rajpooth Tandoori in Durham, a full lunch costs £1.65 (Rs 28), while in Islington the Sonar Goan prices its "kashi" (a whole lamb stuffed with basmati rice that will serve 25) at £400 (approx: Rs 7,200).

Some rely on unusual cuisine to attract customers. Several attract notice for their showmanship or quaint location. One such is Sajus—in Chorley—which functions from a converted church. People wonder whether they might get a culinary uplift from such a sanctified setting. There are accompanying cracks about "vindaloo in the vestry", "baptistry biryani" and queries if "pappadams will be served with holy communion".

The food in such ecclesiastical environs is reportedly not heavenly. In Folkestone, at The India Restaurant, the owner-cum-chef, Ali Shraf, is French-trained. So a string of extraordinary dishes grace the bill of fare—duck, partridge, pheasant, crab and lobster—and he uses cream, wine, brandy and delicate spices to create inventive dishes. Restaurants throughout the country create their own whimsical dishes. Thus there are cyclone chickens for those who relish flaming hot food, tandoori trout, the Indo-Kenyan pili pili chicken and gulab jamuns flambeed in cognac.

The Indian food rage that has gripped Britain is because of both standard menus and 'new wave' sophistication.

Not everyone is a robust curry lover—health officers in Southhampton for instance. Some of its 20 Indian restaurants have regular brushes with the law. Even if the food is not spectacular, some restaurants display a sprightly sense of humour—a 20-foot sign on the facade of Memsahib in South-West London proclaims: "Food from the subcontient: Victims wherever we can find them". Its owner, Ron Dutta, has been getting into hot water with the Wandsworth Council, but says: "There is no law which says I can't insult myself." His restaurant is covered with slogans such as "our food must be good, 20,000 flies can't be wrong" and "our curry is so oily I am thinking of selling shares". And at the British Raj in Royston the anecdotal menu helpfully informs patrons: "The eating of spicy food promotes perspiration which itself takes your fatness away."

A mostly unresolved debate amongst curry-eaters centres round which are the country's finest authentic Indian restaurants. Chapman's guide lists the top 30 in the land. Many of these are unexceptional choices. But there are definite doubts about its choice of the best. The choice of the Taj group's Bombay Brasserie will certainly be questioned by many Indians who have complained both about the quality of its food and its sloppy service. The latter is also lambasted by the guide. The restaurant's plus point is its marvellous ambience, but for all the glowing account of the group's international "expertise", its Paris venture—a moored houseboat on the Seine with a stunning view of the Eiffel Tower—is increasingly criticised for providing indifferent food in the form of "thalis". Many rate the Pakistani-owned Salloos higher, with customers being ecstatic about its superb food, especially the piece de resistance—"the barra" (whole lamb stuffed with rice, nuts, raisins, spices and baked). Patrons are not so ecstatic about the outrageous prices charged and a recent tendency to spike the food with hot spices. Perennial London favourites include the elegant Viceroy of India and the two Gaylords. Gaylords is widely credited for introducing tandoori cooking to this country and although there are other claimants, Gaylord India was Britain's first haute cuisine Indian restaurant.

Other highly rated London-based restaurants include Romna Gate, Bangal Lancer, Tandoori of Mayfair, Bombay Palace, Malabar, Red Fort, Sonar Goan and Kensington Tandoor. South Indian vegetarian food outlets—one of the fastest growing in the land—have not so far had much publicity—even in the guide. For consistent quality Woodlands is still streets ahead. The curry guide, which did extensive research throughout the UK, lists other top Indian restaurants elsewhere in Britain. Among them: Khyber (Plymouth), Palash (Portsmouth), Rajdoot (Manchester), Maharaja (Birmingham), Lancers Brasserie (Edinburgh), Shish Mahal (Glasgow) and Everest (Cardiff).

With an estimated 400 Indian curry houses in Britain, one might imagine that Indian food outlets have reached saturation point. Far from it, Indian restaurants are opening at the rate of 400 a year and it looks like curry will continue to be the hottest item on British palates, literally and figuratively, for menu years.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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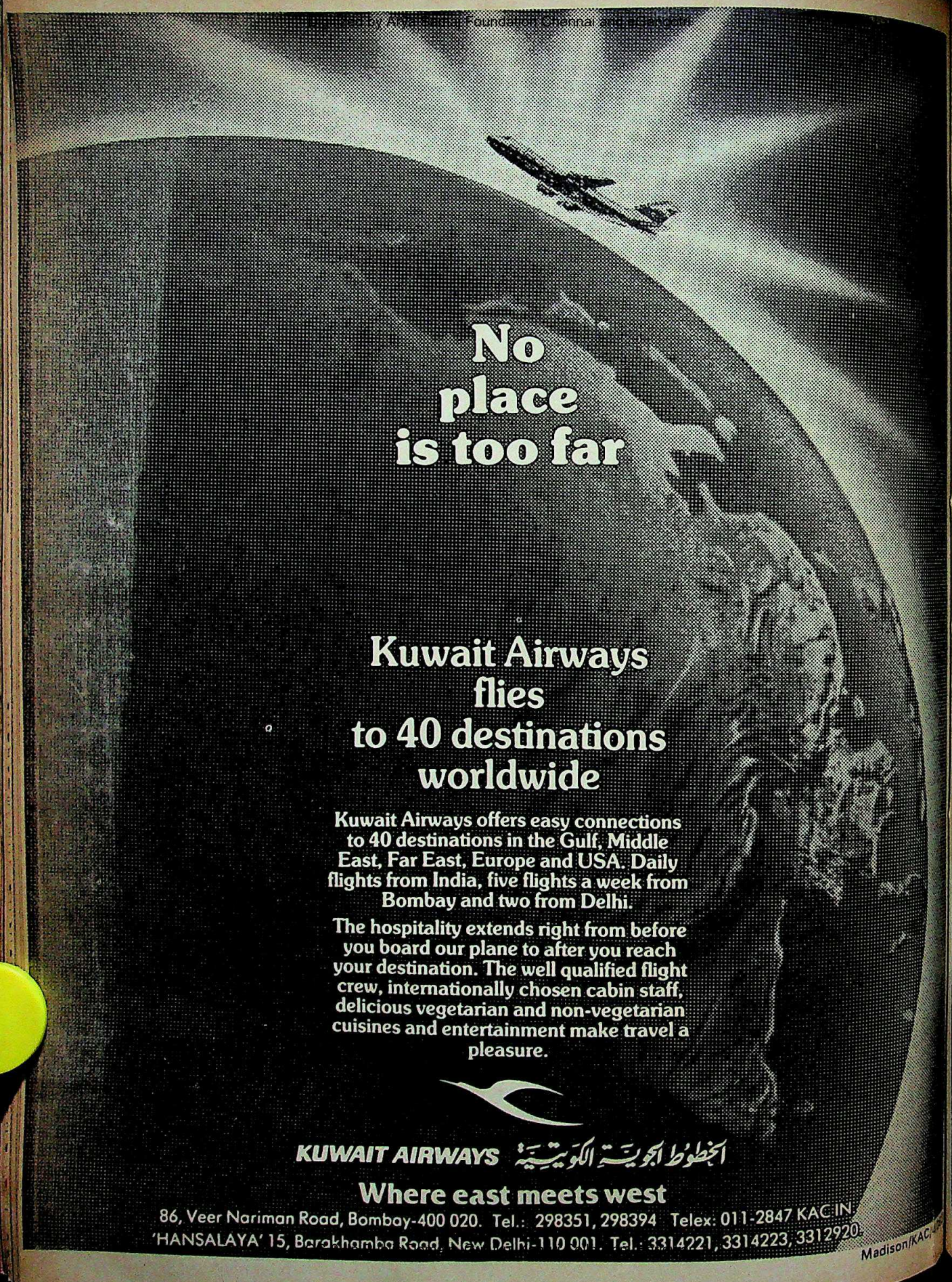

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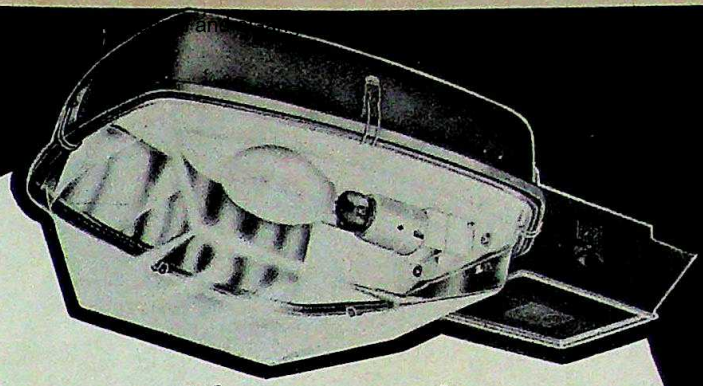

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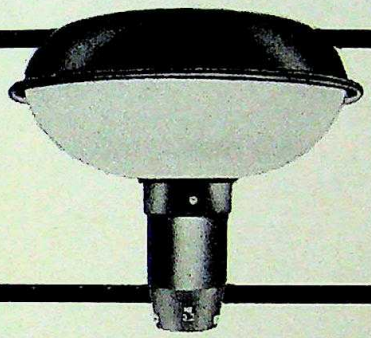

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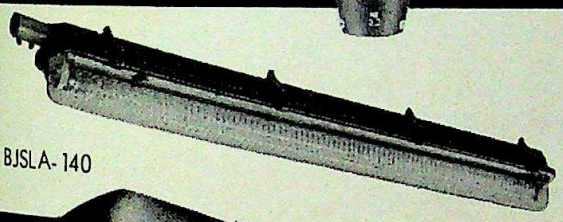

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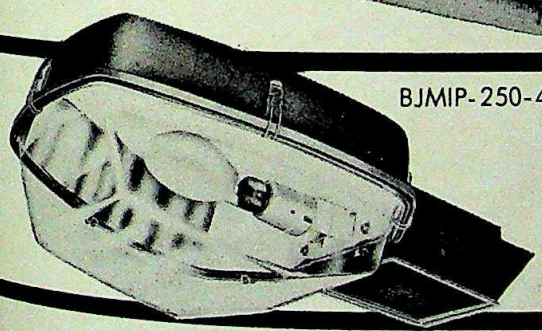

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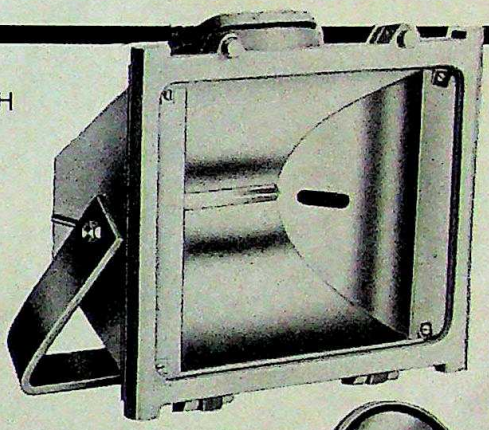

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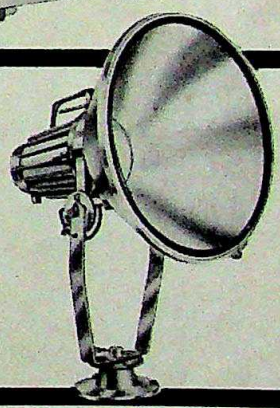

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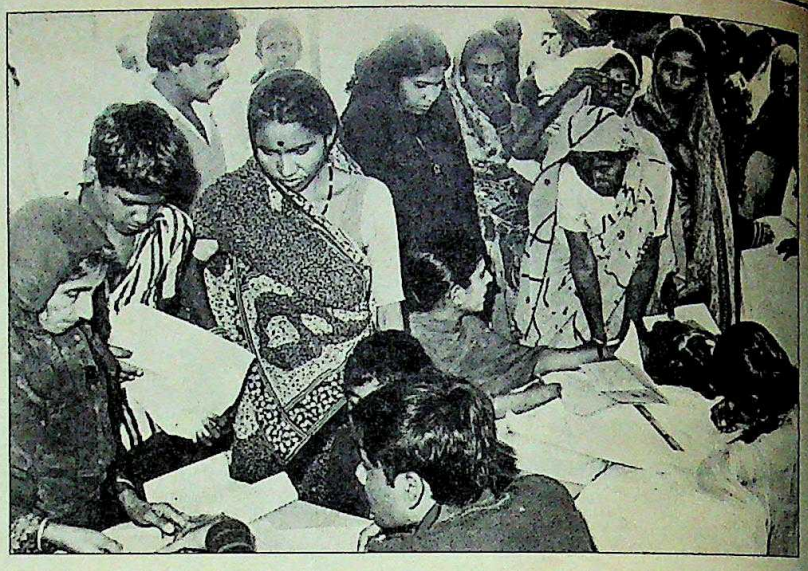
BHOPAL TRAGEDY

In the Balance



Queues at Bhopal Legal Aid camp: running out of time

THE countdown has begun. In New York, Judge John Keenan will soon decide whether US courts are the proper forum for the legal battle between the Indian Government and Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) over compensation for the victims of the Bhopal gas leak in December 1984. On that decision hangs the fate of some 200,000 sick and incapacitated people in Bhopal, and the survivors of those who died in the December tragedy.

As Keenan's decision nears, the Government has two options before it. First, it can do a turnabout and accept the latest Carbide compensation offer of $350 million (Rs 420 crore), a figure higher than the last one of $100 million (Rs 120 crore). While the Government has claimed $1 billion (Rs 1,200 crore), accepting the latest Carbide offer will bring small but speedy relief to the Bhopal victims.

The second option is to hold out for more in the hope that Keenan will rule in favour of a US hearing. If attorneys from both camps, after their long sessions with Judge Keenan in his federal courtroom, seem fairly confident that the case will be heard in the US then the odds are that UCC may be pushed to up its offer of $350 million.

But holding out for more is a gamble because if Keenan says the case must be sent back to India, the Government will only be able to get the assets of Carbide's Indian subsidiary, valued at under $80 million (Rs 96 crore)—and that too when the case is finally decided in India's overburdened courts.

Even if the case is to start in the US, it could drag on for years. As the UCC spokesman said: "The US legal system is also overloaded—that is if the conditions (described) in India are true."

Not surprisingly, then, the Government is watching Carbide's moves very closely. In Minneapolis, the law firm of Robins, Zelle, Larson and Kaplan representing the Government is considering whether yet another case should be launched against Carbide to stop a $1.42 billion (Rs 1,680 crore) sale of its highly profitable batteries section. The Government fears that the sale may be the first of many steps by which the corporation reduces itself to a shell because of the complicated financial commitments it has made to its shareholders to ward off a potential take-over last year by a chemical company, GAF Corporation. If this happens, Carbide may well plead difficulties in paying out a sizeable compensation.

As it is, Carbide plans to sell two other sections of its consumer products unit and another $1 billion of assets, including its 61-acre corporate headquarters which it would lease back as office space. Independent corporate analysts have said that the company's speciality—chemical businesses—may also be sold. The money from the sale of assets would be paid out to shareholders as a one-time dividend, cash that might otherwise go to the Bhopal victims. And if the company is left with nothing other than its losing chemical businesses, it may have to keep selling assets every year to pay out dividends.

Clearly, such moves will have major implications for UCC's claimants. The latest balance sheet of the company puts its assets at $8.639 billion (Rs 10,350 crore), substantially lower than the earlier $10 billion figure. After taking into account its debts, the capitalised value of the company is estimated at $5.489 billion (Rs 6,600 crore)—well below the earlier figure of $7.198 billion. Some experts feel that the company's financial position as reflected in its debt-capitalisation ratio is better than the industry average. But experts hired by the Government, who have scrutinised the company's records, fear that after disinvestment the market value of its assets may be just $657 million.

What the Government wants to ensure is that cash stays in the UCC coffers. But so complex is the functioning of such a gigantic multinational that opinion over its future and finances is divided even among the government's own lawyers. According to Senior Counsel D.S. Sastri, the company has incurred debts which will leave it "lean as a stick". But Michael Ciresi, the Government's attorney in Keenan's court, says that although Carbide's asset base is being eroded, he prefers to wait and watch the sale transactions before taking action.

When the Government does move the court in this matter, it will do so under the New York law on fraudulent conveyances. If the court accepts, it can stop the distribution of special dividends. The money can then be kept in a corporate fund if their distribution is made tantamount to defrauding debtors.

So far, Judge Keenan has been using the carrot and stick method to get the parties to agree on an out-of-court settlement. He appointed a plantiff's executive committee and at the same time warned he would send the case to India if the Government remained inflexible on its $1 billion claim.

It isn't long to a decision on where the case is to be heard. Meanwhile, Bhopal is full of women suffering from all manner of internal complications, men who cannot go to work, children with seriously injured lungs. Hospitals are short on equipment, space and medical know-how for anything other than purely symptomatic treatment. Nor are funds available for creating alternative employment for those who cannot work. There is little time to be lost.

—SHAHNAZ ANKLESARIA AIYAR in Washington

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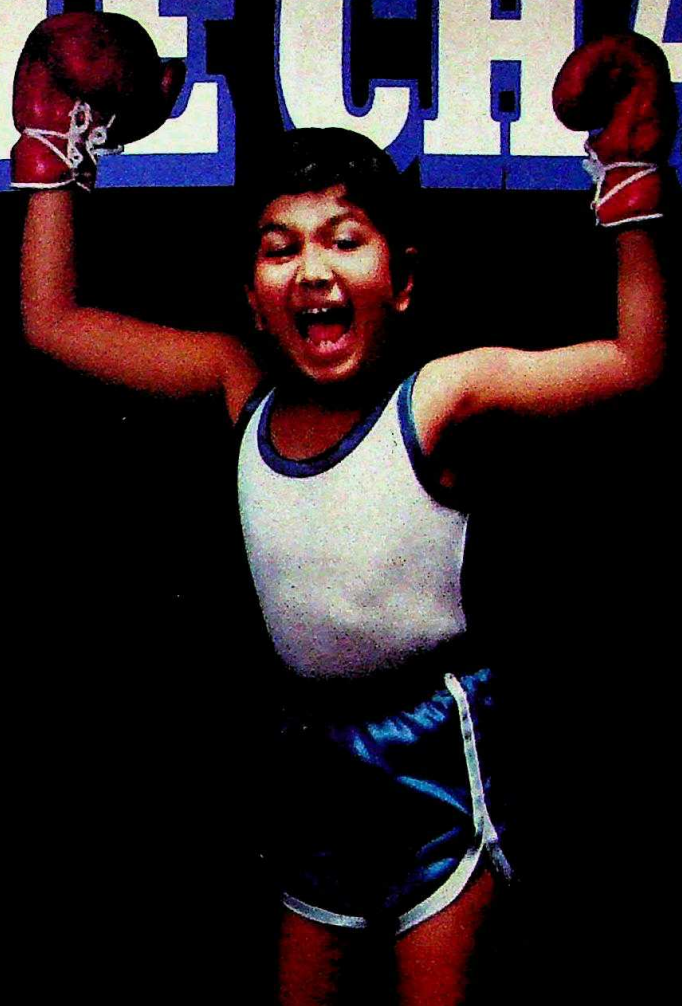
THE CHAMP



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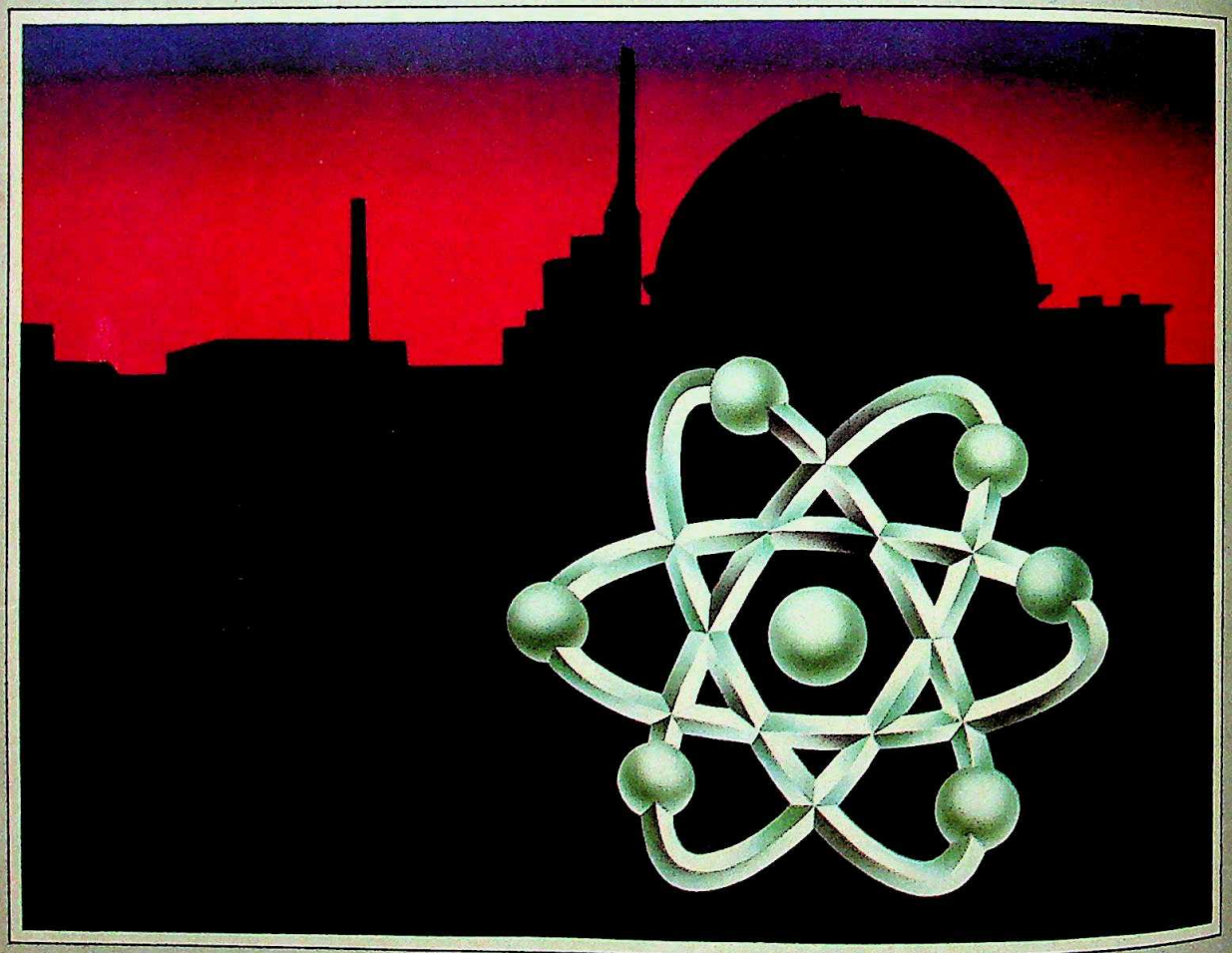

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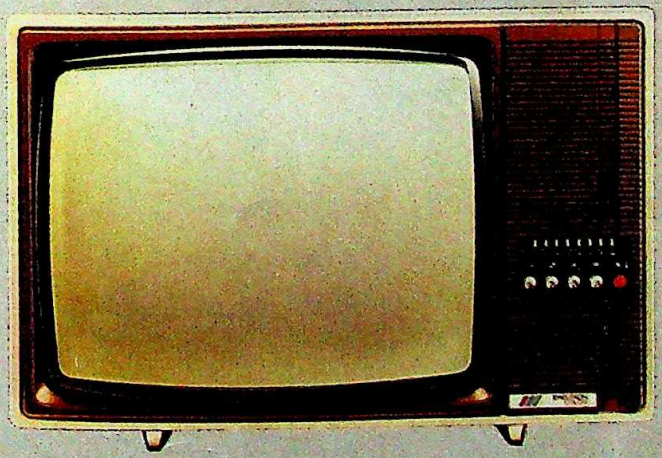

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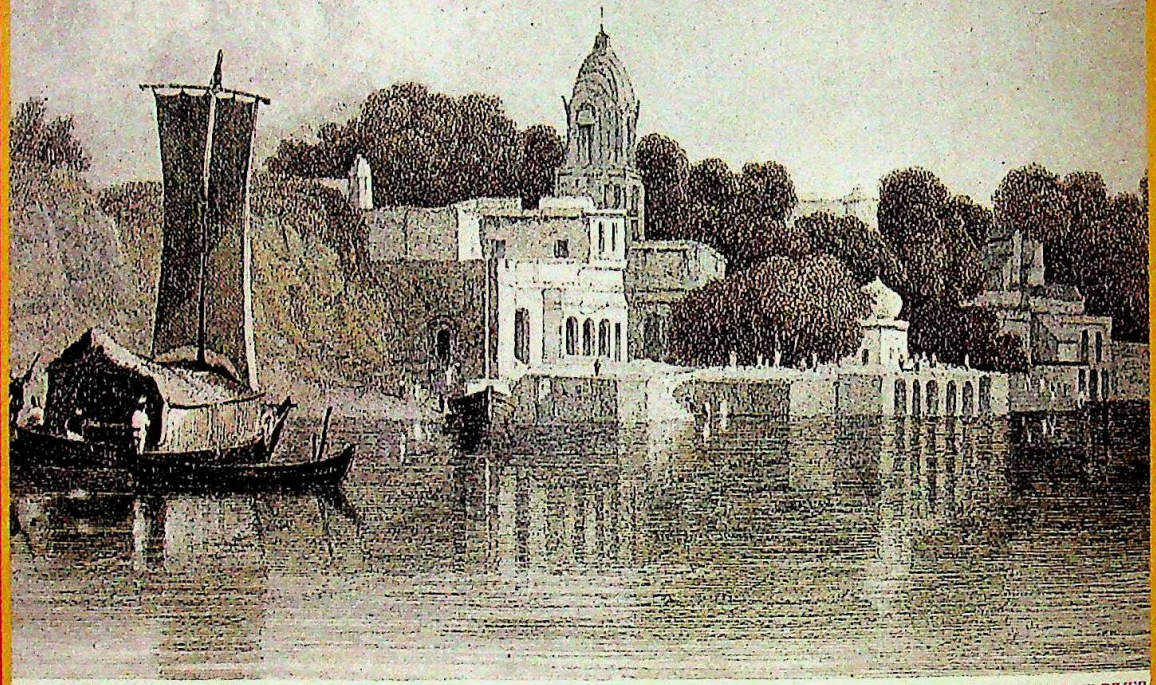

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CONSOLIDATING FUNDS

THE INDO-GULF fertiliser project has finally found a third promoter: the Birla-owned Gwalior Rayon. The Rs 725-crore joint sector venture between the Pradeshiya Industrial and Investment Corporation of Uttar Pradesh (PICUP) and an Arab firm, Gulf Consolidated Company for Services and Industries (GCCSI), ran into trouble when the Arab promoter fell behind in its contributions to the project's equity (INDIA TODAY, January 31). GCCSI had earlier suggested the Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation as a co-promoter, but this was not acceptable to the Government. Under the terms of the latest arrangement, the Birlas will contribute Rs 60 crore to the project. Together with GCCSI's earlier contribution of Rs 11 crore, that amounts to 40 per cent of the equity. PICUP is to shell out another 11 per cent, and the remaining 49 per cent is to be raised from the public. Reliance Industries is learnt to have also been in the race, but lost out to the Aditya Birla-run firm.

OPEN DOOR POLICY

REAL estate development in the capital, for many years a monopoly of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), will soon be thrown open to private real estate companies. A bill to permit this is in the works because official projections show a massive housing scarcity developing in Delhi over the next 15 years. The Regulation of Activities of Private Developers and Builders Bill is expected to confine the DDA's role to providing the infrastructure in residential areas, apart from imposing certain safeguards to ensure that private companies do not take people for a ride.

THINKING BIG

THE MODIS are gearing up to launch the Estee Lauder range of cosmetics. The Delhi-based group already exports the American cosmetics company's products to the Soviet Union but is now looking at the up-scale home market, with prices of its lipsticks, perfumes and face creams planned to be twice as expensive as competing products now on sale. The group has also been looking for a suitable collaboration with a Scotch whisky manufacturer for manufacturing whisky in India, and has settled on a small company in Scotland. Both ventures are still at a nascent stage, and the whisky collaboration is still to be finalised. Other group projects on the anvil include a plan to start the retail marketing of vanaspati in a big way.

DEFERRED PAYMENTS

THE GOVERNMENT has decided to clamp down on the financing of project exports to Iraq through the Exim Bank in future. The word in the project export industry is that this extreme step has been taken because recent official-level talks on settling Iraq's dues to Indian firms failed to arrive at a satisfactory settlement of the problem. Iraq owes 24 Indian companies over Rs 800 crore for work done in Iraq. Caught in a war with Iran, the Iraqi Government has deferred payments for more than two years under agreements arrived at annually with India, and has partially cleared some dues in the form of oil shipments. Despite the delayed payments, Indian companies have hung on in Iraq (most of the overseas construction contracts which the Exim Bank cleared last year were for projects in that country). If reports about the latest development are true, project export figures could plummet.

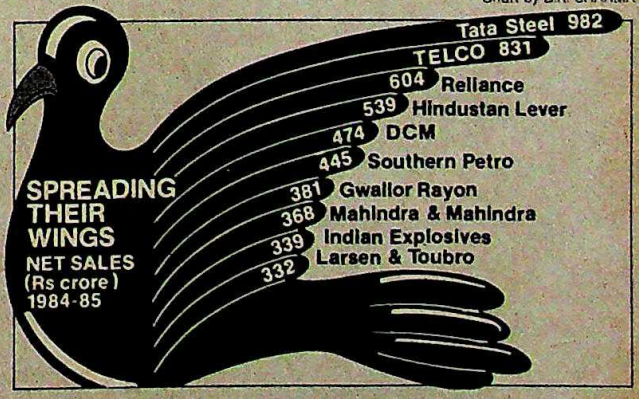
DECIDING VOTE

THE BATTLE to control Swadeshi Polytex has ended, with Rajaram Jaipuria and his nominees having emerged triumphant at the annual general meeting in March, but the Swarups have gone to court on the election results. The poll outcome has ousted Mahendra Swarup, chairman of Paharpur Cooling Towers, and his nominees from the board, although just before the shareholders' meeting they had added to their 17 per cent shareholding by buying another 9.7 per cent from Ashok Jaipuria and his associates. Ironically, Rajaram and the Swarups had joined hands last year to oust Ashok's father Sitaram from the company, but they soon fell out and began soliciting proxies.

TOP OF THE CHART

THE TATA Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) has emerged at the top in corporate rankings for 1984-85, heading the list on sales, profits, capital employed and net worth. The steel giant is followed by stablemate Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO), which is second in sales and

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



capital employed. Reliance Industries comes second on net worth and gross profits, ahead of TELCO on both counts. The rankings, done by *The Economic Times*, show the fourth place in sales going to Hindustan Lever, followed by DCM, Southern Petrochemicals, Gwalior Rayon, Mahindra & Mahindra, IEL, and Larsen & Toubro. The profitability rankings for the same period, after the top three industrial concerns, are held by Larsen & Toubro, Hindustan Lever, Associated Cement, Gujarat Narmada, Southern Petrochemicals, ITC and IEL respectively.

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STEEL AUTHORITY OF INDIA LTD.

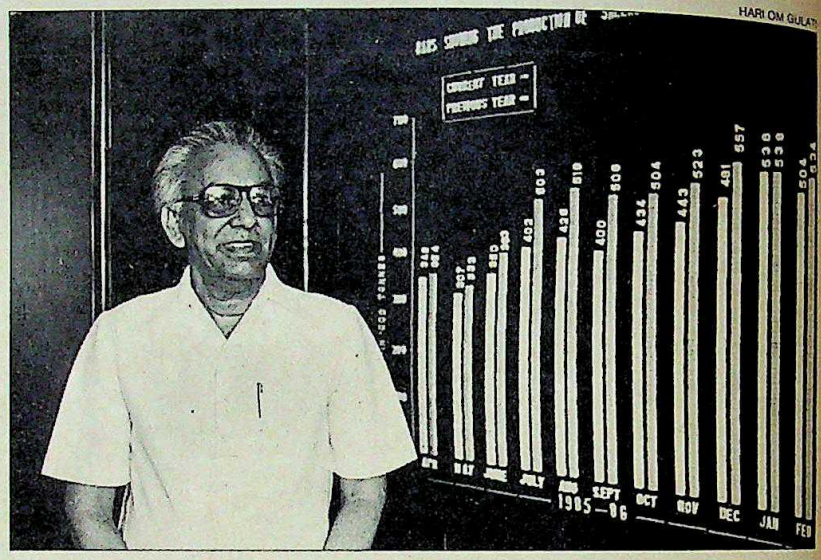
Dramatic Turnaround

SIX MONTHS ago, the Steel Ministry was fighting a furious battle for hiking steel prices, with both civil servants and the steel minister arguing that a price increase was essential if the Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) was not to end up in the red once again. Opposition to the proposal came from an unlikely quarter: SAIL itself. The newly-appointed chairman of the public sector behemoth, V. Krishnamurthy, argued that Indian steel prices were already too high, that prices had been raised earlier in the year, that SAIL's inefficiencies should not be passed on to the steel consumer through higher prices, and that profits were possible at the existing steel prices if the company improved its efficiency levels.

The price hike never went through. And vindication came last fortnight for Krishnamurthy when he announced that SAIL had closed 1985-86 with record profits of over Rs 150 crore (up from Rs 4 crore a year earlier), on an all-time high production of 6 million tonnes of saleable steel (up from 5.28 million tonnes).

Behind those figures lies the dramatic story of a major corporate turnaround. Ten months after taking charge, Krishnamurthy has steered the country's largest company around and achieved improvements in capacity utilisation, sharp savings on costs, lower raw material consumption per tonne of steel, better technical efficiency parameters, and a more disciplined labour force. Russi Mody, chairman of Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) and perhaps the doyen of the country's steel industry, told journalists recently: "Krishnamurthy is doing the best that can be done within the limitations of the public sector."

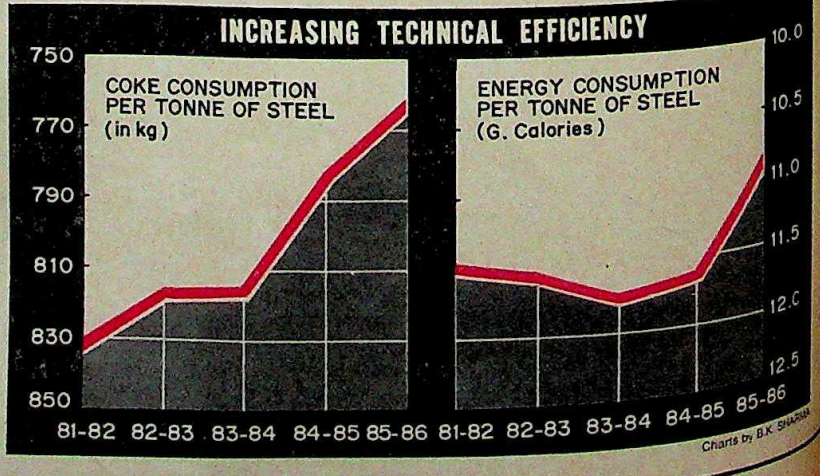
"I wandered through the steel plants," says the SAIL chairman, explaining how he brought about a change that has made everyone in the steel industry sit up and take notice. "And I talked to senior and junior executives, and workers. I must have met 25,000 or 30,000 people in small groups. The ideas and solutions came from them." These ideas he put together three months ago in a 13-page booklet called 'Priorities for Action' and mailed to every executive in the company. The booklet talks of virtually everything under the sun: teamwork, discipline, upkeep of equipment, attention to raw materials, quality, productivity, energy conservation, project implementation, customer satisfaction and a host of other issues. And the organisation seems to have taken them seriously, because the performance parameters have improved.



Krishnamurthy: man of stature

The purchase of raw material has not increased despite ingot steel production going up by 12 per cent, the rate of coke consumption has been reduced by 4 per cent, and energy consumption by 6 per cent. "There has been a tremendous thrust towards improving technological discipline, and these are the results," says Subrata Ray, managing director of the Rourkela steel plant. Rourkela's rate of coke consumption per tonne of hot metal used to be 850 kg a year ago; this has now fallen to 811 kg (the lowest ever), and the new year's target is 800 kg. The plant's inventory level has dropped from Rs 211 crore to Rs 160 crore, with the new year's target Rs 145 crore. Measures like these have helped turn in record profits after absorbing cost increases of Rs 165 crore due to higher coal prices and freight rates.

Meanwhile, members of the Association of Indian Engineering Industry (AIEI), SAIL's primary customers, say that it has become an active member of the association, listening to complaints, promising better delivery schedules and improved quality: another Krishnamurthy talking-point. Says AIEI Secretary-General Tarun Das: "We have never seen this kind of customer-orientation before in SAIL; everyone has noticed it."



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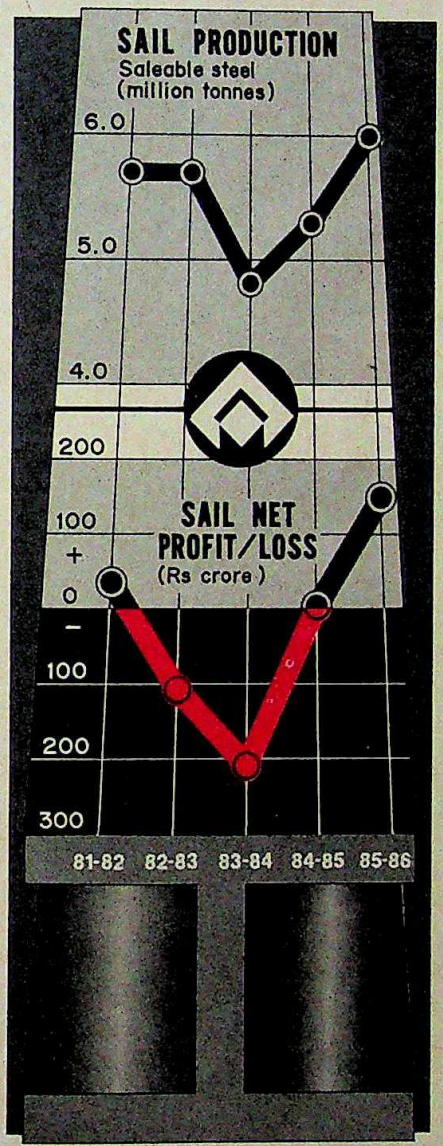
"The basic transformation that has taken place is in the way people think, in their attitude," says M.R.R.Nair, SAIL's director (personnel). "The feeling in SAIL used to be that we had done everything possible internally, and that the problems lay elsewhere, with the Government, with lack of funds and so on. But you will see from 'Priorities for Action' that everything that needs to be done has to be done internally." And certainly, there has been internal change: To take one example, despite being saddled with thousands of surplus employees, the company's annual overtime bill used to run up to Rs 45 crore. Krishnamurthy ordered that all overtime should be stopped in SAIL's loss-making steel plants from January, and abolished altogether in even the profitable plants from April. There have been murmurs of protest, and a one-month strike at the alloy steel plant in Durgapur when the company refused to hire extra hands despite the plant's capacity being raised by 60 per cent. But Krishnamurthy has refused to bend, and the orders have stuck. He now says, "everyone said the Ganges would be on fire the next day, but nothing happened."

IN ANOTHER example, he found that the Durgapur steel plant was burning expensive furnace oil because it wasn't getting enough gas. But this cost an extra Rs 40 crore. Krishnamurthy examined the details and revised the plant's furnace oil budget from one lakh tonnes to 60,000 tonnes. The saving runs into crores.

Success has brought confidence to a demoralised organisation which, before Krishnamurthy came on the scene, had seen his predecessor being kept on ad hoc extensions of tenure on an almost daily basis, with upstart joint secretaries in the Steel Ministry summoning the head of the country's largest company to their offices. But everyone knows that the new man has direct access to the prime minister, and things have changed. Says K.R. Gangameswaran, managing director of the Bhilai steel plant: "The greatest thing which Krishnamurthy has done is that the Government has faith in him. So people down the line can benefit from the new confidence. Now we can take decisions that we couldn't earlier."

He has a point. SAIL used to have little control over major decisions concerning its future: the Government used to decide on sources of equipment supply, hand down orders on expansion projects, determine prices and dictate who should be supplied how much steel. But Krishnamurthy is a man of stature. In the past he has been chairman of Bharat Heavy Electricals and Maruti Udyog, and secretary to the Governments in the Department of Heavy Industry. And he has clearly been able to give the company greater control over its own destiny.

Nevertheless, it hasn't been a smooth ride over the past 10 months. Krishnamurthy ran into some flak with his proposal to induct people from the private



sector TISCO and elsewhere on to the SAIL board and had to beat a retreat. And some of the meetings with trade unions have been stormy: he was in the middle of one such session last fortnight over the new year's production target of 7.2 million tonnes (an increase of 20 per cent over 1985-86).

The 61-year-old Krishnamurthy, who is on a two-year contract that expires in May next year, nevertheless has his eyes on the future. He talks of shifting the company's production increasingly to high-value, sophisticated types of steel products so as to respond to market changes, taking production up from 6 million tonnes to 10 million tonnes in three years, and then raising it further to 15 million tonnes "with modest additional investment of about Rs 1,000 crore". That money, he says, can be generated internally by SAIL if it handles its affairs well.

But projects have been delayed in the past for want of money and because of poor project management. So Krishnamurthy has "completely changed project management", revamped the project monitoring system, appointed a vice-chairman exclusively in charge of projects, and talks of "changing SAIL's record of not completing projects in time and within the stipulated cost." That is a formidable task, given the fact that steel projects in India have taken a decade and more to complete (compared to four years in Japan). But he is confident that he will be as successful here as he has been in the case of improving SAIL's day-to-day operations.

The money is not easily available, however, because the seventh five-year Plan has not provided enough for the company's expansion and modernisation plans. So Krishnamurthy intends raising between Rs 800 crore and Rs 1,000 crore internally in each of the next three years to finance projects. This is crucial, for most of SAIL's plants are a quarter century old and reaching vintage status (the average age of a Japanese steel plant is no more than 10 or 12 years).

Whatever Krishnamurthy may or may not have done in the last 10 months, he has not set his sights low. He talks now of making every plant in the company run to full capacity ("The annual production targets will be the same as the rated capacity"), of changing the organisation's culture, and of tapping new steel-making technology which needs natural gas by locating some production units in West Asia.

With substantial achievements already under his belt, the ambitious talk of the future sounds credible. But in a sense, the turnaround at SAIL has just begun. With outdated plants, under-utilised capacity, excess manpower, a poor project completion record and efficiency norms that even today are nowhere near the best in the world, the company has a long way to go. But for the first time in a long while, the mood in SAIL is one of optimism that the problems can be tackled.

—T.N. NINAN

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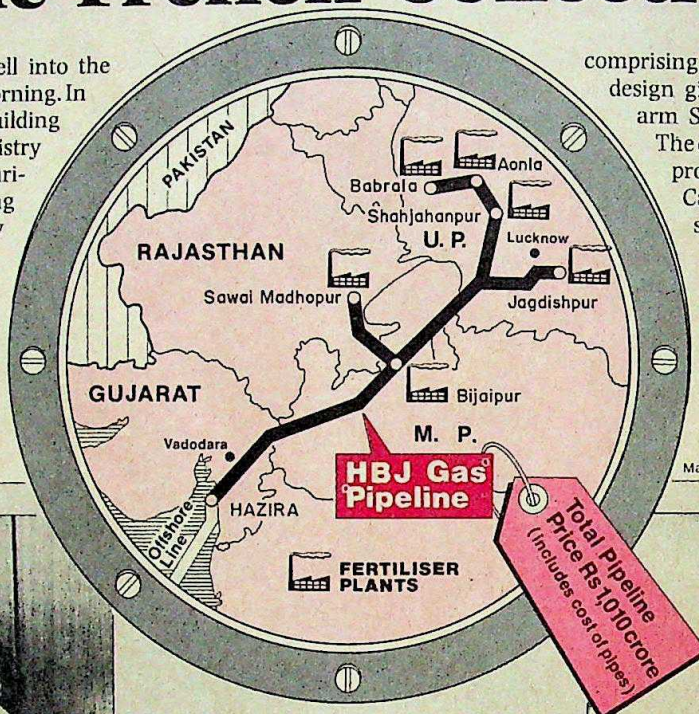
HBJ PIPELINE

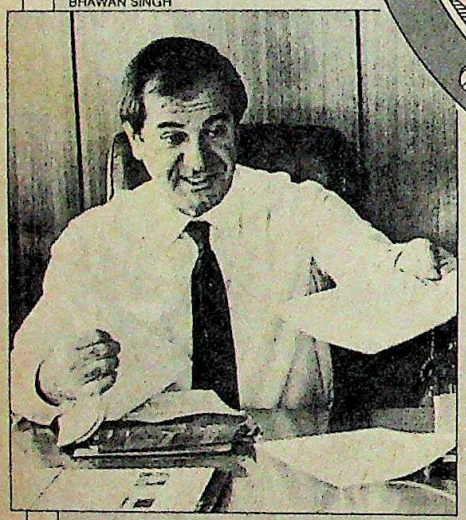
The French Collection

THE LIGHTS burned well into the early hours of Friday morning. In the red sandstone building that houses the Finance Ministry in the capital, senior officials furiously pored over a daunting array of price and currency figures. Several hours and long calculations later, the explosive file was forwarded to Finance Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh before making its final move to the Minister of State for Petroleum Chandrashekhar Singh's, room 1.5 km away. Eventually, on Sunday April 6, a top Petroleum Ministry bureaucrat placed a phone call to an office that adjoins a five-star hotel in the capital.



Map by B.K. SHARMA

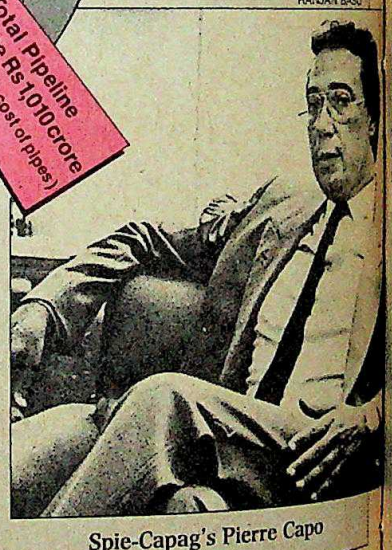
BHAWAN SINGH



Snamprogetti's Ottavio Quattrocchi

The Spie-Capag consortium bid Rs 92 crore less than Snamprogetti to bag the contract; but failure to meet the tight time schedule could make it a bitter victory.

RANJAN BASU



Spie-Capag's Pierre Capo

That call, to Pierre Capo, representative in Delhi of Spie-Capag, ended months of cliff-hanging drama, rumour-mongering, public smear campaigns, official procrastination, policy reversals, allegations of all manner of wrong-doing, and rang down the curtain on one of the most convoluted government decisions in recent memory: the award of the contract to build the 1,730 km-long Hazira-Bijaypur-Jagdishpur (HBJ) pipeline.

"We are very glad to have won, very proud," said Spie-Capag Vice-Chairman Jean Monville who had flown in hours earlier to be in on the final act. But Ottavio Quattrocchi, Snamprogetti's long-time representative in India who had intensely lobbied for the project, declined to talk to the press, saying only that "the Government has taken a decision in the country's best interests". Quattrocchi also shot off a telex message to the French congratulating them on their victory.

That victory was the outcome of the French-Japanese consortium's price, the package of loans and soft credit it offered, and the official assessment made in day-long sessions of the foreign exchange outgo. Spie-Capag and its Japanese partners Toyo Engineering Corporation and Nippon Kokkan (NKK) had bid around Rs 760 crore, Rs 92 crore, less than its major rival, the Snamprogetti-led consortium comprising the Italian engineering and design giant itself, its pipeline laying arm Saipem, and Dodsal of India. The other two consortia in the race proved either too expensive (the Canadian-French combine consisting of consortium leader Nova and Alberta Corporation, Majestic Contractors and the French firm Entrepose) or short on soft credit (the Mexican firm Condux, Brown & Root and India's Essar).

Last fortnight, however, it looked as if the official caution had paid off. Pointedly referring to the delays that have dogged the award of the contract, Singh told Parliament: "At current exchange rates there will be a savings of over Rs 100 crore." He is right in one sense. The bill for the entire pipeline was originally placed at Rs 1,700 crore. But on re-evaluation, this was reduced to a realistic Rs 1,100 crore. Last year, when the project was offered on a turn-key basis and the contract for the pipes, valued at over Rs 320 crore, hived off, the cost plunged to around Rs 780 crore. It will now wind up around Rs 715 crore, excluding reduced imports of certain items.

What Singh failed to mention was that the first 640-km stretch from Hazira in Gujarat to Bijaypur in Madhya Pradesh

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and the second 554-km stretch to Jagdishpur in Uttar Pradesh were supposed to be ready by June to feed, eventually, six fertiliser plants coming up along the route. Had the schedule been kept, there would have been a considerable saving in fertiliser imports which cost Rs 1,300 crore last year.

While that assessment may not be universally shared in official quarters, few would disagree that the brouhaha over the HBJ project has been unprecedented. The latest storm was triggered off towards the end of last year after price bids in the second tendering had been opened. At around Rs 764 crore, the French combine had emerged as the lowest bidder. But in early November, the Italian ambassador to India took the unusual step of writing to Singh questioning the qualifications of the Japanese members of the French consortium. Subsequently, Quattrocchi wrote to the Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL), the public sector company that was set up to run the pipeline, along the same lines. The charges included:

► NKK did not qualify because the two pipeline laying contracts in Japan that the company cited were city, not cross country pipelines as stipulated in the tender.

► NKK took 9 years to complete one of the Japanese pipeline projects.

► NKK had been in the running when the HBJ job was being awarded on a piecemeal basis. It had then listed 98 km of experience for a project in Thailand, but when the project turned turnkey switched the figure to 100 km. (The tender specified that as the minimum stretch that would be taken into account to assess previous experience).

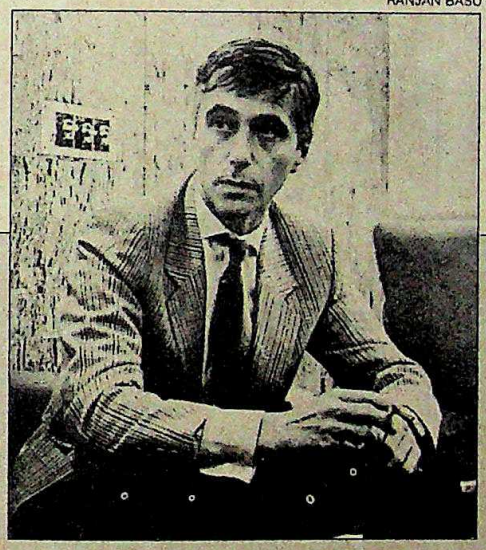
Certainly, these were serious charges and the Government appointed a committee under Cabinet Secretary P.K. Kaul to look into the allegations. But GAIL was furnished with ready explanations for the charges. NKK's Japanese client wrote on December 5 that the pipeline concerned was, indeed, cross country.

The French also claimed that the project involved 20,000 km of pipelines and so it took nine years to build them. The French however had no ready explanation for the third charge, but GAIL wrote to the Petroleum Ministry that "NKK was qualified earlier also when we had called exclusive tenders for laying of pipeline on a piecemeal basis".

The Kaul Committee, whose report is confidential, is believed to have gone into the charges in great detail and given a clean chit to the Japanese. Even so, it was touch and go for the French-led consortium. They had an initial price edge when the price bids were opened last November, but lost ground because there was a substantial yen element in their bid. With the yen soaring, the margin between them and the Italians was sharply cut to around Rs 42 crore. The whole affair was by now so tightly wrapped up in claims and counter-claims that in spite of extending yet again a publicly announced deadline for the decisions, it called on March 27 for yet another round of bids valid till April 7. The only question that now remains is whether the victors, already pressed for time, will be able to complete the job on time. If not, it will be a bitter victory.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

RANJAN BASU



Monville: satisfied

JEAN MONVILLE

Bitter Fight

JEAN MONVILLE, vice-chairman of Spie-Capag, the French leader of the winning consortium, flew in from Paris for the final negotiations, and spoke to Principal Correspondent PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI *after the contract was in the bag. Excerpts:*

On the final negotiations:

We were invited over the telephone on Sunday, April 5 to the Petroleum Ministry for discussions. Government officials then asked us to offer a last discount on prices. We had a day's notice. After contacting our partners and suppliers, we agreed to cut our quotation of $606 million (Rs 727 crore) to $570 million (Rs 684 crore).

On being asked to quote again:

We were both disappointed and satisfied—disappointed because we were the lowest, and satisfied because this would be the quickest way to end the whole thing. It was our bad luck that the yen rose, but the French Government would have acted similarly.

On the questions raised about the competence of his Japanese partners:

Except for the statements about Nippon Kokkan, most of the attacks were directed at people in government who were making the technical choices. An official of the Nova and Alberta Corporation (the leader of the Canadian consortium) had attacked Spie-Capag in a newspaper in the United States. We told him that we would sue him, but the matter has now been resolved. To put it in a nice way, some of our competitors were a bit too tough and we did feel bitter at times, but their reaction in the end was very sporting. Snamprogetti sent us a telex message congratulating us and wishing us all the best for the future.

On the role Indian firms will play:

BHEL has submitted proposals for the cathodic protection system (equipment to ensure that the pipes do not corrode). We are prepared to work with them. But we cannot accept the TCIL proposal on the telecom and telemetry systems. They have a collaboration with Japan Radio Equipment. TCIL will be in the picture if they sign up with a French company. Our French loans are tied to buying equipment in France.

On the delay in awarding the contract and downstream time problems:

It is quite normal for clients to take their time to decide. As for us, we have made a commitment that we will complete the job on time. We will start preparing now, but the actual pipeline laying will begin in September, after the monsoons. The consortium will simultaneously take up four separate stretches of the first portion of the pipeline and complete a total of 6 km a day.

On penalties for failure:

We will lose face and credibility. Secondly, we will have to pay a penalty of 10 per cent of the total amount.

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SOUTH OF DELHI

Sprawling Enclaves

ALONG much of the 30 km-long stretch of macadam from Delhi to Gurgaon in neighbouring Haryana, billboards tout "exquisite" residential colonies, "luxury" homes and "deluxe" apartments. Closer to the Haryana town, the hoardings get bigger, loudly proclaiming what has been evident for months: the hottest real estate action in the north lies south of the capital.

Lured by the smell of big money, nearly every private construction company worth its salt is heading for the border town, scrambling for huge tracts of land, forking out breathtaking prices that spiral upwards with every passing month, blitzing the home-hungry with media advertisements and hauling them in vans and buses to sites spread over nearly 4,000 acres of land.

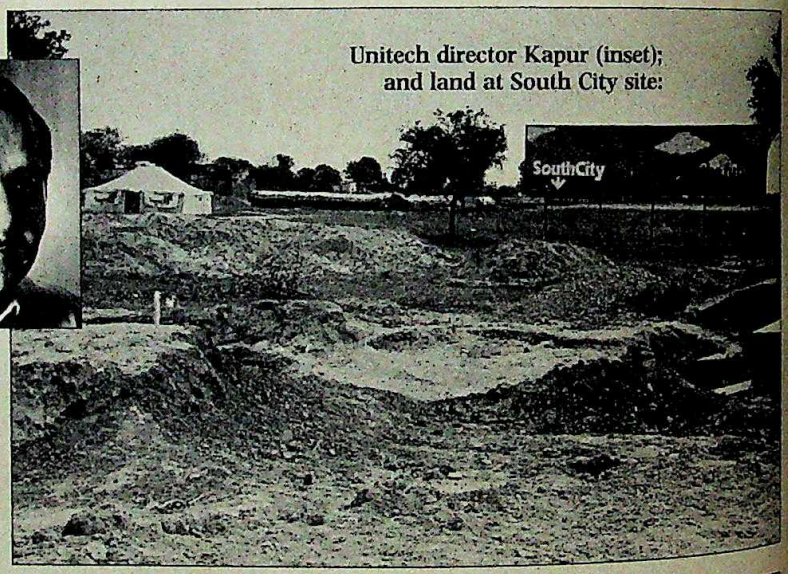
The players in this cash-churning drama include both the big daddies of the real estate business and a ragtag of smaller firms. DLF Universal and the Ansal group are establishing several townships on a total of nearly 2,500 acres. Utility Builders and Leasing India, an engineering and construction firm, is hawking plots in a 323-acre stretch in the foothills of the Aravalli range, construction company Unitech has jumped in with a 130-acre project called South City, and Gulmohar Estates, launched by former ITC chairman Ajit Haksar and associate Rakesh Aggarwal, is offering deluxe apartments and bungalows on a 23-acre plot, at prices that match those in Manhattan.

"Before 1981, no one had heard of Gurgaon. But everyone is furiously rushing to the area now," says Gurgaon's Deputy Commissioner Sanjay Kothari. The latest to do so is a new venture called Shaandar Holiday Resorts, which bought 500 acres of hilly terrain last month. The goal: a camping resort for the capital's week-enders. Farms are in too. The Taj group of hotels has one, while Khosla Properties' Gold Mine Farms is hawking eucalyptus farms and orchards 40 km from Delhi.

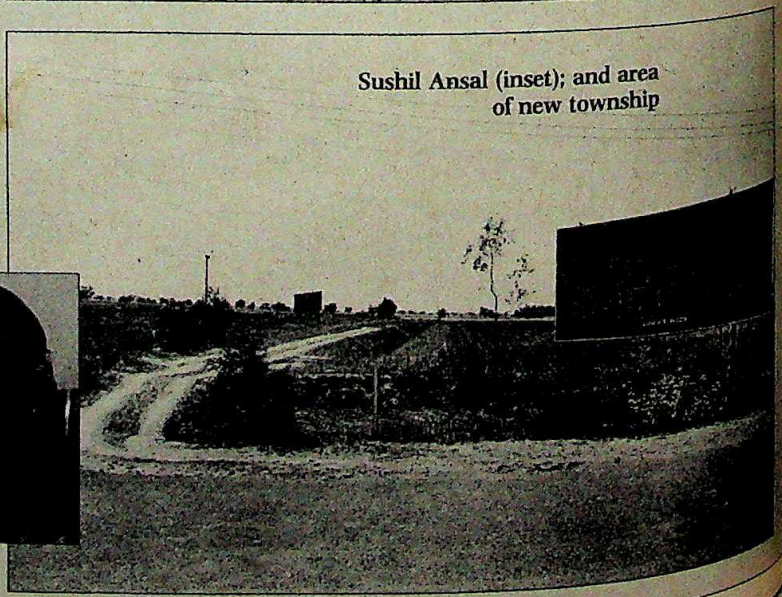
If all manner of real estate developers are flocking to Gurgaon, the reasons are evident enough. Haryana has no urban ceiling law and allows private builders to lay out residential colonies, unlike in nearby Delhi. Again, unlike Delhi, land is readily available in Gurgaon. As Sushil Ansal, managing director of the Ansal group argues: "We have no choice but to go there." K.P. Singh, managing director of DLF Universal, in turn, points out that the capital has inevitably to expand southwards because the density of population is low there, whereas Delhi's industrialised northern fringes are congested. He adds that a new highway now being built will shorten the commuting time to the capital. Finally, south Delhi is chic. And as Satya Sheel of Shaandar Holiday Resorts puts it, "Gurgaon is respectable because it's to the south of Delhi. Companies are building for the rich."

That's certainly true, for the *hoi polloi* have little chance of coughing up the asking rates, which in Gulmohar Estates vary from a substantial Rs 8.7 lakh for a two-bedroom apartment to a horrendous Rs 40 lakh for a plush garden bungalow, the tag including charges for maintenance, five television channels, phone connections, water and power on tap 24

Photographs by HARI OM GULATI



Unitech director Kapur (inset); and land at South City site:



Sushil Ansal (inset); and area of new township

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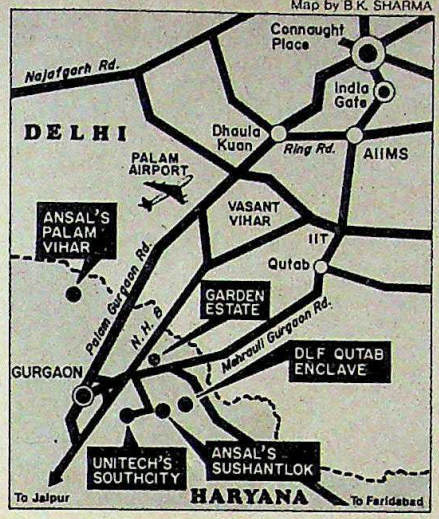
hours a day in a state where these are in short supply. The Ansal group's rates vary from Rs 1.05 lakh to Rs 4.89 lakh for plots bought on instalment payments, while the bill for houses ranges from Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 9.85 lakh. These rates are cheaper than those in the capital, where land prices go up to as high as Rs 5,000 per square metre. But Gurgaon is hick, and has little to say for itself other than its proximity to south Delhi.

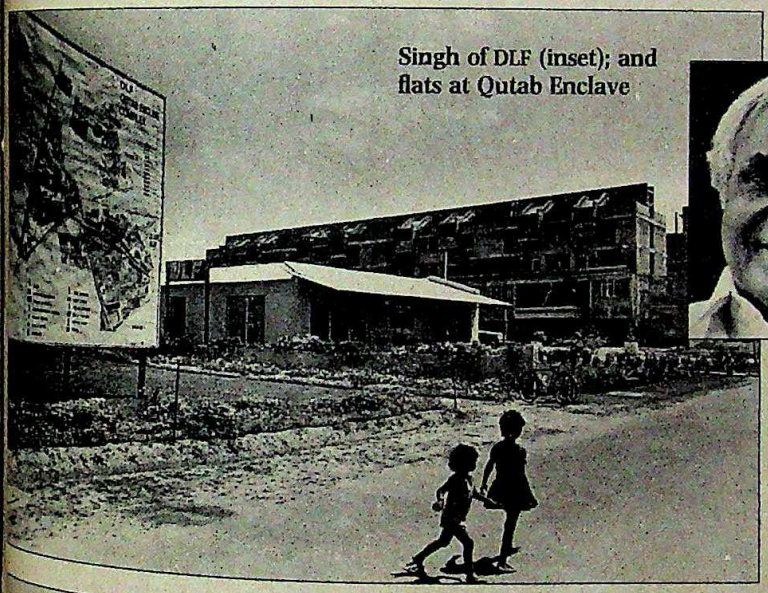
Nevertheless, the plots on offer have been snapped up eagerly. DLF found the response so overwhelming that what started out as a 60-acre project has grown to 1,600 acres, with plans to acquire another 300 acres. Ansal has expanded similarly and Utility claims to have sold 79 per cent of the plots it had on offer. Unitech Director R. Kapur say that over a third of the 1,500 plots the company is offering have been sold since they hit the market in mid-February, and Haksar claims that Gulmohar Estates has received 6,000 enquiries, 200 of them from abroad.

Map by B.K. SHARMA



If the response has been overwhelming, buyers are clearly banking on the localities becoming the hottest properties in the region in a decade or so. A surgeon based in Saudi Arabia said that he preferred to invest in land rather than deposit the cash in a bank. The surgeon already owns a house in Delhi and has now bought a plot of land near Gurgaon.

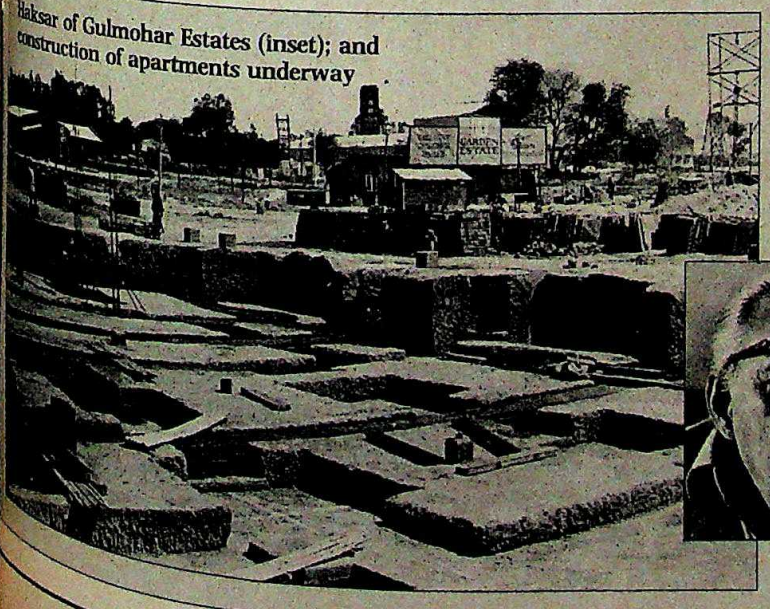
The doctor is dead right in his calculations: land prices in the area have zoomed over ten-fold in six years. When DLF first tested the Gurgaon waters in 1980, it shelled out some Rs 30,000 an acre. Barely 18 months later, another developer forked out about Rs 1 lakh. Now the rate is almost Rs 4 lakh, and prices per square metre from the ultimate buyers can reach Rs 25 lakh per acre.



Singh of DLF (inset); and flats at Qutab Enclave

With such prices, the profits must be handsome for the developers. Although the Haryana Government has imposed a ceiling on post-tax profits of 15 per cent, this works out to a tidy sum on projects running to Rs 100 crore or more. Besides, as Housing and Urban Development Corporation Chairman S.K. Sharma cautiously suggests: "There are always hidden profits in real estate." Private firms predictably deny this, saying that chartered accountants certify profits and that statements must be submitted to the state Government.

But it is also true that the Haryana Government requires 45 per cent of privately-developed plots to be reserved for middle and lower income groups on a no-profit, no-loss basis; the remaining 55 per cent can be sold on the free market and it is this segment which firms are eyeing, and non-resident Indians form a part of the prize catch. Non-residents have bought 40 per cent of Utility Builders' plots, while they account for some 20 per cent of DLF's land sales. Gulmohar Estates and Utility are also vetting applications to ensure that neighbours will be *pucca* enough. Says S.M. Pande, managing director of Utility Builders: "We have been trying to invite people to apply for plots. It's very important who



Haksar of Gulmohar Estates (inset); and construction of apartments underway

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the neighbour will be."

Developers such as DLF's Singh argue that the official obligation on the industry to provide plots at lower rates jacks up corporate break-even points. Says Singh: "In our case, the break-even figure is nearly Rs 400 per square yard." Then, Haryana charges Rs 60 per square yard for the development of infrastructure.

But high prices are clearly not a limiting factor; indeed, they have probably contributed to the boom by helping keep out the *hoi polloi*. So the 4,000 acres now being developed will support a population of nearly 2 lakh, almost equivalent to the present population of Gurgaon town. The town's population by the turn of the century is expected to be 7.5 lakh.

But the Haryana Government has no complaints: as far as the state authorities are concerned, private companies are putting into development the cash that the Government does not have. But as an official put it: "We welcome the role played by private firms, but there should be some limit to this. If there's none, they will go on expanding."

Questions are also raised about infrastructure. Gurgaon faces a serious water shortage. The Government is toying with the idea of a canal to supply water from the Yamuna to the area, but nothing has been done so far. Many of the new colonies have deep tubewells that should help tide over the water problem for six or seven years, but after that residents could be in trouble.

As is inevitable when land is involved, charges of malfeasance are being aired. Pande of Utility talks of having to grease official palms to get things done quickly. And he takes a swipe at rivals by suggesting that firms are riding the south Delhi wave too heavily. Says Pande: "DLF calls one of its colonies Qutab Enclave while an Ansal area is named Palam Vihar. Both the Qutab Minar and Palam are in Delhi, and the names suggest that the colonies are in Delhi, which is quite untrue."

But more serious charges have also been raised. After dithering for years, the Centre launched its National Capital Region (NCR) plan some months ago to chart the future growth of the area around the capital. But private firms are pre-empting the official plans for the area. Says R.S. Sethi, the Delhi Development Authority's land commissioner: "Private firms are presenting a *fait accompli* to the planners."

Still, according to Urban Develop-

HARYANA

Rural Uplift

RAM NARAIN is sitting pretty. Late last year, the 72-year-old Narain and his four brothers sold 13.5 acres of land on the outskirts of Gurgaon, near Delhi, to a real estate company for a cool Rs 55 lakh. The firm struck a deal with the brothers: in return for letting it keep the money as a deposit, it would pay them 12 per cent interest, less tax. So the retired army havildar now gets a cheque for Rs 9,000 every month.

Earlier, farmer Chander Bhan, 52, also peddled land to the same firm—four acres for more than Rs 10 lakh. With the cash, he bought 23 acres some 25 km from Gurgaon, where land is far cheaper, and built a farmhouse to boot. And some two years ago, Jagmal Singh Yadav went into business after hawking eight acres of family property for Rs 10 lakh. The former government head clerk's share of the family bounty came to Rs 2.5 lakh.

Jagmal Singh Yadav went into business after hawking eight acres of family property for Rs 10 lakh.

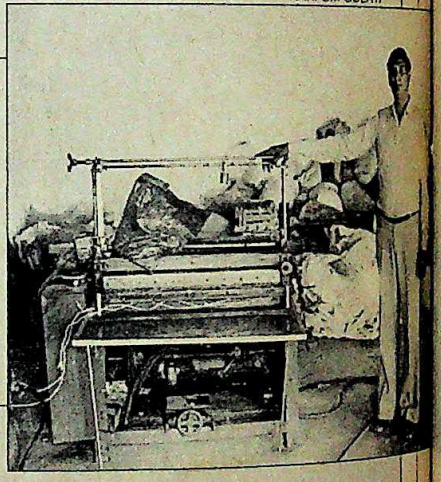
Narain, Bhan and Yadav are among the scores who have hit the jackpot in the dusty villages that skirt Gurgaon. With real estate developers scrambling for land in Gurgaon's vicinity, many villagers have made small fortunes overnight, the amounts depending on land sites and the time of sale. Says Chander Bhan's lawyer son Nawal Singh Yadav: "Almost every family has sold land valued at more than Rs 1 lakh.

Remarkably enough, prosperity has not radically altered rural lifestyles. Villages like Sirhaul do not bristle with television antennas, and cars do not roar down their narrow village lanes. A few like Rampal Singh, a member of the Sirhaul panchayat, have spent some money on improving their homes but many have not.

The real estate boom has come as a windfall for brokers too. Some of them charge a brokerage of up to 2 per cent for each land deal. Ram Anand, for instance, is reputed to have risen considerably in the world since the first real estate firm came scouting for land, and now owns a car and a jeep. Anand himself, however, downplays his wealth (he says that he bought his vehicles from the proceeds of a small inheritance).

The last is true, but it is also true that nosy strangers are regarded with suspicion. For affluence has brought in its wake huge tax liabilities. Lawyer Yadav narrates the tale of a man who sold land for around Rs 80 lakh but had to cough up over Rs 30 lakh to the Government.

HARI OM GULATI



If the tax department is detested, another arm of the Government is equally unpopular. A few years ago, the Haryana Urban Development Authority acquired rural land on which to build houses, but market rates have dramatically soared since then. So several villagers are sore that they have had to stand by while more fortunate neighbours make their pile. The stage would therefore seem set for the social tensions inevitable when incomes change dramatically. That these have not developed so far in the midst of this rural ferment is a tribute to the equanimity of the Haryanvi villager.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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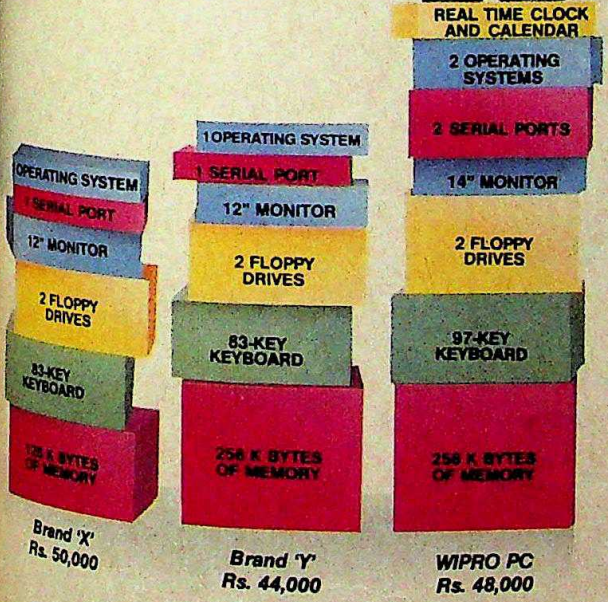

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recent Secretary Ramesh Chandra, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh had raised with the Centre the question of decisions they had already taken before the NCR plan came into force. "The states had argued that the regional plans should be such that any previous expenditure doesn't become infructuous. To some extent, this was conceded. Even so, the NCR board will examine whether these things fit into the overall pattern. If anything radically stands in the way of coordinated planning, we will consider what action should be taken." But the fact remains that with such large colonies coming up for the well-heeled, the Government is unlikely to suggest any real changes to the decisions of private companies.

If the NCR plan isn't a serious question mark over the new colonies coming up, water might well be, as well as the fact that many of them were started half a decade ago, and might take as much longer before they become habitable. But in the ultimate analysis, the hard fact is that Qutab Enclave, Palam Vihar, Gulmohar Estates, South City, Gold Mine Farms, Shaandar Holiday Resorts and all the other about-to-bloom schemes around Gurgaon make for the biggest real estate boom north of Bombay.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

DELHI

Posh Plans

THE VISION is breathtaking: expressways and flyovers cutting a swathe through the skyline, a subway-cum-surface rail system that can disgorge up to 20,000 commuters an hour into the heart of town, three major new settlements, each designed to accommodate one million people. By the turn of the century, the stately capital that Edwin Landseer Lutyens built will have become a megapolis, one of the world's 27 super cities with populations of over 10 million.

These are ambitious plans, but ambition seems set to turn into reality. Last month, the Delhi Urban Arts Commission, a watchdog agency for preserving the city's heritage, submitted a 200-page report to the Central Government that endorses a blueprint prepared by Delhi Administration nearly a year ago. Titled *Delhi 2001*, it will go to the Cabinet in a few weeks.

Both documents plan a vaster city with more of everything—people, housing, a rapid transit system and oases of serenity in a sea of frenetic activity. By the year 2001, Delhi will house over 12 million people, 4 million more than now, with all the accoutrements that a bigger population calls for—15 new telephone exchanges and 21 hospitals, three new university campuses and 20 flyovers, and much more. Three virgin land areas (*see map*) of around 60 sq km each may be developed to house an additional 3 million people, and a million more squeezed into undeveloped parts of the city. And metropolitan limits will stretch from Gurgaon in Haryana and NOIDA in Uttar Pradesh.

Linking much of this will be a surface metre gauge rail network to be constructed around the existing ring rail. The commission also favours a 15-km long subway. The bill for this: a daunting Rs 1,050 crore or more. The lines will end up close to the bustling central business district in the heart of town. This means that some of Delhi's major arteries will be dug up for years.

While most of Delhi will make fast tracks, the walled city will move along at a sedentary pace. Out will go rickshaws, handcarts, buses and cars—and a number of the area's 1.5 lakh small traders and businessmen who, town planners believe, have contributed to the congestion by shifting in. In will come that old Calcutta faithful, the tram. Says a senior Delhi Development Authority (DDA) town planning official: "The walled city will be basically meant for pedestrians, with trams to ferry them around."

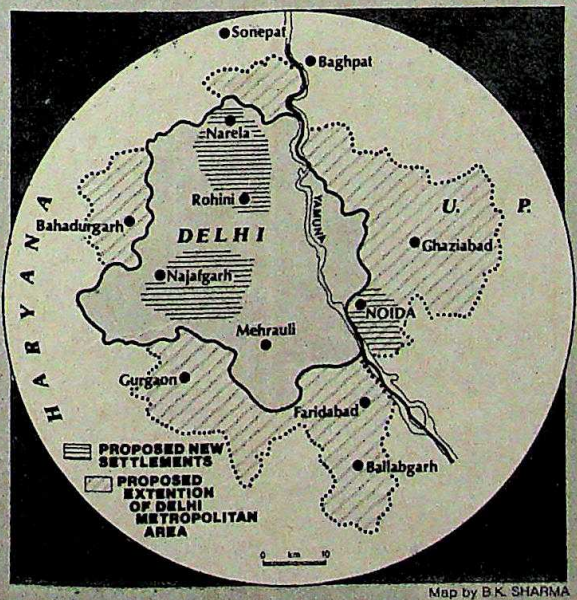
And the Yamuna river-front may be just such another big promenade. The river is to be spruced up and confined to a 550-metre channel. Delhi Administration would like to hand over the 8,000 acres of land thus freed to businessmen, but the commission has loftier goals in mind: three new university campuses, or the development of a Venice-like waterfront for the pursuit of leisure.

But flyovers, rapid transit systems, promenades and buildings call for money—a hefty Rs 13,000 crore at 1981 prices, and perhaps double by the time projects go on stream. And this excludes the cost of the underground. Where will the cash come from?

The DDA reckons that the private sector will fork out 70 per cent of the money, directly or indirectly: businessmen will build factories and residents houses and the DDA will recover its investments in similar buildings from the private sector. Also, the Administration hopes to get a few hundred crore rupees by selling commercial property. Finally, the Central Government will fork out the remaining 30 per cent of the funds required.

"Spread over a 15-year period, Rs 4,900 crore is not very much," the DDA official argues. Adds A.P. Kanvinde, one of the five architects of the commission's report: "If we are prepared to enter the 21st century, we must find the money." This is equally true of the three other metropolitan cities, but will money for them be as forthcoming? With the commission's report due to go to the Cabinet, the charge that Delhi is a pampered city will be given credence. As one cynic put it last fortnight: "Would a report on the future of another city be forwarded all the way to the top?"

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI



Map by B.K. SHARMA

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INFORMATION SHOPS

Keyed Up

EVER THOUGHT of hooking on to a computer packed with information in California and finding out everything you ever wanted to know about the brewing of diabetic beer, microwave methods to detect cancer or about calorie-reduced foods? Well, companies in India have begun doing precisely that—and in steadily larger numbers as the months go by.

Information "shops" that sell data at the push of a button are commonplace in the developed world. But they still constitute a fledgeling industry in India yet to really come into their own.

But things are changing. And industry and research bigwigs have begun moving in. Tata Chemicals, Defence Scientific Documentation Centre, the Gas Turbine Research Establishment and dozens of others acquired passwords for direct access to the computers of Dialog, the premier California-based information-selling company in science and technology.

And the Bangalore-based Informatics has set up a telex facility to contact

Sathyanarayana: information on sale

computers the world over. After a secret password is telexed, it gets hooked on to a computer-storehouse. While many of the bigger companies telex directly for information, Informatics is the only one to go commercial. "All you do is ask and we have the answer, precise, accurate and complete," says Managing Director N.V. Sathyanarayana.

Sathyanarayana, 32, started the service a little more than three years ago, and business has doubled in the last two years, but remains modest at Rs 8 lakh. According to R.K. Bammi, CIPLA's Bangalore-based research director: "This sort of service is essential. The computer can do in minutes what an army of clerks will take months to do."

The enthusiasm notwithstanding, India lags far behind the services available to information-seekers in the West: they can call information on their personal consoles by simply dialing the database's telephone number. And though the Posts and Telegraphs Department has developed a public switch telephone network capable of the necessary audio-to-visual transformation, it is hardly efficient, thanks to bad telephones in the first place and limited international circuits in the second. The alternative—to have a computer-to-computer link with foreign databases—is an expensive proposition (a link with Dialog would cost about Rs 18 lakh a year). "We can't afford this unless we are also allowed to have multiplexing (sub-links with clients who would share the cost) but the P&T says it is against the rules," says a disappointed Sathyanarayana.

Meanwhile, some industrial giants are seriously thinking in terms of forming an information consortium. Whatever be the outcome of their move, there is no doubt that Indian industry is beginning to wake up to the information explosion.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD

MRTP

Blow Hot

THE NAME of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) commission strikes terror in the heart of the hardiest of capitalists. So Dilip Piramal, chairman of Blow Plast Ltd (turnover Rs 66 crore), was rattled to receive a letter from it informing him that his latest sales gambit was in jeopardy. The commission had upheld the complaint of Delhi advocate Madhu Singh that Blow Plast's 'VIP bag-a-bargain offer' was "grossly misleading".

Launched in January, the scheme claimed that the customer, by judicious use of the 20-page booklet of discount coupons, could save up to Rs 5,000 on various purchases. Singh said she went to buy a suitcase and discovered that the scheme promised more than it delivered. Among her grouses:

► Dealers who usually offered a standard 22 per cent discount on bags now asked customers to choose between the booklet and the discount;

► Blow Plast had raised its prices earlier this year, thus effectively negating the cost to them of the discounts;

► The discounts were available at selected outlets only, so the money spent on travel to and fro ate into the offer.

The VIP bargain: altered offer

The commission agreed with her and slapped a temporary *exparte* injunction on Blow Plast. Piramal countered that:

► All luggage manufacturers, and not just VIP, had raised prices following excise levy increases;

► There was no obligation on the customer to use the booklet;

Says Piramal: "It's not that when you buy our bag you have to spend Rs 50,000. You are free to take it or just leave it."

The inquiry continues, but the commission has allowed Blow Plast to go ahead with the scheme. But the advertisements have to change. Notably, the words, "Believe it or not, to save up to Rs 5,000 all you have to do is to buy a VIP now" are to be replaced by "Leading consumer products will be available at the stores specified on the rebate coupons as well as any other supplementary lists". It now remains to be seen whether Piramal's sales pitch will have the same force it did earlier. —JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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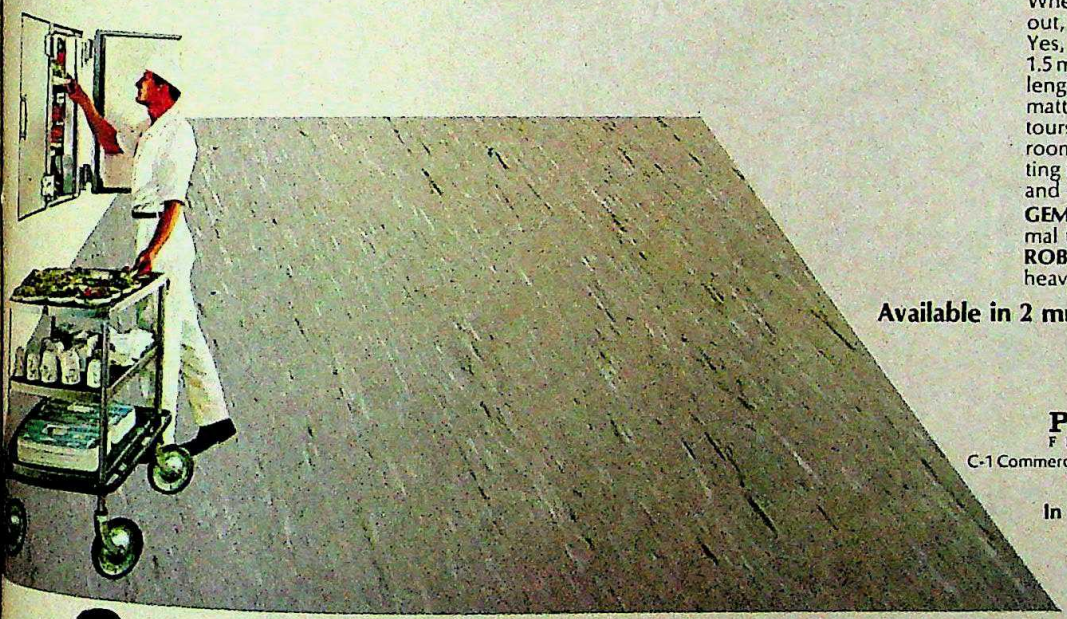

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Look down on splendour

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The magic of Wonderfloor... every floor needs it. Scratching and Scrubbing make no impression. Spills and Splashes leave no blemish. Smears and Stains vanish with a swish. Fire and Flame can't go far. Wonderfloor... it truly catches the eye. And its veneer of splendour fades not with time.

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Whenever Wonderfloor is rolled out, it says a cheerful welcome to all. Yes, Wonderfloor comes in tiles and 1.5 metre wide rolls of continuous lengths. Ready for laying out flat in a matter of hours, following the contours of even the oddest shaped rooms, rolling down stairs and fitting into corners. No unsightly strips and joints!

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"Dad, why does water spiral anticlockwise down a drain in Australia?"

His capacity to ask questions is infinite. Because he's growing, exploring.

Water does spiral anticlockwise in Australia. Clockwise in the northern hemisphere.

So much wonder in the world was, until now, imprisoned in dull text books and rote learning...

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Software? There's plenty of it. Being developed indigenously not only by NCERT and the Ministry of Education, but by many software houses as well. Regional language software in Hindi, Telegu, Marathi and Gujarati is ready and lots more is underway.

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Clockwise. Or anticlockwise.

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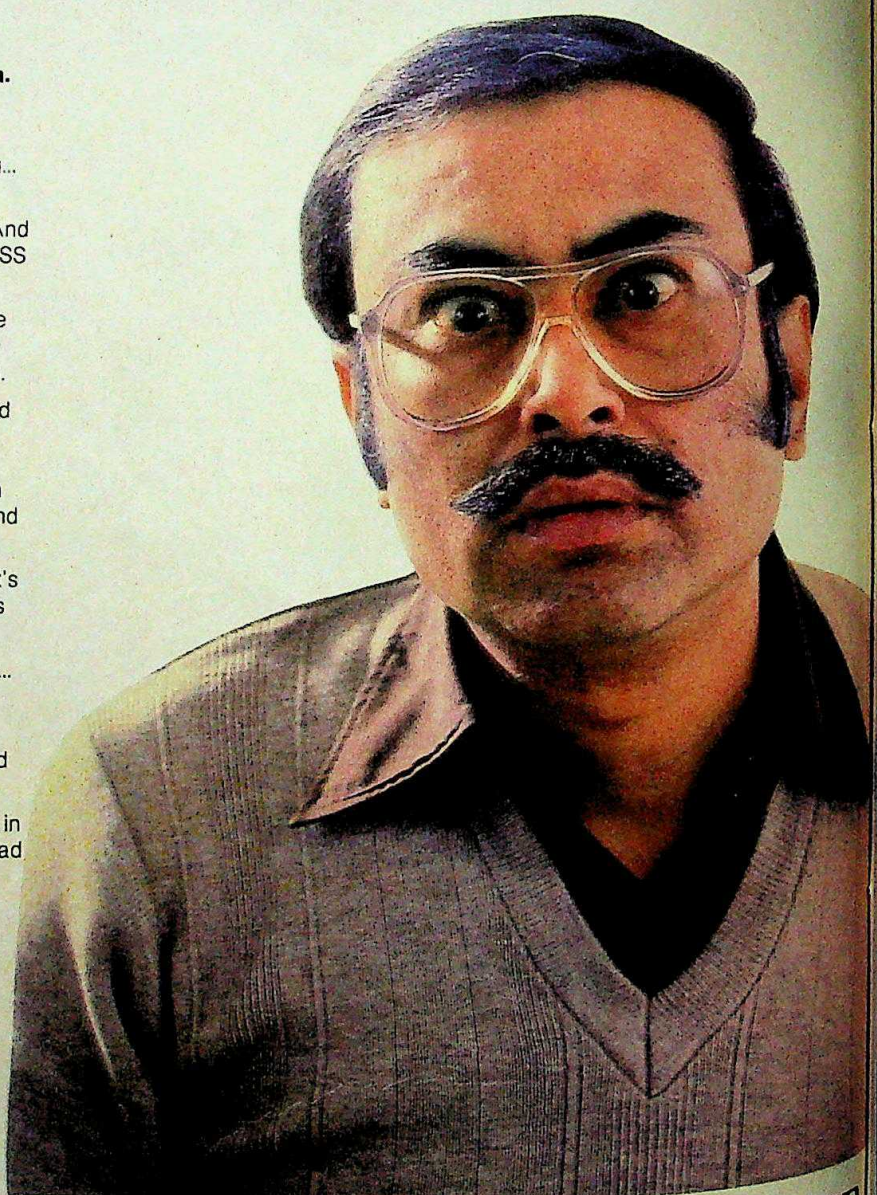

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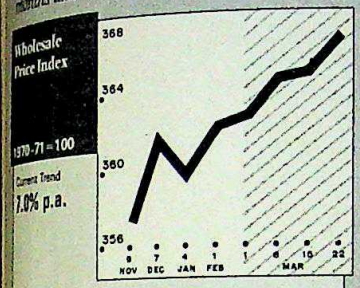
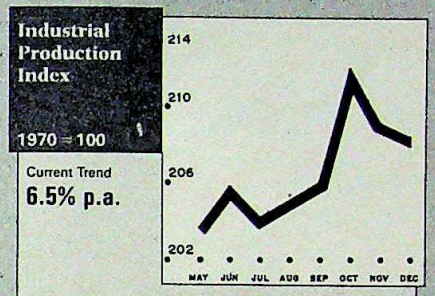
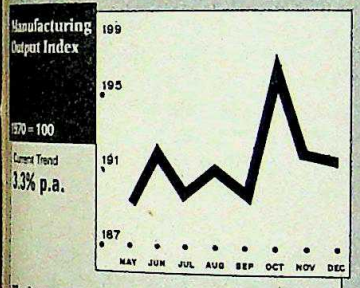
WHOLESALE prices are rising at a steady and fairly consistent 7 per cent per year. The money supply and commercial bank credit position have eased somewhat of late. The post-Budget scare which gripped the bourse did not have any effect on long-term buoyancy. The picture on the power generation front is none too good and leaves much to be desired. And, after quite some months, gold prices have risen. *All data are seasonally adjusted. The current trend is computed on the basis of the last six months data to which a regression is fitted.*



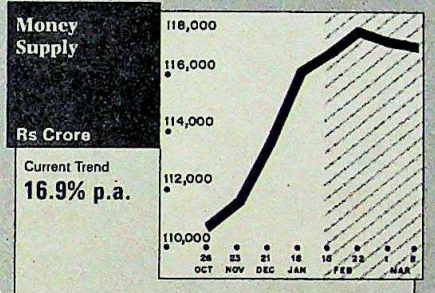
Wholesale prices rose by 1.1 per cent between 1st and 22nd March. While the annual inflation rate is 7 per cent, the price rise is accelerating.



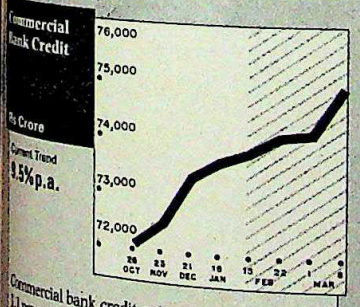
Between October and December 1985, the industrial production index fell by 1.7 per cent—an indication of trouble ahead.



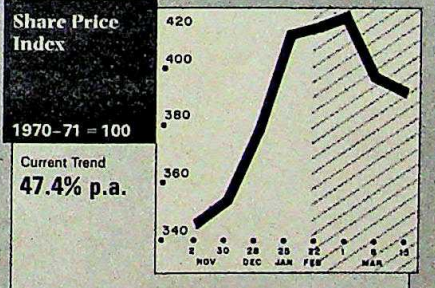
The drop in manufacturing output—2.7 per cen between October and December—is evident, bu the reasons for the recession are nuclear.



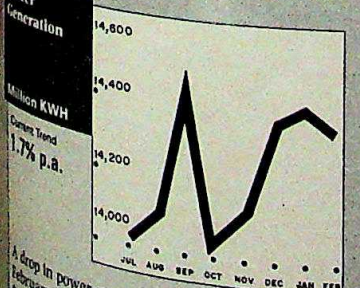
Money supply dropped by 0.5 per cent between 22 February and 8 March, resulting in a tightening of M3 to below 17 per cent.



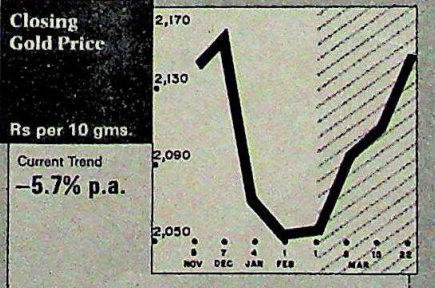
Commercial bank credit expanded marginally by 1.1 per cent between 22 February and 8 March. But the overall credit growth has been small.



Share price crashed by 6.3 per cent after the Budget. But gains were only marginally hit, so the long-term trend remained positive.



A drop in power generation by 0.4 per cent in February has sharply lowered growth on this front, spelling yet more trouble for industry.



Finally March saw an upturn in gold prices—by 4.4 per cent between 1st and 22nd March. This reduced the declining trend to 6 per cent.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of Items in November, 1985

	% Growth
Cement Machinery	127.9
Synthetic Rubber	88.7
Ferro-Alloys	44.7
Watches & Clocks	43.7
Newsprint	26.8
Airconditioners & Refrigerators	19.9
Beverage Industry	17.9
Storage Batteries	13.1
Cosmetics	12.6
Fertilisers	12.4
Artificial Leather & Oil Cloth	9.6
Pens & Pencils	8.5
Railway Rolling Stock	6.6
Linolium	5.4
Iron & Steel	5.4
Synthetic Resins & Plastics	5.3
Petroleum & Coal Products	5.3
Man-Made Fibres	4.3
Drugs & Pharmaceuticals	3.3
Tobacco Manufacture	2.2
Mining & Quarrying	2.0
Jute Machinery	1.8
Paper & Straw Board	1.7
Organic Chemicals	1.7
Mining Machinery	0.5
Paper	0.4
Electricity	0.3
Jute Textiles	-0.1
Electrical Lamps	-0.2
Tea	-0.9
Power-Driven Pumps	-1.8
Cotton & Blended Mixed Fabrics	-2.0
Non-Ferrous Basic Metal Industries	-2.1
Textile Machinery	-2.5
Motor Cars	-3.4
Chemical & Pharmaceutical Machinery	-3.6
Grain Mill Products	-3.6
Electrical Motors	-4.3
Inorganic Chemicals	-4.4
Razor Baldes	-4.5
Internal Combustion Engines	-4.8
Hurricane Lanterns	-5.1
Soaps & Glycerine	-5.3
Paints & Varnishes	-5.5
Explosives	-5.5
Iron & Steel Structurals	-6.1

Of the 86 series considered, 28 of them with a total weight of 43.8389 had a positive growth and 58 of them with a total weight of 44.137 had a negative growth

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1986	1985
Petroleum Refinery Products		
Thousand Tonnes, February	3520	3055
Fertiliser		
Thousand Tonnes, February	481	437
Thermal Plant Load Factor		
Percentage, February	57.6	54.6
Revenue Earning Goods Traffic		
Million Tonnes, February	22.07	19.25
Rail Movement		
Net Tonnes Kms, February	14291	14525

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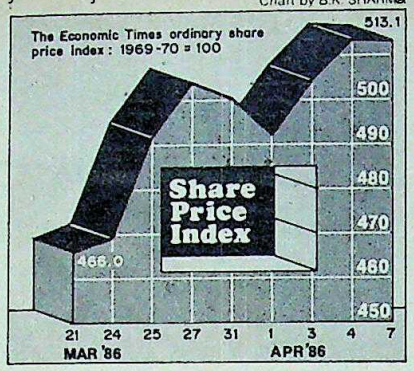
THE MARKETS

Sunny Days



OPTIMISM reigns again on the stock-market. Following the precipitous crash immediately after the budget, shares rallied last fortnight in the wake of the tax concessions and modifications announced by the finance minister. Most important for the market, the reinstating of the tax concession on inter-corporate dividends removed the danger of the market getting destabilised by companies disinvesting in the Unit Trust. Some other budgetary proposals remained untouched, notably the new laws on investment allowance and the capitalisation of interest. But the market was visibly cheered. The President of the Calcutta Stock Exchange, S.L. Bardhan, described the tax concessions as "a step in the right direction which will go a long way in regaining investors' confidence in the share market", and gains were notched up on almost every major trading counter.

The recovery carried upward the prices of automobile companies like Bajaj Auto and Telco, textile units like Century Spinning and Bombay Dyeing, engineering units like Blue Star, Bharat Forge, Kirloskar Cummins and Larsen & Toubro, and pharmaceutical and chemical shares like Bayer, Glaxo and Ranbaxy.

Good corporate results helped the recovery along, with Reliance climbing by Rs 23 to Rs 323 following a hike in the dividend and the announcement that the Government had cleared the company's project for manufacturing TV glass shells. Escorts rose by Rs 11 to Rs 87 following improved profits, and Tata Steel shot up by Rs 210 to Rs 1,310 following the announcement of record production. The relaxation on inter-corporate dividends will particularly help a company like ITC, which rallied by Rs 9 to Rs 72.50. Finally, the financial institutions resumed their buying, thus further bolstering the new bullish mood.

Nevertheless, the recovery is only partial. In fact, the majority of shares are only slightly higher than the lowest points that they have touched this year: clearly, the recovery has a long way to go before there can be another boom on a market which was rattled considerably by the budget.

Also, several imponderables remain. For one thing, companies might be happy to claim the higher rates of depreciation for energy-saving assets acquired, but if blocks of assets are to be written down at the proposed rates of between 33.3 and 50 per cent depreciation, companies might not have enough surplus left over to hand out generous dividends. In the final analysis, however, last fortnight's mood on the market was in sharp contrast to the bearishness that prevailed earlier. And the fresh cheer should be expected to carry forward into the new fortnight.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1986 HIGH	1986 LOW	CLOSE 7.4.86	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	26.00	32.25	1.50 +
Associated Cement	389.00	236.00	249.00	9.00 +
Atlas Copco	92.50	71.00	71.00	2.00 –
Associated Bearings	990.00	730.00	750.00	10.00 +
Avery India	146.00	103.00	118.00	4.00 +
Bajaj Auto	2775.00	1950.00	2375.00	175.00 +
Baroda Rayon	490.00	315.00	360.00	30.00 +
Bata India	82.50	65.50	69.00	1.00 +
Bayer	680.00	445.00	515.00	15.00 +
Bharat Forge	86.00	48.00	62.00	4.00 +
Birla Jute	97.00	42.90	51.00	7.75 +
Blow Plast	160.00	98.00	111.50	13.50 +
Blue Star	110.00	75.00	85.00	10.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	120.00	77.00	84.00	5.00 +
Brooke Bond	96.75	74.00	93.00	9.00 +
Ceat Tyres	520.00	240.00	410.00	10.00 +
Century Spinning	1690.00	1220.00	1355.00	125.00 +
Chloride India	122.00	91.00	100.00	5.00 +
Citurgia	65.00	43.00	47.00	1.00 +
Colgate	262.50	200.00	225.00	20.00 +
Cyanamid	100.00	70.00	72.50	7.50 -
DCM	58.50	36.00	41.00	2.00 +
Dunlop	74.50	49.75	68.25	3.75 +
Elecon	117.50	80.00	95.00	9.00 +
Escorts	94.00	69.00	87.00	11.00 +
Food Specialities	285.00	215.00	270.00	55.00 +
Garware Nylon	61.50	36.00	43.00	6.00 +
Glaxo	87.00	62.00	71.00	5.50 +
G.E. Shipping	36.00	22.50	25.00	1.00 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	1700.00	925.00	1415.00	180.00 +
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	59.00	74.00	13.00 +
Hindustan Lever	163.00	124.00	150.00	22.00 +
Hindustan Motors	128.50	52.60	54.00	48.00 –
Hind.Dorr	505.00	380.00	440.00	50.00 +
Indian Explosives	84.50	64.50	73.00	7.00 +
Indian Hotels	157.00	115.00	135.00	15.00 +
Indian Organic	90.00	63.00	72.50	7.50 +
Indian Rayon	151.00	100.00	122.00	19.00 +
Indrol	390.00	200.00	305.00	95.00 +
Ingersoll-Rand	480.00	360.00	435.00	42.50 +
ITC	76.50	53.00	72.50	9.00 +
J.K. Synthetics	132.00	90.00	116.00	23.00 +
Kinetic Engineering	325.00	220.00	285.00	45.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	715.00	647.50	595.00	47.50 +
Lakme	195.00	120.00	137.50	10.00 +
Larsen & Toubro	204.00	157.00	179.50	17.50 +
Lipton	69.00	46.50	64.00	6.00 +
Lohia Machines	70.00	44.00	55.00	9.00 +
Madura Coats	92.00	71.00	87.50	11.00 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	52.00	62.00	8.00 +
Motor Industries	910.00	605.00	740.00	130.00 +
National Organic	777.50	530.00	640.00	65.00 +
Nirlon	77.00	48.00	51.00	4.00 –
Orkay Silk Mills	167.00	120.00	161.00	32.00 +
Peico Electronics	104.50	56.00	56.00	2.25 –
Pfizer	125.00	78.00	86.00	1.50 +
Premier Auto	745.00	555.00	682.50	107.50 +
Ranbaxy	160.00	105.00	135.00	30.00 +
Raymond	97.00	72.00	81.00	6.00 +
Reliance Industries	367.00	226.00	323.00	21.00 +
Shriram Fibres	88.00	62.50	67.00	4.50 +
SPIC	184.00	129.50	157.00	25.00 +
Tata Steel	1440.00	1090.00	1310.00	210.00 +
Telco	910.00	575.00	680.00	90.00 +
Vulcan Laval	162.50	85.00	120.00	12.50 +
Wimco	98.00	54.00	67.00	11.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	T.T. Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.0923	8.9962
Austria	Schilling	100	75.8137	74.6821
Bahrain	Dinar	1	32.7430	32.6919
Bangladesh	Taka	100	41.4730	41.2210
Canada	Dollar	1	9.1059	9.0252
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.4433	1.4148
Egypt	Pound	1	14.7913	14.6010
France	Franc	1	1.6743	1.6489
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6150	1.1623
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.0910	1.0830
Iran	Rial	100	15.1770	15.1030
Italy	Lira	100	0.7730	0.7591
Japan	Yen	100	7.6245	6.9579
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7530	0.7450
Kuwait	Dinar	1	42.4030	42.3830
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.7232	4.6518
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.8930	0.8940
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5830	0.5700
Netherlands	Guilder	1	4.7080	4.6528
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7730	0.7619
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.7635	5.7064
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0830	0.0815
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4501	0.4430
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.6922	1.6771
Switzerland	Franc	1	6.3478	6.2871
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.7810	0.7730
Thailand	Baht	100	47.2130	47.1910
UK	Pound	1	18.3166	18.1953
USA	Dollar	1	12.6500	12.5400
UAE	Dirham	1	3.3480	3.3299
USSR	Rouble	1	17.4010	17.2532
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	5.3390	5.2883

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 7.4.86.

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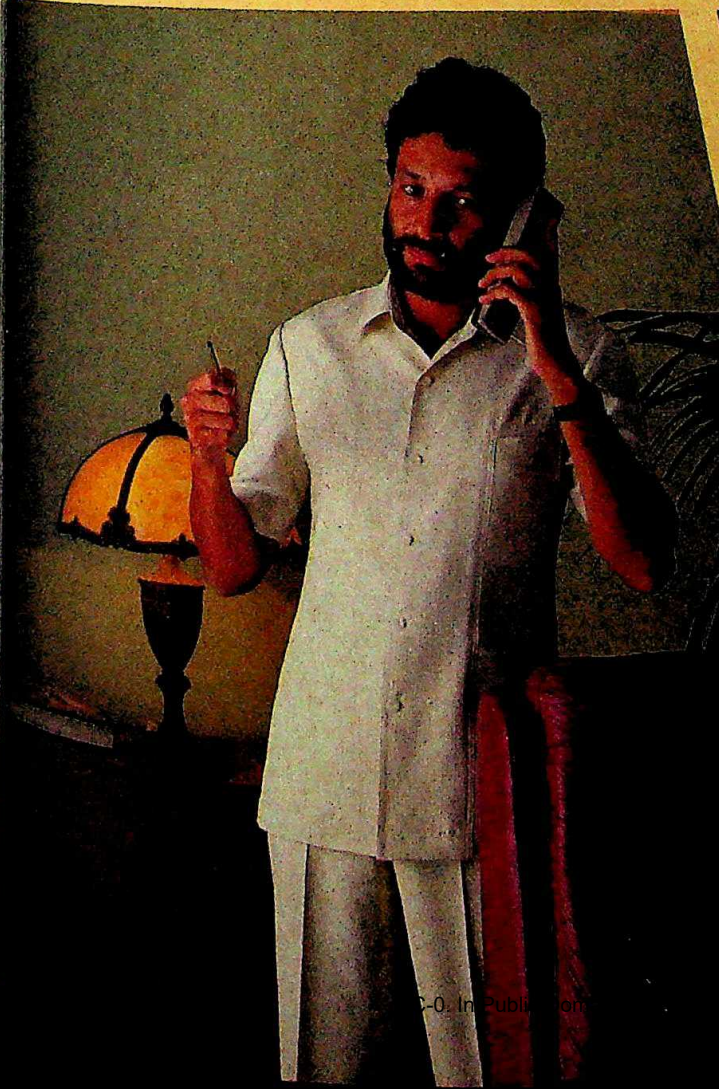
COOL, COMFORTABLE, ELEGANT... THE SUMMERWEAR FOR THE CONNOISSEUR



Unmistakably...

DIGJAM

GOLD CREST, SNOW FLAKE, FLAMING GRACE, PALM BEACH, MONARCH, ELEGANCE

AJAX/DWM/86 S

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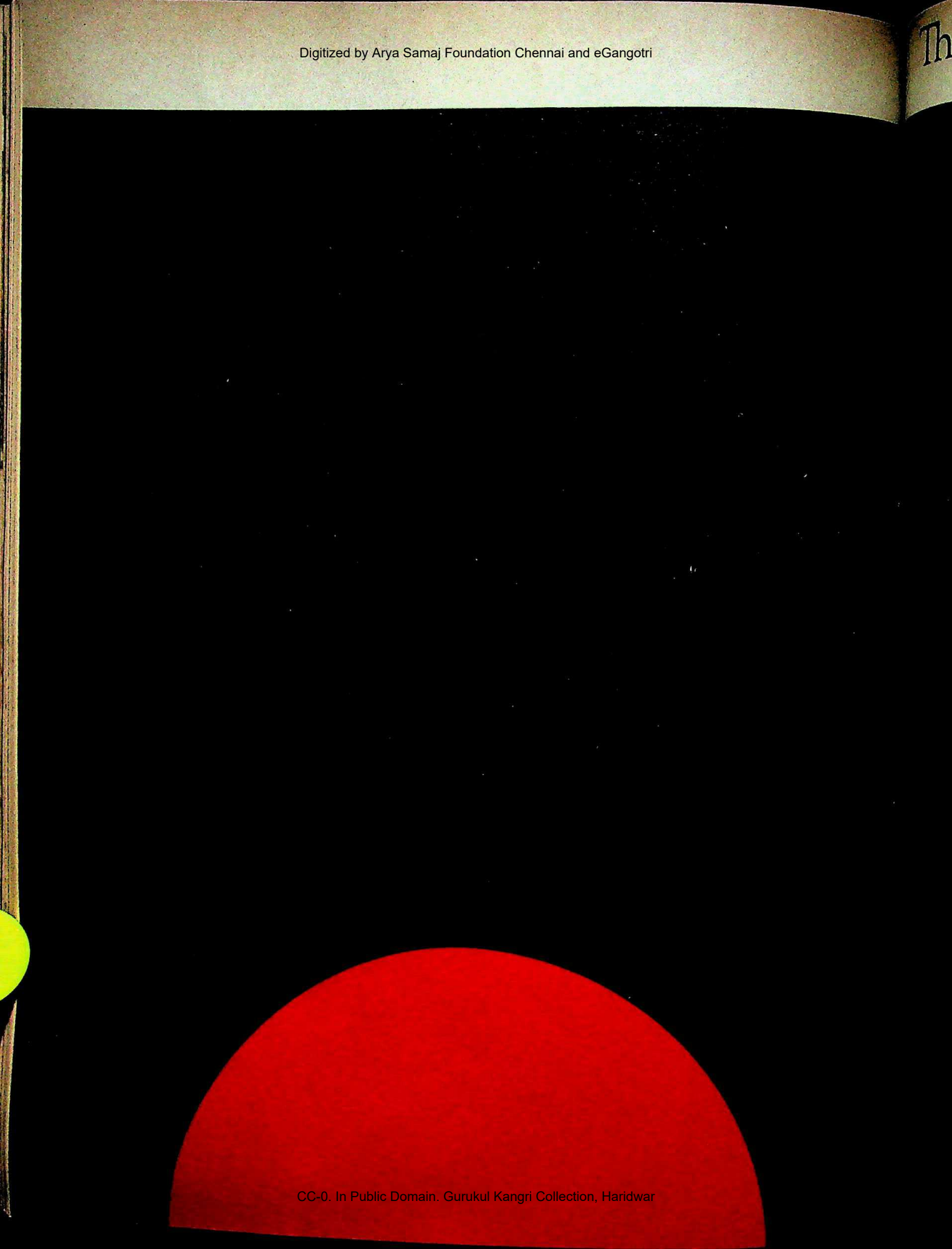

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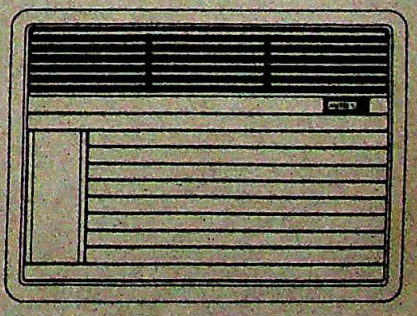

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THE DEFENCE SERVICES

Day of the Soldier

THIS IS the story of a soldier who refused to die or fade away. Condemned to an early grave a decade ago, by his own failing health as well as the policies of the Indian Army, he has battled not only the disease but also the army establishment. His victory—a testament to his courage—is certain to result in a radical alteration in some questionable rules and regulations of the defence services. No fewer than 157 army officers stand to benefit from the legal triumph of one officer who would not give up.

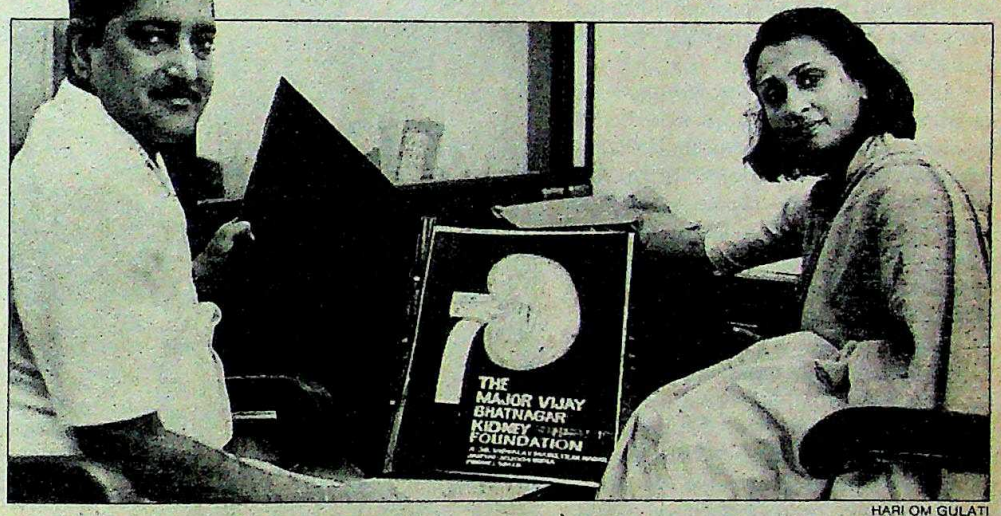
Ten years ago, Major Vijay Bhatnagar was a 35-year-old officer in the Bombay Sappers, in charge of constructing roads in high border areas. When he began to suffer from repeated bouts of nausea, dizziness, and a swelling of the joints, he was diagnosed as suffering from failure of the kidneys. After keeping him under observation for a year, the army told him that he was being "boarded out" on grounds of medical disability—on a P-5 rating.

After 14 years of service, Bhatnagar was put on a disability pension of Rs 160 a month. "Basically I was told to go back home and die," he said. He got himself admitted to a government hospital in Chandigarh for dialysis. The hospital agreed only because Bhatnagar's father was ready to donate a kidney. But soon after this, his father had a heart attack and was no longer in a condition to donate a kidney. With no donor in sight, the hospital ceased the dialysis and discharged Bhatnagar.

Since private dialysis is a costly affair—as much as Rs 500 per session—Bhatnagar turned once again to the army. But the army responded that it was not its policy to dialyse patients with chronic kidney disease. His wife, Asha, then went knocking at the doors of every minister and senior general she could find. For a while, Bhatnagar was admitted for dialysis but because there was no donor, he was again discharged.

However, a way had been found. With the money Asha had raised from regiments, relatives and friends, and by selling her jewellery, Bhatnagar was taken to New York Downstate Medical Centre—under oxygen in a comatose state. Says Asha: "When he arrived in New York, he was 15 lbs heavier with water retention, his eyes were like slits. And he had lost hope."

Availability of kidneys is not a big problem in the US. Within 24 hours, a kidney from an accident victim in Virginia, 500 km away, was flown for Bhatnagar. The operation was successful. Six months later, just as they were packing to leave, he had a seizure. The kidney had failed. He was rushed to hospital, the kidney removed and he was back on dialysis.



HARI OM GULATI

Bhatnagar and wife Asha: battling the establishment

Even as the doctors searched for another kidney, they discovered that Bhatnagar had contacted hepatitis. They predicted this would take a year to clear and that no transplant would be possible before then.

Bhatnagar had neither the money nor the will to survive another year of dialysis. But after some fretting and despairing, a determined Asha plunged into money-raising again. As if by a miracle, the hepatitis cleared up within four months. In the month that followed a new kidney was found and transplanted. By 1979, it was functioning well and Bhatnagar came home in 1980.

Back home, he had problems finding a job as a transplant patient is often treated as a liability. Steadily over a period of time he and Asha, with loans from friends and banks, started a travel business and beauty parlour. They also started the Vijay Bhatnagar Kidney Foundation in Jaipur, to educate Indians about kidney programmes, lobby for changes in the laws governing donations, and provide donated dialysis machines to medical institutions.

But Bhatnagar had some unfinished business. "I was always conscious," he says, "that the army should make medical treatment for diseases such as mine a must for servicemen. There was a larger fight ahead which I had to plunge into. The army had to be stopped from boarding out people with kidney disease to their deaths."

Bhatnagar took the unusual step in 1981 of filing a writ petition against the army in the high court. "I didn't know that I even stood a chance," he says. Five years later, the court ruled in his favour, holding the army order discharging Bhatnagar illegal and unlawful and should be quashed. It ordered his reinstatement, with payment of full compensation as well as back pay due to him.

The army appealed for a stay but its appeal was summarily dismissed in March 1985. The army then appealed to the Supreme Court, which sustained the verdict of the lower courts. The verdict could now apply to 157 other officers who have been boarded out with similar medical ratings.

Bhatnagar was recently reinstated to his rank in the army under a special presidential order. So far, however, the army has not given him his back pay and benefits ordered by the courts. But for a man who has battled death and despair—and won—it can only be a matter of time before he emerges triumphant again.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

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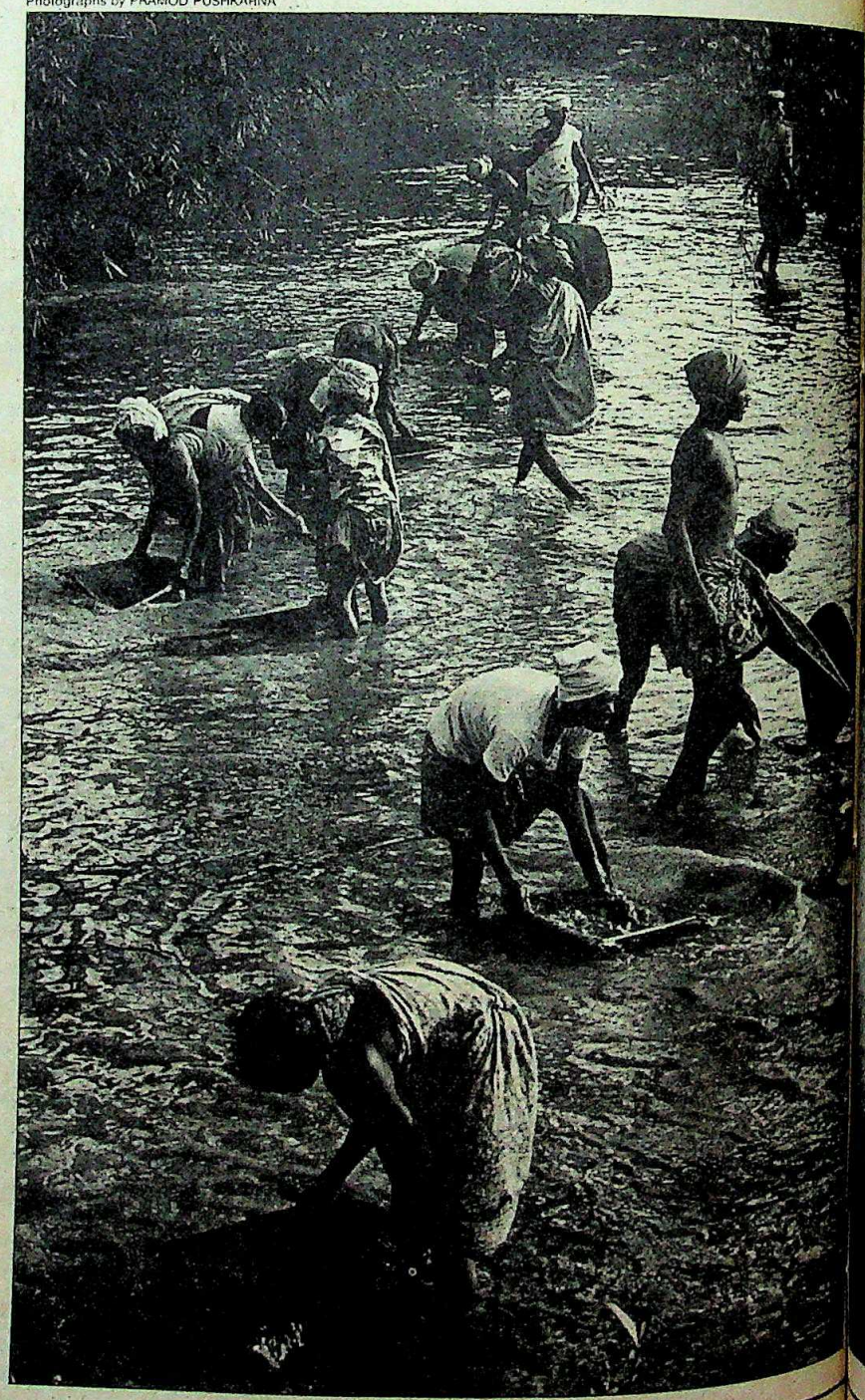
BASTAR

Manna from the Earth

THE DISTRICT of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh is known best for its tribals and its backwardness. Yet parts of it have turned into an unlikely El Dorado. The discovery of tin, an expensive (and in India, rare) metal, has not only introduced a new occupation but has changed the face of the local economy. But prosperity has brought in its wake problems of environment and smuggling, as well as the generation of black money. Senior Correspondent SREEKANT KHANDEKAR *and photographer* PRAMOD PUSHKARNA *travelled around the areas. Khandekar's report:*

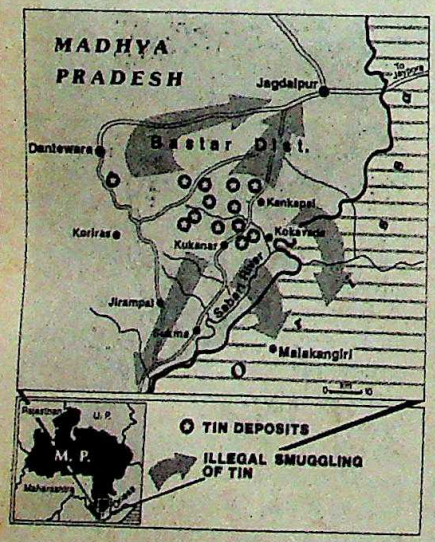
Photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



THE WEATHER is cool and yet the dark bodies glisten with sweat in the early morning sun. The work is back-breaking and yet some of the tribals have come from as far as 200 km to try their hand at something they have never done before. Indeed, most of them had never even heard of tin until they came in search of it.

Mining, even open cast mining, is not easy with primitive implements. The quarries are between six and 30 feet deep and several tribals, still learning this skill, have been buried alive. There is earth to be transported to the stream, where the womenfolk stand bent over in muddy water for hours on end, panning the soil over and over again to get a handful of tin ore. But that fistful represents the kind of money that these impoverished tribals have never earned before: one kg of tin sells for anywhere between Rs 250 and Rs 300. Several thousand tribals are employed in this new occupation across central Bastar; and though no precise figures are available, the value of the metal mined runs annually into several crore rupees.

Confides Sahadeo, a tribal of village Katekalyan, who is a member of the local *Janpad* panchayat: "No tribal will ever tell



Map by B.K. SHARMA

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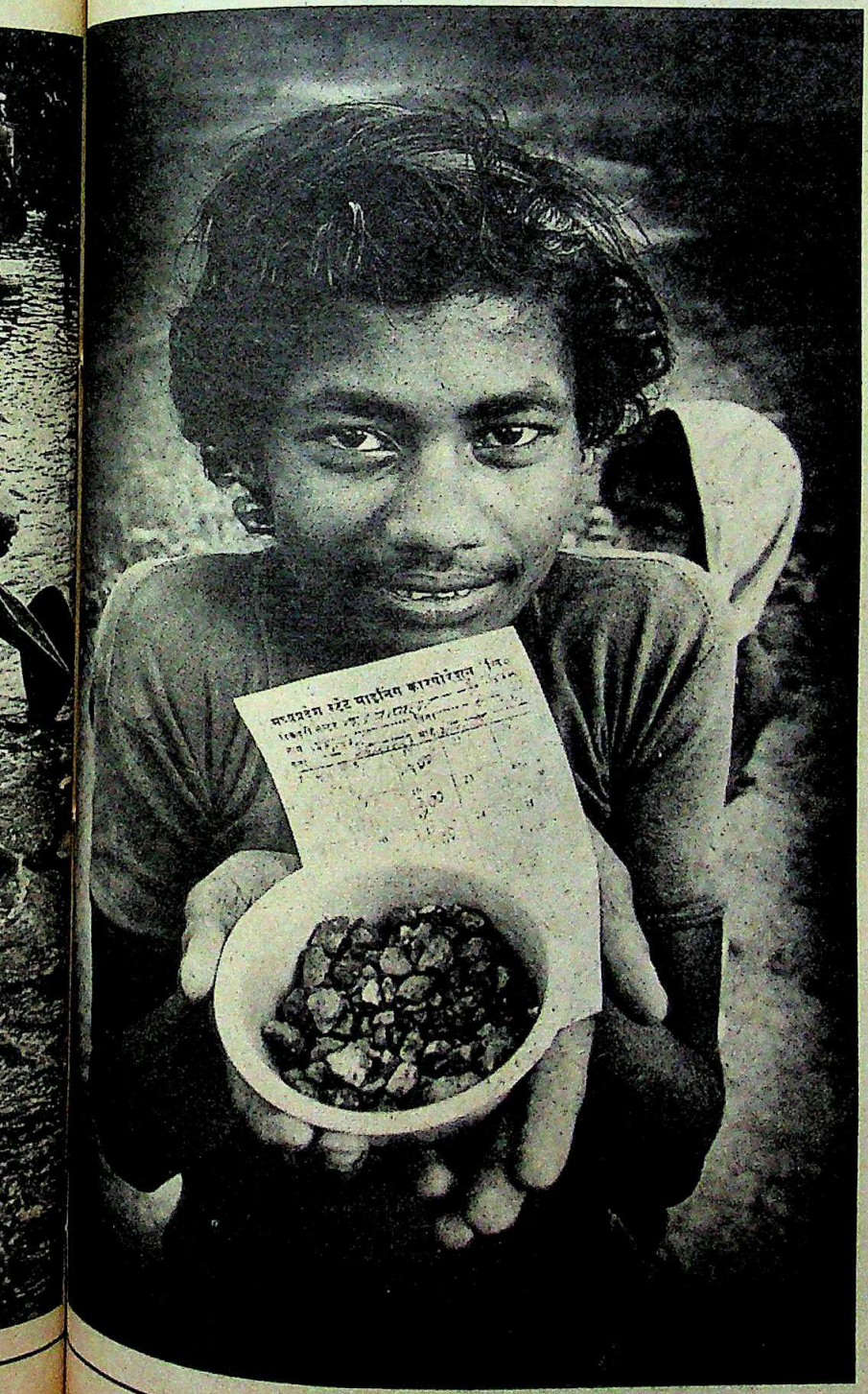
...how much he earns: everyone is scared to give the correct picture. But take it from me: there are several who have made as much as a few hundred rupees on a lucky day."

For the tribals—and even more so for the traders who live off them—it has been manna from earth. According to a farmer in Pushpal village, close to the Orissa border, it is hard to get labourers to work in the fields for even Rs 20 a day, which is a fantastic wage in the interior of a tribal area anywhere in the country. But wages have more than trebled in recent years. Five years ago, Pushpal farmers sent 1,600 kg of surplus paddy to the rice mill; today they send none, but can instead afford to import 3,000 kg of rice. Everyone is out mining tin, and agricultural production has consequently suffered.

(From far left) Panning for tin; a day's reported output; molten tin at the MPSMC centre: new prosperity



Recalls Maharaja Tiwari, a trader from Uttar Pradesh who has been settled in Pushpal for three decades now: "Twenty years ago, when I bought a bicycle and transistor, literally thousands of tribals turned up to gawk at them. Today most households have them along with watches and, in some cases, even two-in-ones. The village has changed dramatically in the last few years."

Tin was first discovered in the mid-'70s, and the Madhya Pradesh State Mining Corporation (MPSMC) took up mining in 1978-79. But its record has been dismal. Between 1980 and the end of 1985 the MPSMC mined only 56 tonnes of ore, purchased another 89 tonnes and got just 38 tonnes of tin metal. This is a small fraction of the actual production of ore, the bulk of which is being smuggled out by tribals and traders.

When the Corporation started its operations, it first hired local tribals at Rs 9 per day and expected them to come up with a minimum of 300 gms of ore daily. But the labourers soon realised that they stood to gain much more if they worked for themselves, and the illegal mining of tin began. Says MPSMC's Managing Director C.K. Chaurasia: "Even 40 or 50 chowkidars could not have prevented this since the area is so vast."

While the state Government's failure to evolve a clear policy has been a major reason for the current mess, the existing problems have also been compounded by the nature of the metal as well as the terrain—forested and hilly with a low population density—in which the ore is found. First, the melting point of tin is low, around 230 degrees centigrade, so that almost anyone with a fire (and common sense) can heat the ore and extract the molten metal at home. Second, tin is a

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compact metal so that it takes very little space and can be smuggled out easily. Says Bastar's Superintendent of Police C.P.G.Unni: "Even a motorcyclist can take out 50 kg or more in a bag without anyone finding out."

Meanwhile, the Forest Conservation Act was introduced in 1980 and it specified that forest areas could not be used for any purpose other than afforestation without the prior permission of the Centre. The state Forest Department, therefore, compelled the Corporation to stop work, but the mining itself carried on. The only thing that changed was that the Corporation bought ore from the tribals and no questions were asked about whether they had dug up a forest area or not.

Several tribals were prosecuted for illegal mining, but since the Corporation was unable—or unwilling—to stop either them or the smugglers completely, the state Government issued a notification in 1984 permitting tribals to mine tin in the district but demanding that they sell the ore only to the Corporation.

This was too much to expect. The Corporation paid only Rs 40 per kg of ore, compared to the Rs 60 offered by a smuggler. And so, according to local estimates only 3 to 10 per cent of the total ore mined actually goes to the Corporation. Last month, in Korapal, which is one of the MPSMC's 10 purchase centres in the interior, tribals were selling the Corporation only 100 to 200 gms of ore at the end of the day's work: clearly only a fraction of what they had mined. The Corporation has now hiked its offer to Rs 50 per kg from April, but even this maybe inadequate. Indeed, the dangers of trying to physically force the tribals to sell the ore at lower prices became apparent in December last year when a corporation employee, Narayan Singh Jhala, was axed to death when he tried to perform his duty too enthusiastically.

The traders have come like homing pigeons to where the money is. Tongpal village, adjoining the tin belt on a state highway, consisted of a handful of shacks before the '80s: now it has several dozen shops. Again, Pushpal village has not only half a dozen grocery stores but five tailor shops as well, because the men think it is stylish to get clothes stitched rather than wear ready-mades. And the women are increasingly discarding their traditional cotton sarees, available for Rs 15, to wear nylons sarees for which they are willing to pay anything from Rs 60 to Rs 125.

And prices have soared. Egg consumption has multiplied manifold and in Pushpal an egg costs a rupee. A bottle of *mahua* , the local liquor, sells for Rs 5, compared to a rupee in the late '70s. In Katekalyan, another village where the MPSMC has its purchase and smelting centre, rice costs twice as much as five years ago, and a chicken sells for an incredible Rs 50 or more. Many tribals have preferred to spend their money buying gold chains.

The tribal seems to have scant respect for the money that has come his way, and banks do not seem to have enticed him. Stories abound of money being shoved into coarse gunny bags and kept at home; of wads of notes being roughly thrust into the rafters of their huts, only to be eaten by termites; of bus conductors being at their wits' end to give change for big denomination currency notes. The tribal tradition of living only for the present and not worrying about the morrow has not changed, not yet.

AND THE trader has taken full advantage of the tribal's ignorance and his carefree attitude to life and money. Says a shopkeeper from Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh who made Bastar his home only recently: "I cheat, everybody cheats. The tribals are simple: if they like something, they'll pay anything for it. We know that once we get them interested, they are hooked." He grins and adds: "I pay one-and-a-half rupees for a haircut here. But I know that if a barber talks convincingly, he can get a tribal to pay Rs 10 or more after telling him that he is actually getting a *filmi* haircut."

"No tribal will ever tell you how much he earns. But take it from me: there are several who have made a few hundred rupees a day."

SAHADEO
member, Katekalyan panchayat

Tin-rich tribals are sold third-grade watches with dials that carry the name of well-known companies; a cheap transistor that goes for Rs 80 in the district headquarters of Jagdalpur sells for Rs 300 less than 150 km away; tribals are known to pay heavy charges to repair their dead transistors, when all that has happened is that the batteries have run down. Maharaja Tiwari narrates an incident in which he intervened to abuse and tell a trader that enough was enough: a shopkeeper had charged a tribal Rs 65 for the repair of a torch that cost only Rs 40 when it was new! Says Tiwari: "The traders, particularly from Jagdalpur, have made the real money."

There is enormous loss in allowing the unrestricted mining that has been going on: Both tantalum and noibium, found along with tin, are lost with the slag that illegal miners discard after drawing out tin. The state Government has been losing

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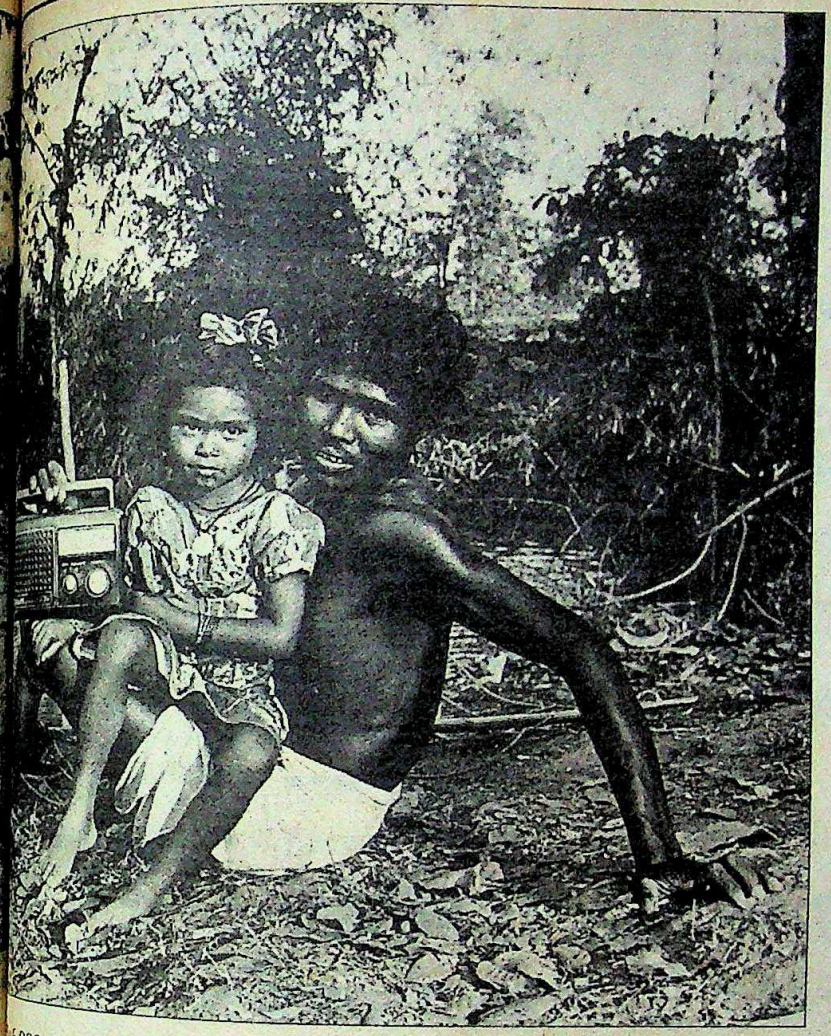


Tribal with transistor: dramatic change in fortune

...5,000 per tonne of royalty that it could ...e secured in systematic mining. And ...e haphazard excavation has meant ...mage to trees which are uprooted, cut ...r burnt to make place for quarries. ...reover, huge quantities of coal are ...quired to melt tin. And in the interior, ...e simplest way to get coal is to burn ...es, particularly *sal*, which works best. ...extract one kg of tin metal one requires ...kg of sal wood coal as compared to 18 ...g of coal of any other species of wood. ...w many trees have been lost thus and ...w many more will go this way in the ...ture is anybody's guess.

Apart from this, the tin-mining has ...nerated huge quantities of black ...ney, and corruption in all the wings of ...e State Government is rampant: officials ...the police, forest and mining wings each ...cuse the other of turning a blind eye to ...e smuggling. The police seized tin worth ...18.50 lakh being smuggled out in 1984 ...d metal valued at Rs 20.37 lakh in 1985. ...t even police officials admit that this ...mounts to practically nothing.

When the thanedar of Kukanar recently seized 185 kg of the metal, worth roughly Rs 50,000, he was awarded a meagre Rs 100: clearly, inaction is far more lucrative. Admits Unni reluctantly: "It is true that the temptations for the police are great. I have suggested to the state Government that like in Customs, 2 per cent of the catch should go as a reward to the police officer so that he has an incentive to perform."

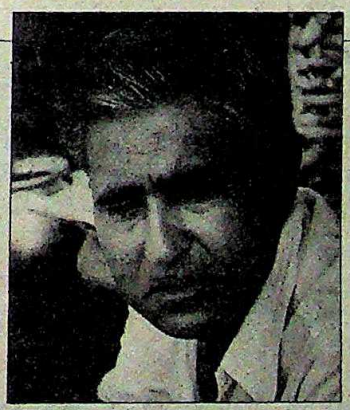
In the initial stages, the metal was smuggled north to Raipur, situated on the Bombay-Calcutta rail route, and south by road towards Hyderabad. But Unni says that now the tribals normally carry the ore across the river Sabari into adjoining Orissa, where too some tin ore exists. Six months ago, about 5,000 kg of tin was seized in Malkangiri in Orissa, a major smelting and despatch centre, but such successes are rare. Tribals cross the Sabari anywhere in a 70-km long stretch and are hard to apprehend, even if the police is really interested.

Argues one police official: "The real culprit is this notification which permits tribals to mine. Even if we catch them carrying ore towards the border, that is no crime; it becomes an offence only if we actually get them in the act of crossing into Orissa. Moreover, we can never snare the real money-makers, the non-tribals, because they themselves never handle either the metal or the ore."

Unless the state Government takes a clear-cut policy decision on the tin question, no concrete action is possible at the district level, where far too many officials and local politicians of all hues are busy raking in the profits. India imports 2,000 to 2,400 tonnes of tin annually, and there are clear advantages in organising tin mining on a scientific basis in Bastar. But the Mineral Exploration Corporation is still trying to determine the primary deposit, in the rock, while the secondary deposit, just below the soil surface, in Bastar is estimated at 15,000 tonnes of ore. There is talk of the National Mineral Development Corporation joining hands with the Madhya Pradesh Government to mine the metal systematically, but nothing concrete has emerged so far.

Perhaps the Government does not want to take any decision that will make it unpopular with tribals who have chanced upon undreamt of riches. But the chances really are that at the end of it all the tribal, unless he is guided, will end up just as he was at the beginning: poor and cheated.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in Bastar



"Twenty years ago, when I bought a bicycle and transistor, thousands of tribals came to gawk at them. Today most households have them."

MAHARAJA TIWARI
trader from Pushpal village

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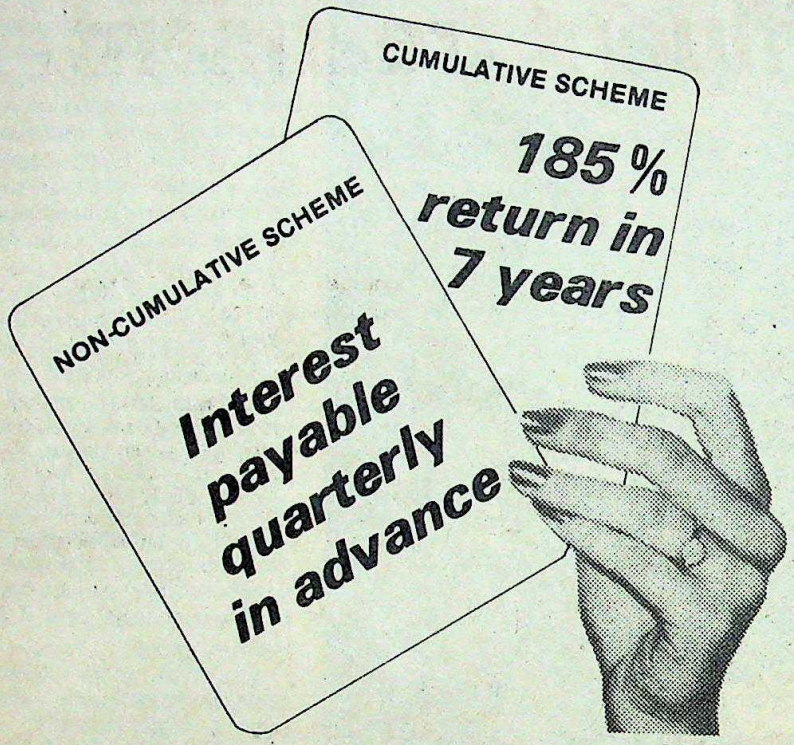

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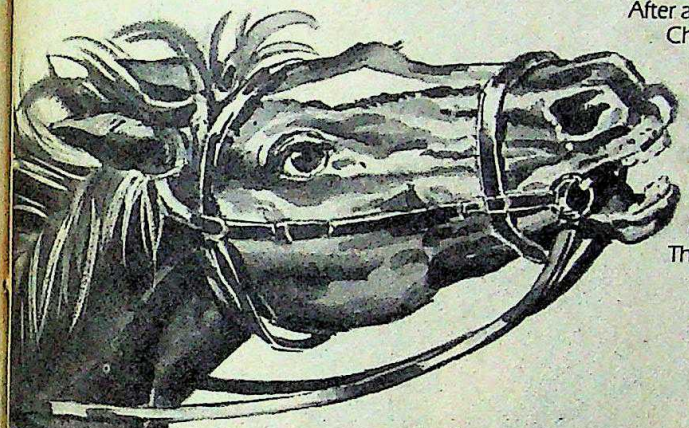

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KERALA

Private Problems

EDUCATION, Kerala's biggest money-spinning industry, seems to be going into yet another head-spin, sending the private school graph soaring upwards in a controversial spiral. Long a captive in the hands of private educational organisations, the country's most literate state seems to have capitulated completely to their designs this time.

Already 740 private schools have been sanctioned in the state ever since the Karunakaran Government assumed power in 1982, and Education Minister T.M. Jacob appears a man in a tearing hurry to speed up this process, notwithstanding the negative reactions it has spawned in certain quarters.

Fuelling the wrath of the pro-public sector education lobby is a proposed state Government directive ordering the closure of all uneconomic government-run schools with less than 100 students on their rolls. This is likely to throw hundreds of poor students out on the streets; if the order is implemented 400-odd schools will have to shut down.

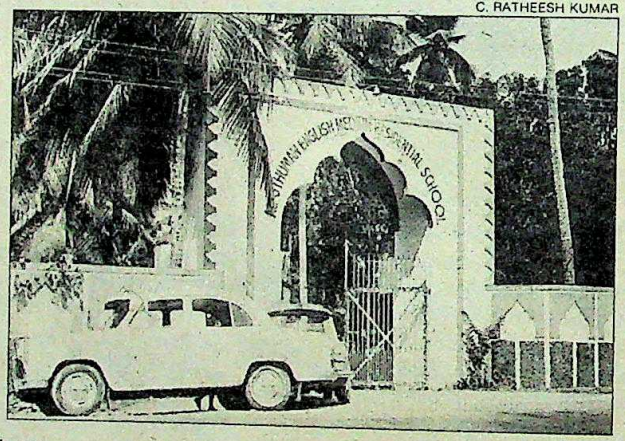
Charges Baby John, former education minister and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leader: "Jacob is in a mad rush to totally privatise education in the state. The poor will suffer as they cannot afford to send their children to school again." Jacob, however, staunchly defends his stand: "These days no parent likes to send his children to government-run Malayalam medium schools. How can we continue running schools which have 70 students and nearly 30 teachers?" he says.

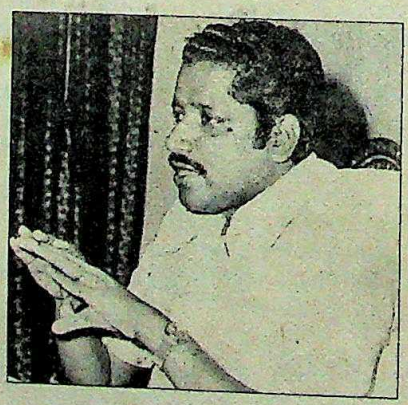
Education, which claims as much as 43 per cent of the state's total revenue expenditure and employs almost 47 per cent of the state's government servants, is an obsession with the people, striking a deep chord in every Keralite's psyche. The propriety of the Government action in encouraging education in the private sector at the expense of the public sector has thus sparked off an intense debate cutting across political affiliations, ideologies and individual interests.

K.K. Kurian, president of the Kerala Recognised Private Schools Managers Association, says rhetorically: "Parents are falling over each other to get admission for their children in private schools." He predicts that "the Government-run schools are doomed due to lack of discipline among students and the highly-unionised teaching staff".

Critics see hidden dangers in allowing an unbridled proliferation of private educational institutions.

C. RATHEESH KUMAR





Education Minister Jacob; and (top) a private school near Trivandrum

But critics see hidden dangers in allowing an unbridled proliferation of private educational institutions. Because of the lucrative nature of the industry and the high demand, more and more people are coming together to form trusts and float new schools. Says a top academician: "The formula is simple—use the words English medium and then think of a good Christian saint like St. John or St. Mary—and you are in business." Most of these schools make money in the appointment of teachers and from the inevitable donations under various guises, despite specific government directives that schools which take donations will be de-recognised.

A lucrative offshoot of this money-spinning industry are the elite government-recognised private schools who prefer to admit only those children whose parents are either in the Gulf or are affluent planters. In the central Travancore area, 10 such 'public schools' have come up in the last five years. One of them even advertises: "Ideally suited for children whose parents are abroad."

Defending the private schools, Mary Roy, the champion of Christian woman's fight for equality and who also runs the blue chip Corpus Christi School in Kottayam, maintains: "Even though education has become an industry in Kerala, it is a fact that the worst private school is better than any government school."

And T.M. Jacob asserts: "Parents in the Gulf want to send their children to the best private schools situated nearest to their villages than to Ooty or Bangalore. This has resulted in public schools mushrooming in central Travancore area, which has the largest foreign remittance in the state." But Jacob hastily adds that he wants a peaceful coexistence between the private sector and the public sector schools and blames the earlier Nayanar ministry for the legacy of 700-odd aided and unaided schools.

There is no denying that private schools, aided by high fees (Rs 5,000 a year on an average) provide better educational facilities than government-run institutions, which are seriously hampered by unionisation and indifference among the teaching staff, resulting in poor standards. But in a state where education is the number one priority, the increasing and seemingly inexhaustible demand for private schools is certain to create an imbalance that could raise more questions than the current boom is attempting to answer.

—SHREEDHAR PILLAI

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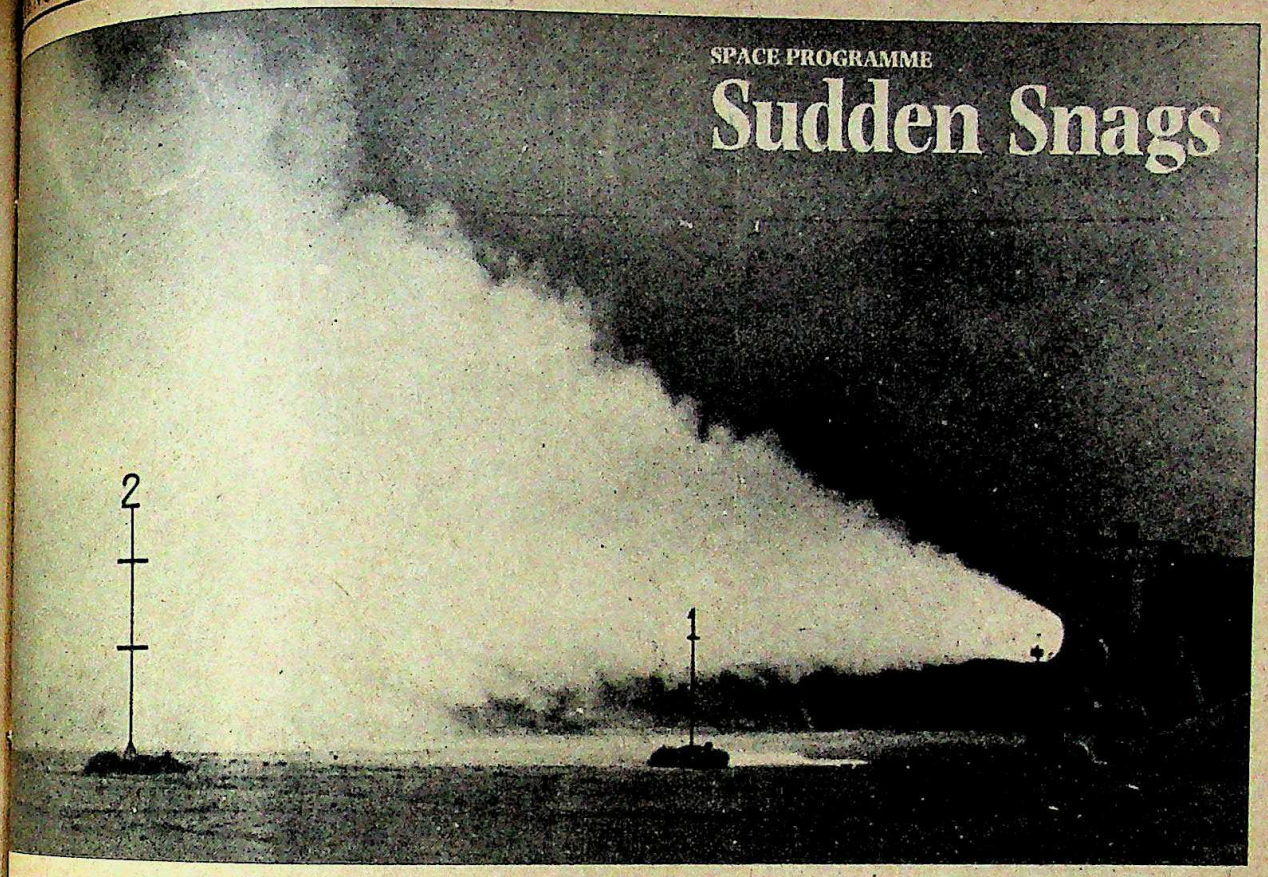
SPACE PROGRAMME

Sudden Snags



Testing ASLV boosters: starting trouble

ST when everyone, including the prime minister, was patting the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for meeting targets, events in the past few months have suddenly plummeted its tightly scheduled programme into uncertainity.

The first shock came when the US space shuttle Challenger blew up seconds after lift-off at Cape Canaveral on January 28. For in September the Challenger was set to have launched INSAT 1C into space as a back-up satellite for INSAT 1B, and those plans now have to be indefinitely postponed. India's space scientists have reason to be jittery because INSAT 1B, which handles 4,300 two-way telephone circuits and relays most of Doordarshan's national network programme, has already been 30 months in space and if it starts malfunctioning, all these services would be put into jeopardy. "That bird is vital and till we send it up we are all spending sleepless nights," confessed INSAT Project Director Pramod Kale.

ISRO scientists have been spending sleepless nights over other projects as well. The Challenger disaster has put on ice the sending of the second Indian into space. And the Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV), ISRO's second generation satellite launcher that was first scheduled to go up in December and then in March, has now been postponed to July or August after unexpected snags developed at the testing stage. To add to ISRO's woes, scientists working on the first Indian Remote Sensing satellite (IRS 1) announced that it would not be ready by December when it was to have been shot into space by a Soviet launcher. IRS 1 is now likely to be ready only in mid-1987.

1986, the year that ISRO was to come of age has suddenly become one of teething problems, plunging India's tightly scheduled space programme into uncertainity.

All this has made 1986, the year that ISRO was to come of age, suddenly a period for teething problems. Irked by the flurry of questions in Parliament about the delays, Professor U.R. Rao, ISRO's chairman, said last fortnight: "We have put our scientists on almost impossible schedules. But when we slip behind by a couple of months it is highlighted while there are any number of power projects that are delayed for years that don't receive any attention."

But if ISRO has being getting flak for the delays it is because in the past two decades it has built up a sizeable reputation for delivering. Space scientists realise that delays of any kind are bound to hurt the entire programme simply because it has a domino effect on other on-going projects. As P. Ramachandran, project director for putting up a wholly indigenous INSAT II satellite by 1990, said: "Unless scientists get free from the existing projects we can't get our own act together on time."

But right now ISRO's main worry is how to get the Rs 70-crore INSAT 1C satellite up in the sky as quickly as possible. With the shuttle project in the doldrums, ISRO is negotiating with the US space agency NASA to use an expendable rocket instead which would eject the spacecraft into orbit, as was done for the ill-fated INSAT 1A. This can only be possible by December. Moreover, ISRO's prestigious programme of sending a second Indian into space on the shuttle will have to be shelved for the time being. But, as Professor J.P. Singh, INSAT programme director, says: "We just can't delay 1C and if it means postponing the manned space

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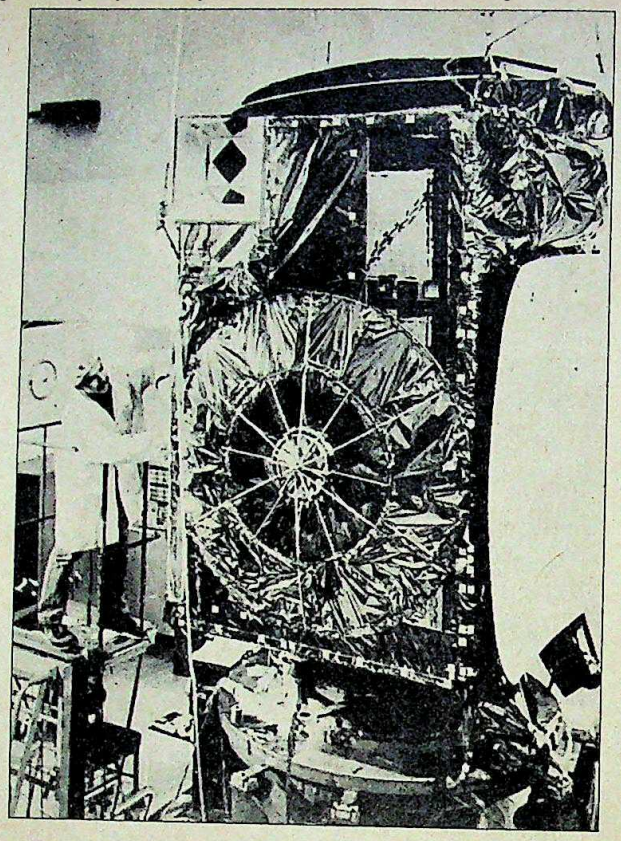
programme then we have to sacrifice it."

This would certainly be discouraging news for space scientists N.C. Bhat and P. Radhakrishnan, one of whom would have been the second Indian to be shot into space if the original plan of sending 1C in a space shuttle had not been disrupted. Both were selected last year from among 340 applicants after NASA offered a piggy-back space ride to any country sending up a major payload on the shuttle. And for the past six months, both have been on an intensive training programme to familiarise themselves with their tasks in space. In fact when Challenger blew up, they were in the US for their final briefing. Both of them are now back in Bangalore, and a disappointed Bhat says: "It's like waiting in an airport and not knowing when your plane is going to arrive."



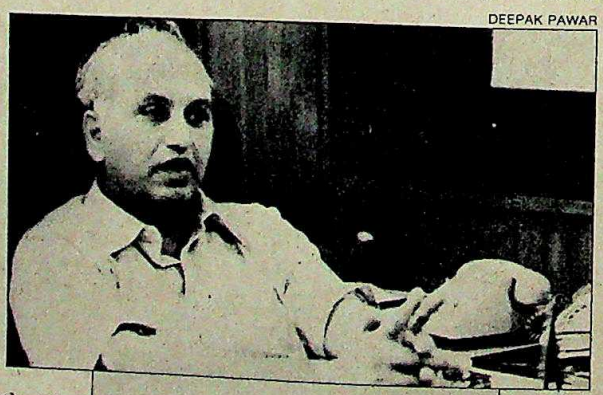
Insat 1C: waiting for a launcher

Another project which is making ISRO scientists anxious is the ASLV. The five-stage rocket, which will launch a 150 kg satellite into a low earth orbit, is a technological leap over it's predecessor. The SLV3 could only launch satellites of no more than 35 kg. ISRO will soon need to send up still heavier satellites (1C, for example, weighs 1,000 kg). The ASLV is designed as a major step in upgrading the country's launching capability.

But while scientists at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Trivandrum, where ASLV is being integrated, have tested several modifications like the strap-on boosters, they have run into some trouble with the most crucial element in the launcher: the close loop guidance system (CLGS). Working like an autopilot, the CLGS, the size of a briefcase and bristling with microprocessors, is the ASLV's brain and will not only regulate the speed of the rocket and its angle of inclination but also ensure that it ejects the 150 kg satellite into the exact spot the scientists want. Being built for the first time in India, it is crucial to the space programme because all future satellite launchers will be equipped with it.

Trouble started when the onboard computer registered several inexplicable glitches when the system was being integrated on the test stand. Scientists are struggling to correct the anomalies. Said VSSC's Director S.C. Gupta: "We are working seven days a week and 24 hours a day to get it right. It's a very tricky problem." Till they solve the CLGS defects the exact flight date of ASLV will not be announced.

DEEPAK PAWAR



"We need time. We can't cut corners because space will never forgive us."

U.R. RAO
chairman, Indian Space Research Organisation

The rocket launch, scheduled for December 1985, was delayed for other reasons. In late 1984 a cyclone submerged all the rocket testing stands under a metre of water and it took two months for scientists to get the project ticking again. Then last year they decided to opt for the CLGS system, which was originally scheduled to go up only on the second ASLV flight. This involved mastering sophisticated rocket guidance systems without compromising on the time-frame for development. With ISRO scientists now struggling to correct the problems, a delay of another four months has become inevitable.

Another project which is giving ISRO scientists plenty of worry is the IRS. Designed to compete with the LANDSAT, the US series of satellites used by many countries, IRS when ready would be almost state of the art. India subscribes to LANDSAT but with IRS it could start generating its own data for remote sensing. That would be crucial because remote sensing satellites have varied uses, like mapping water and forest resources, apart from helping to study crop patterns and floods and weather conditions.

IRS has run into problems because the import of certain vital electronic components from countries like the US has been delayed. Says Project Director K. Kasturirangan: "The procurement time for components has gone up from six months to two years and this has inevitably led to slippages in the schedule." But he hastens to point out that even if there is a six-month delay it would be a record of sorts if IRS is ready by the middle of next year as the turn around time for building satellites of the IRS class is usually six years. ISRO is doing it within five.

As the pressure to complete projects on schedule mounts, ISRO scientists wonder if they can deliver. Realising that quality cannot be compromised in spacecrafts, Rao said: "We need time, patience and perseverance. We can't cut corners because space will never forgive us." While the space department seems to have plenty of perseverance, what seems to be running out is time.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA

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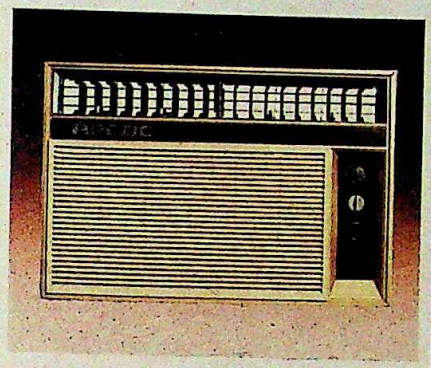

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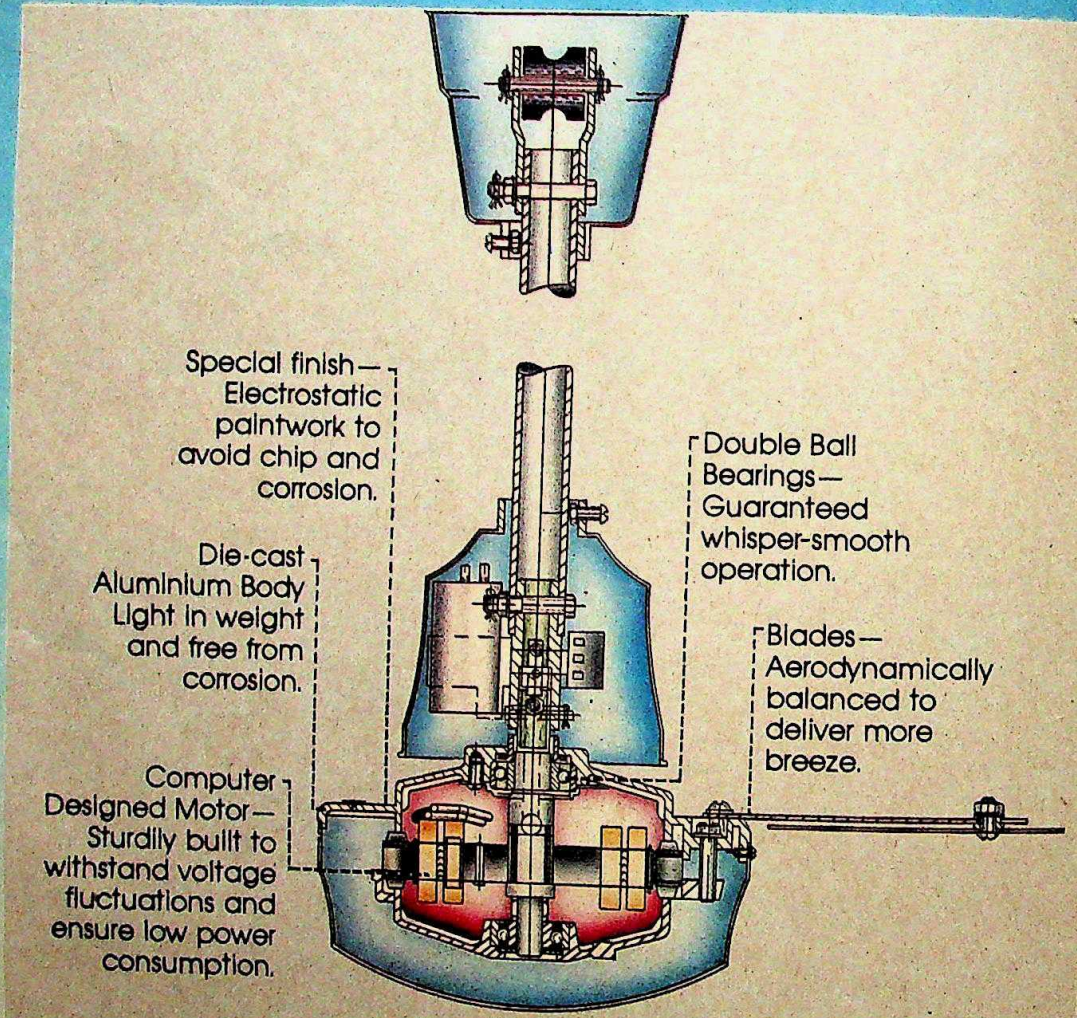
The Orient is only five decades old.



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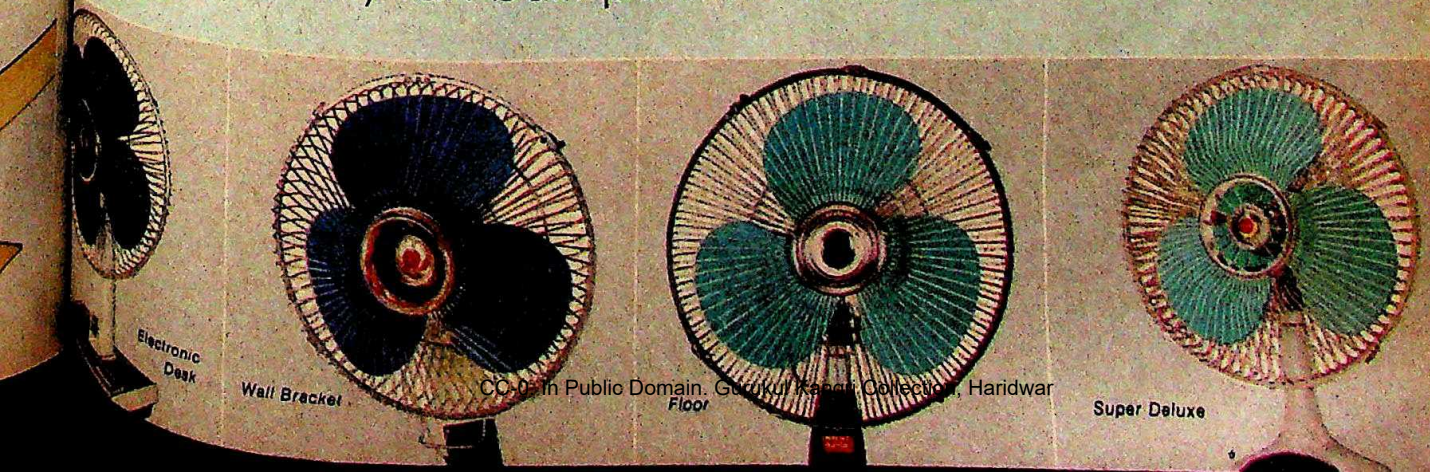

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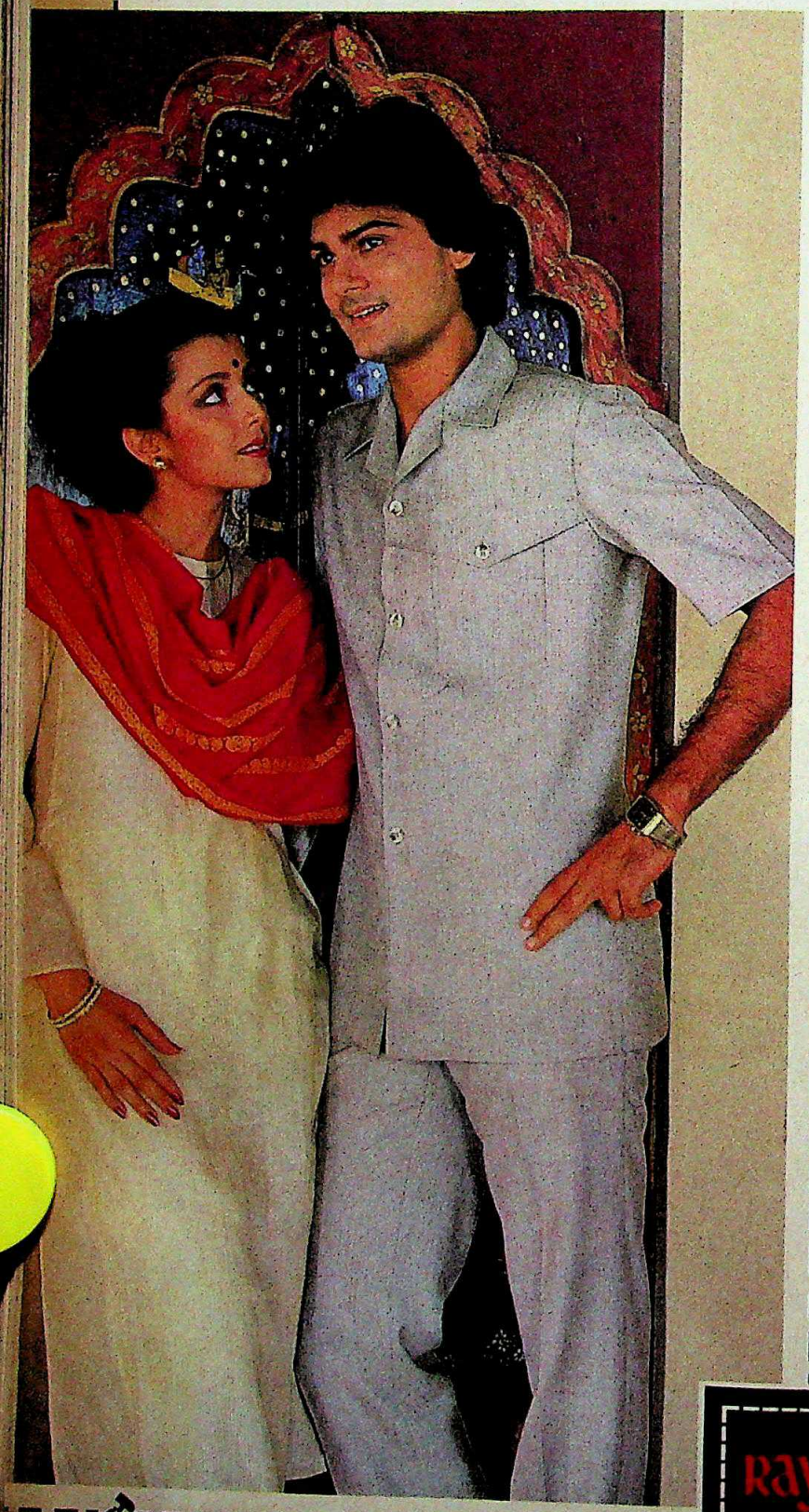

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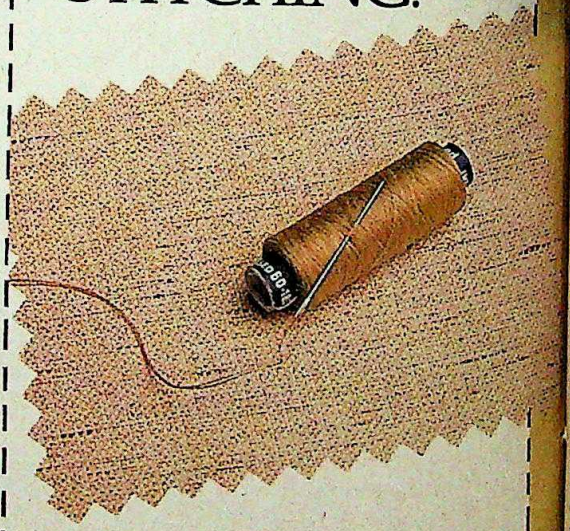

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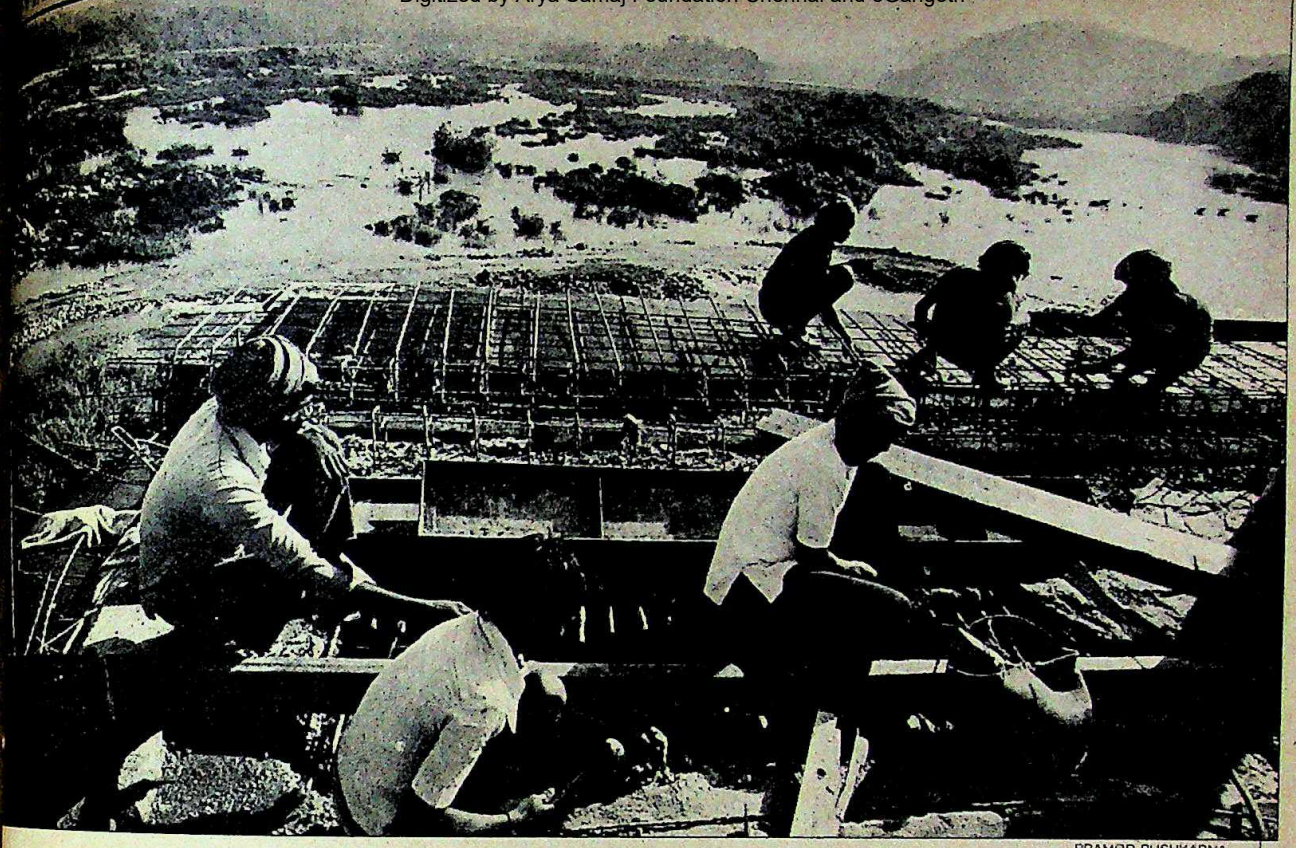


PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Work on the unapproved dam

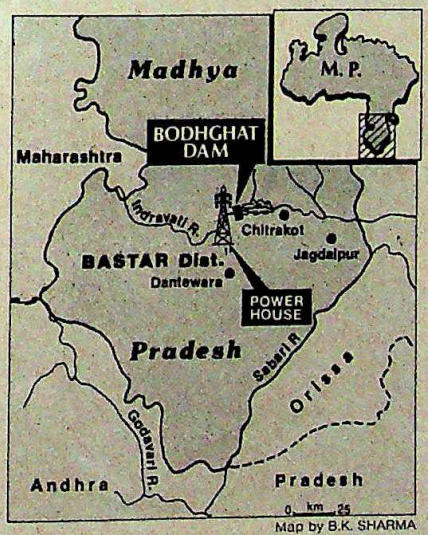
INDIRA SAROVAR

Expensive Dithering

ONE OF the finest examples of how not to go about a major development project exists in Madhya Pradesh's southern-most district of Bastar. The Indira Sarovar Hydro-electric Project—until recently called Bodhghat—stands as a monument to sustained bureaucratic and political indecision. Seven years after the laying of the foundation stone, with well over Rs 15 crore having already been spent (designed capacity: 500 MW), the project has still not got the final go ahead from Delhi because of a controversy over environmental issues.

The dilly-dallying has been expensive: in 1970, the project cost was estimated at Rs 126 crore, in 1979 at Rs 210 crore. In 1983 at Rs 475 crore. According to guesstimates, at today's prices it may well have swelled beyond Rs 600 crore. Asks a Bastar district official: "Be it yes or no, why can't they decide one way or the other and finish with it?"

Work on the project is proceeding at a snail's pace because of the lack of a final clearance, and its veritable army of engineers is grossly underutilised. "We have six Sundays and one Monday," bitterly laughs a junior engineer at Bodhghat, where whiling away the time is a major occupation.



Map by B.K. SHARMA

Currently employed are one chief engineer, one deputy chief engineer, three superintendent engineers, 15 executive engineers, 70 assistant engineers, 22 graduate engineer trainees, 30 sub-engineers and about 300 other people. There are also two land acquisition officers, two naib tehsildars, four revenue inspectors and eight patwaris, all paid by the Madhya Pradesh Electricity Board (MPEB). The monthly salary bill is Rs 6 lakh and the total expense on this is already in excess of Rs 2 crore. Another Rs 13 crore has been spent on constructing a bridge, and on foundation work for tunnels, the powerhouse, the water intake point and the dam itself.

The dam was ill-fated from the outset. Investigation of hydro-electric potential on the river Indravati first started in the mid-1950s after a visit of the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Bastar. This progressed gradually until the '70s when, in the course of a power struggle, charge of the project shifted no fewer than six times, going back and forth between the state's Irrigation Department and the MPEB. The MPEB ultimately won out in 1981.

The dithering reached ridiculous heights because the Union Government approached the World Bank for financial assistance in 1983. The Bank's experts visited India twice that year to examine the dam's technical feasibility and negotiations in Washington in April 1984 followed. Finally, an agreement for

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a $300 million loan was signed in March 1985. Says a Delhi official: "We had all the facts with us. If we still had our doubts, why didn't we address ourselves to them before approaching the World Bank? One year after being sanctioned the loan we still don't know whether we want the project! On the other hand, why was the MPEB permitted to spend so many crores on a project whose future was uncertain? The whole thing makes us look so foolish."

THE PROGRESS of the Bodhghat file past the desks, corridors and shelves of the bureaucracy would confuse anyone. After one project report in 1970, an improved one was prepared in 1978. The environmental appraisal committee of the Department of Science and Technology cleared the project in January 1979, stipulating however, setting up of fuel depots to supply free wood to labourers employed in construction; drawing out of a detailed plan for rehabilitating oustees; creation of a sanctuary by having a 5 km wide belt of vegetation around the reservoir's periphery; strict enforcement of anti-poaching laws; promotion of pisciculture as well as crocodile farming; arrangements to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases; compensatory afforestation and the formation of a monitoring group to oversee the implementation of these steps.

The then prime minister Morarji Desai laid the foundation stone in the same month and Planning Commission approval—for Rs 210 crore—followed, with completion expected by 1985. Today, that sounds like a bad joke.

The Central Forest Conservation Act (FCA) came in late 1980, and so the project authorities had to seek fresh sanctions for the transfer of forest land. The MPEB applied for this new permission in February 1981. Today, five years later, the decision-makers are still dilly-dallying. The papers were forwarded from the MPEB to the state Forest Department which sent them on to the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Forests in February 1983. More information called for from the state Government came only in August 1983.

The Union Agriculture Ministry then referred the matter to the Department of Environment (DOE), which set up a working group for a reappraisal. How the group went about its job is a story by itself: they visited the site only in April 1984, eight months after being formed, and submitted its report only in February 1985. The total exercise took one-and-a-half years. And the much-awaited report, which approved the project, once again stressed the conditions laid down in the environmental sanction of January 1979 and also advocated care in handling the oustees and providing them vocational training. The report also stressed on the point of discouraging too many industries in the forest areas.

Between February 1985 and now, four high-level bureaucratic meetings have taken place in Delhi but clearance—or rejection—under the FCA has still to take place. A lot of this time was wasted in correspondence between the Centre and the state about some additional information that was asked for. At one stage the MPEB was also accused of clearing forests without permission.

Meanwhile, the process of land acquisition has begun at Bodhghat and Rs 53 lakh have already been paid for about 500 hectares of land. Says an official: "Work has just begun, and by the end of 1986 we should be able to acquire 75 per cent of private lands." Some 9,200 people, three-quarters of them tribals, from 42 villages will be displaced by the dam.

But what appears to have put the decision-makers in a dilemma is not so much the problem of oustees as that of the forests that will be submerged under the 130 sq km reservoir. Many figures have been quoted about the number of trees in the affected area but the latest—and considerably scaled-down—statistics of the state Forest Department puts the figure at 2.8 million.

How reliable these figures are is questionable. According to the Forest Department's survey, some parts of the submergence area show a density of 325 trees per hectare, while others show 863 trees per hectare. Such wide variation in a small radius defies explanation. Also, in one section, trunks with a girth of less than 20 cm have been classified "trees" while in another, trunks of this size have been ignored.

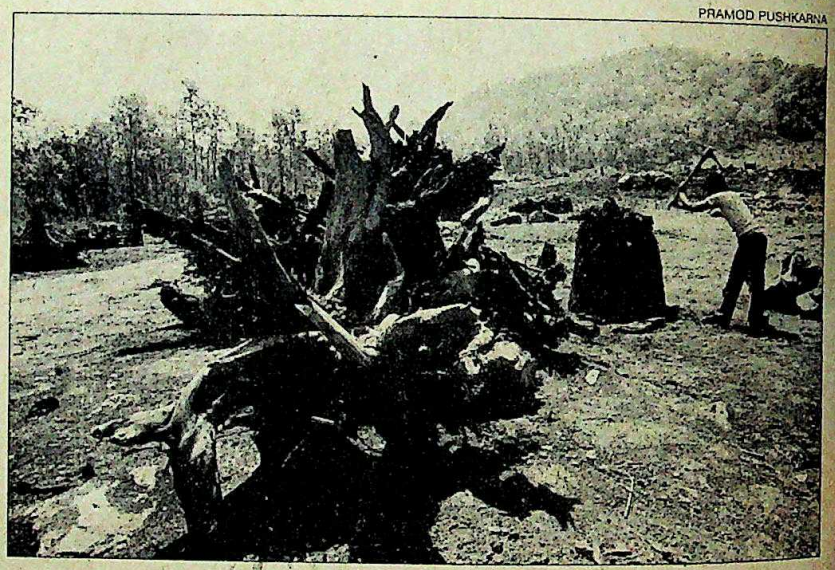
Another major discrepancy is that only trees standing on forest lands seem to have been considered though it is well known that in tribal areas like Bastar, there are a vast number of trees standing on private and revenue lands. These appear to have been forgotten while conducting an exercise as massive as a tree count.

The escalations have directly affected the cost of producing one unit of electricity at Indira Sarovar and some people feel that the delay has rendered it less economically feasible than it once was. Whichever way the ultimate decision goes, it is now a no-win situation.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR in Bodhghat

Uprooted trees: symbol of destruction

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



What appears to have put the decision-makers in a dilemma is the problem of the forests that will be submerged under the 130 sq km reservoir.

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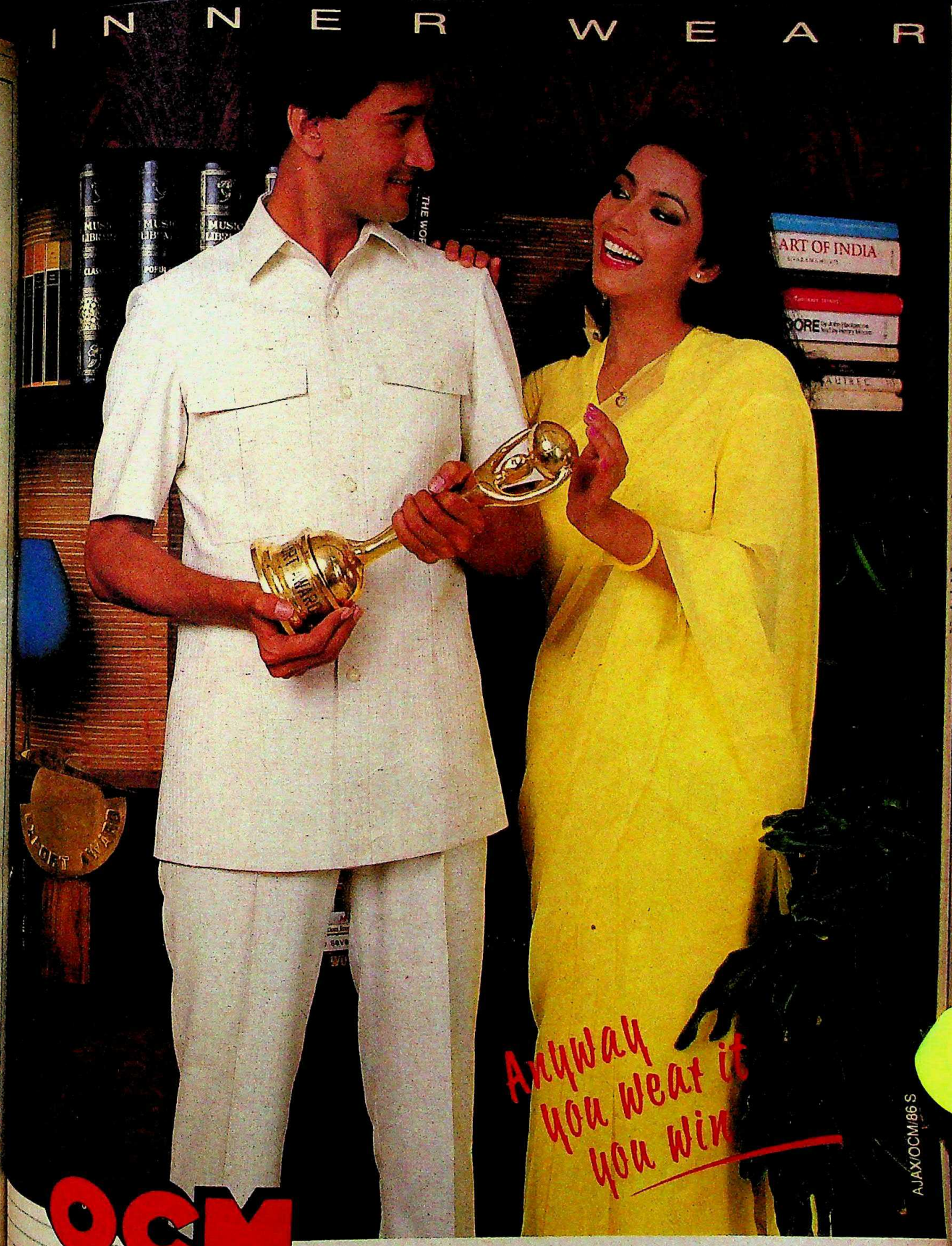
INNER WEAR



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TECHNOLOGY

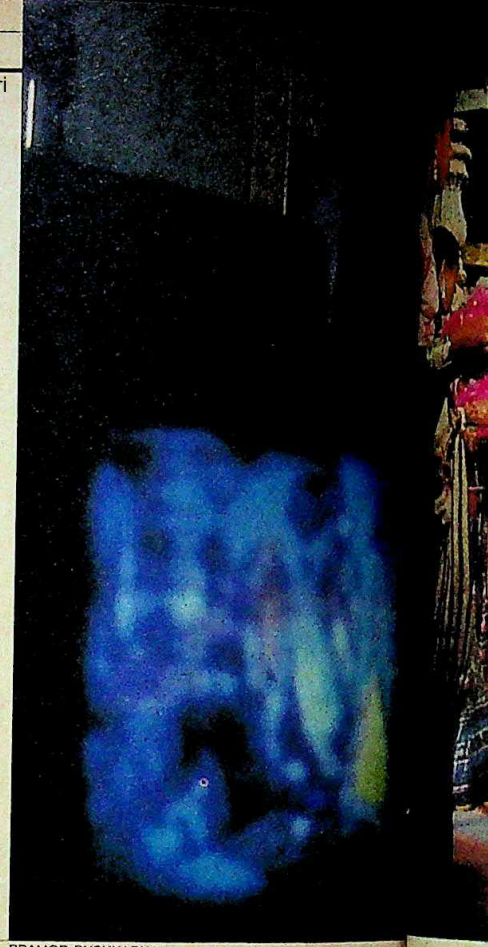
Electronic Epics

A CHERUBIC Vishnu with a canopy of snakes over his electric blue face and an incandescent Laxmi by his feet lies suspended in mid-air, as if floating in ether. Distressed humans float up to the deity and complain about the demons ravaging the earth below. From the depths of the orange sky, Ravana, dominant and deadly, zooms forward, his feet trampling the spinning globe. Lord Shiva glides into view resting on a tiger skin.

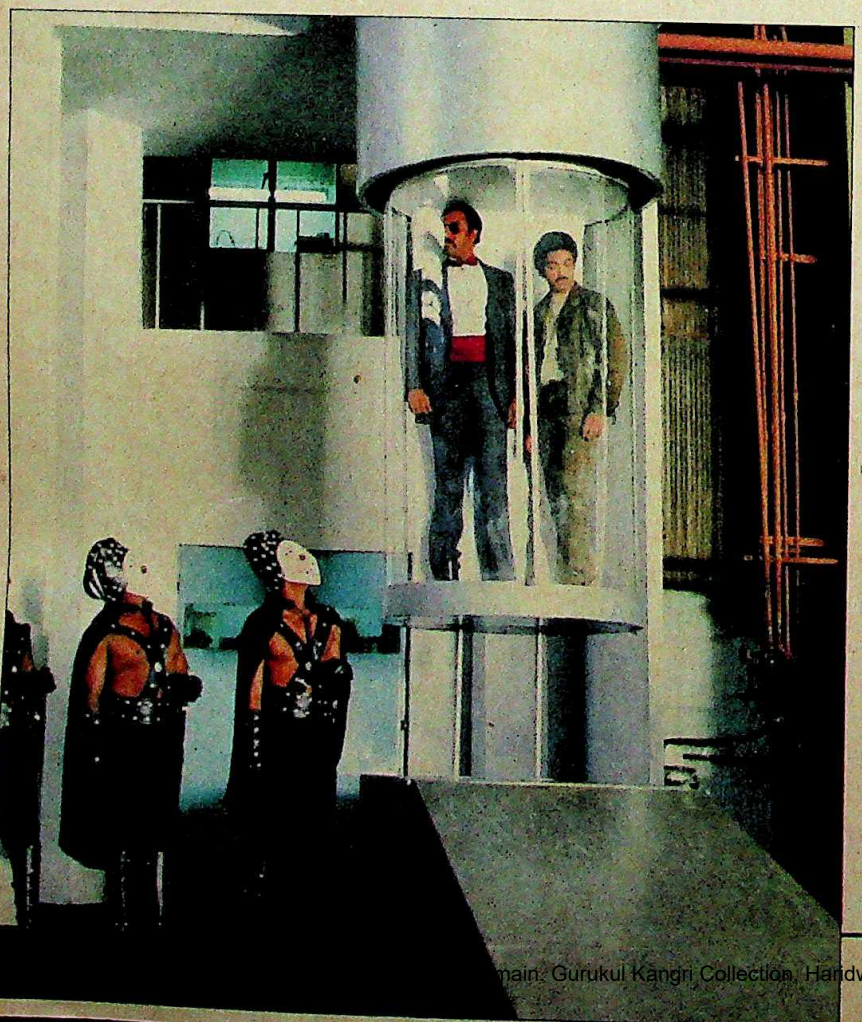
So begins Ramanand Sagar's video version of *Ramayana*. All laws of gravity are defied, there is a willing suspension of disbelief, for we are in epic land where gods and men rub shoulders with one another and miracles are quotidian fare. Dazzling technology and the advent of video magic leaves nothing to the imagination. Sagar's *Ramayana* in 52 episodes will shortly be aired (four episodes have already been completed) and the *Mahabharata*, for which movie Moghul B.R. Chopra is currently casting, will have a similar run. Move over *Humlog;* Doordarshan now offers Bhagvanlog.

Fantasy never disappeared; it only slipped into the side-streams of cinema and is now being reincarnated on television and video, and above all, being transformed by the magic of special effects into a technicoloured dreamship where space and time and movement are controlled by the touch of a button. Prem

Fantasy is being transformed on television and video by special effects into a technicoloured dreamship where space and time and movement are being controlled by the touch of a button.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



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Stills from and special effects for Kamalhasan's *Vikram* (far left and left); and Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayana* (above): fantasy inviolate

Sagar's *Vikram aur Betal* and Moti Sagar's *Dada Dadi ki Kahani* have already unveiled the electronic era. While the big screen is still dominated by modern escapist fare like Kamalhasan's forthcoming spectacular *Vikram*, the little screen is coming alive with electronically retold epics. And video has opened an Alladin's cave of gimmicks—studios echo with such arcane phrases as spins, dissolves, wipes, bipacking, special effects generators, optical printers, chroma keys, blue screens and double camera set-ups.

In Umbergaon, Gujarat, 170 km from Bombay, Ramanand Sagar is "writing the *Ramayana*" with "his camera". Hira Bhai Patel's Brindaban studio has been converted to 50 acres of Ramayana landscape. Scattered all over are columns of plaster of paris, bits and pieces of palaces, moulded blue-birds, thrones and many-splendoured bows. Reality continues to rudely intrude into the world of carefully constructed illusion. Vashist, dignified in his saffron robes, clogs and *rudraksha*, dispels the illusion when he nonchalantly flicks the ash from his *bidi* into his water

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pot. The next instant, a little girl shyly approaches 'Ramji' (Arun Govil, the Vikram of *Vikram aur Betal*) and says *namaste*, as if to a god. Illusion restored.

Wisely, Ramanand Sagar does not want details of his special effects to be revealed in print. "It's like going into the kitchen to see how *rasgullas* are made. Is it not better just to eat and savour them, to keep the mystery?" To capture some of this mystery, Sagar left the script of *Ramayana* at Vaishnodevi. "When I finished the script, I left it there, hoping that some *ras* would fall on it from above." The *ras* may not have been forthcoming, but divine power is manifested in the earthly devices of modern special effects—gods fly, split into a thousand manifestations or transform themselves into other shapes.

The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are tailor-made for special effects. When Vishwamitra wants to perform a *yagna*, Ram creates a shield of arrows to stop the demons from polluting the *yagna*. Hanuman (in this case Dara Singh) has to fly. He is photographed against a blue background, which is later matched to the desired backdrop by a technique called blue screen. Sagar also did extensive research for authenticity—for the costumes and jewellery, he consulted the acknowledged king of celluloid Rams—Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao and Professor Sankhalia in Pune, whose standards for authenticity were a bit too revolutionary for him. "The professor told me that women of those times from Kaushalya to Sita had to be topless. But I decided that I could not do this in India. I consulted other Vedic scholars who told me that even if this were the case, it was against the common man's concept of Sita."

In B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharata* too, fantasy remains inviolate. Bhishma arrests the flow of the Ganga with a tide of arrows, storms blow people away; Karna shoots bomb-like arrows and the wars are an ideal battlefield for special effects. Says Chopra: "Fantasy is a part of Indian life, you cannot break the belief."

But it is the Sagar brothers who, in *Vikram aur Betal*, for the first time opened up the bag of gimmicks in an Indian television serial. "What can one make with one and a half lakhs?" asks Prem Sagar. "The way out is to use visuals. We have no stars. The hero is the production. Thus we spend 90 per cent of the budget on the production and 10 per cent on the stars."

Thus, there is a flying *uran khatola* and a throne with a none-too-righteous king; Betal flies through the air a la Superman, a *rakshasa* carries away a screaming Kajal Kiran like an Indian King Kong. The extent of the illusion is enhanced by the fact that the *rakshasa* is actually four and half inches shorter than the petite actress. One episode has the remains of a girl brought to life by the five elements. We see the body taking shape as the wind blows and a fluorescent green light (supposed to be the soul or life), hovers over the bones. Reality, except for the moral messages in each tale, seldom intrudes. One illusion is heaped upon the other, by the director-puppeteer moving sets and actors at will with his magic special effects machine and chroma keys. Explains Sagar: "The *rakshasa* never visited the site of the shooting; he was on my floor in front of the blue background. He had no idea who he was abducting or fighting in the jungle...or who was shooting arrows into his hairy heart."

The illusion is complete with a visit through the Sagar villa in Andheri, *Vikram and Betal* land, with tiny plants which become big trees, newspaper and straw coatings which become horrific caves, painted gates which are transformed to huge palace gates or durbars; like looking at Cinderella when the midnight hour has struck. Fantasy has been created from virtually nothing.

While the Sagars are creating Indian fantasies on video, Kamalhasan is creating a different kind of fantasy on film. *Vikram*, probably the costliest Tamil film made so far, is a modern day fairy-tale of the 007 genre. Its hero is a spoofy, sexy James Bond played with tongue-in-cheek panache by Kamalhasan, also the film's producer. Replete with missiles and mid-air action and a bevy of beauties including Dimple Kapadia, the film is a marriage between high technology and fantasy. Not only have the use of Apple 2 and IBM PC-70's contributed to it, the people involved in the making of the film include scientists working at the Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) in Bangalore. Students at the Madras IIT wrote the computer programme for the rocket, called Agniputra II. The story has been written by Kamalhasan and Dr Rangaragan of BEL, and Periyanaigam, also from BEL, helped with the titles and effects and even loaned a microcomputer for the rocket.

The marriage between high-tech and the world of celluloid was formalised in the formation, some years ago, of Motion Graphics—Kamalhasan is one of the partners, along with some young technologists—for creating special effects. Says Kamalhasan: "The hero Vikram, belongs to an intelligence agency BRA—shades of Bond—the Bureau of Research Analysis. The film has the spirit of Spielberg and the authenticity of rockets and nuclear missiles: we also have made a Cessna which does all but fly. We have used all kinds of effects: computer images in which faces crumble, the teleprinter titles roll in as if from nowhere, zoom towards the camera and explode in your face. The film will really bring out the boy in all men." Including, no doubt, the new pioneers of the electronic epic.

—MADHU JAIN in Bombay and Madras

Still from *Vikram*: mid-air action

Kamalhasan's *Vikram* is a modern-day fairy-tale of the 007 genre. Replete with missiles and mid-air action, it is a marriage between high-technology and fantasy.

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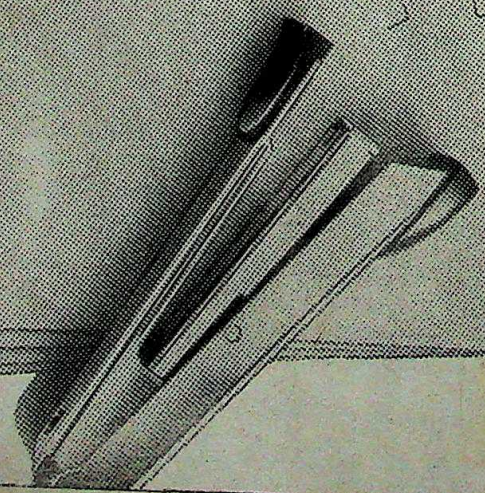

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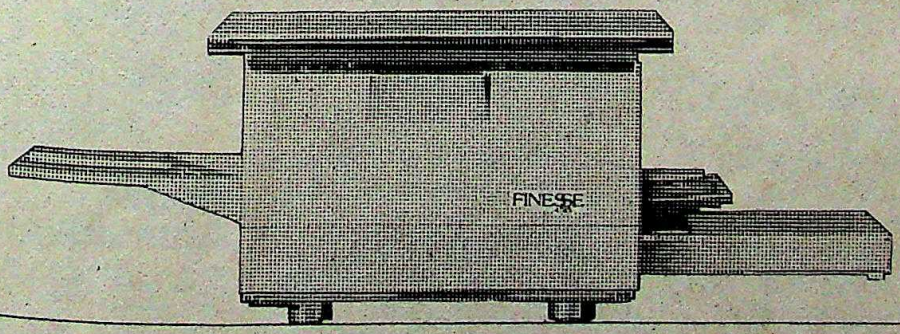

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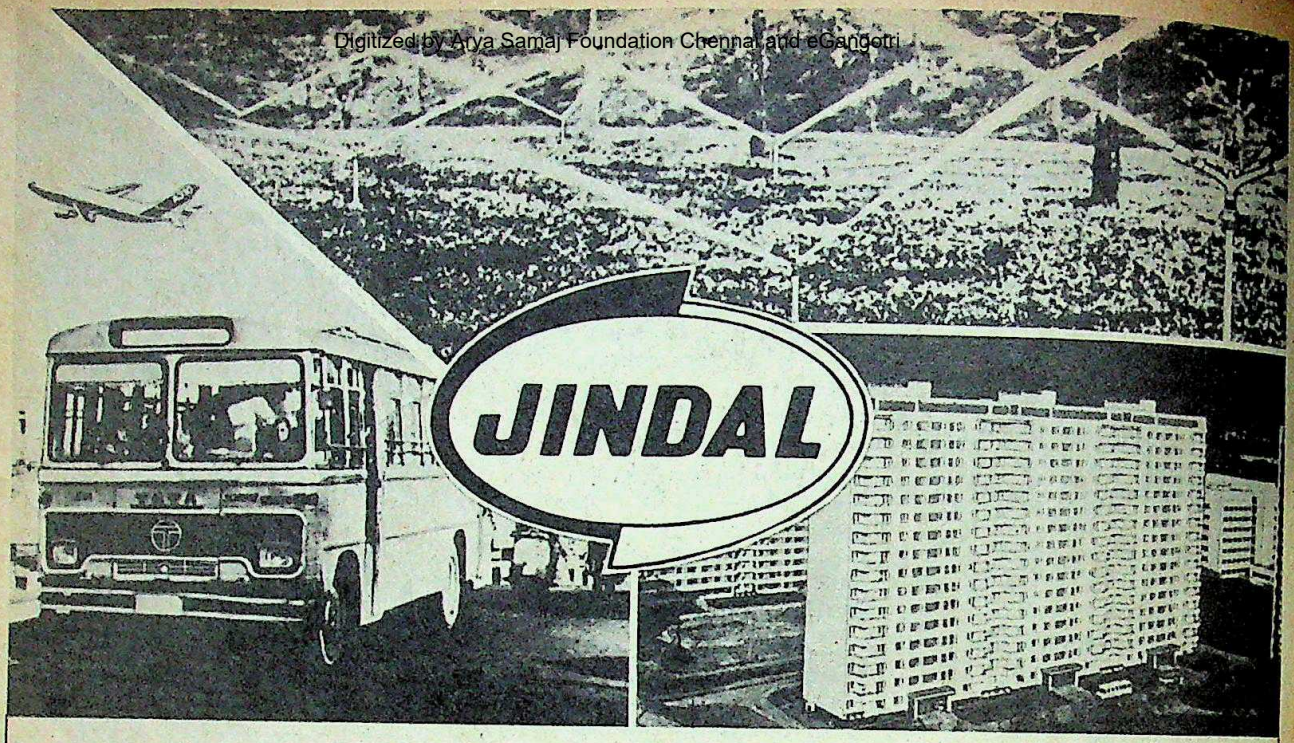

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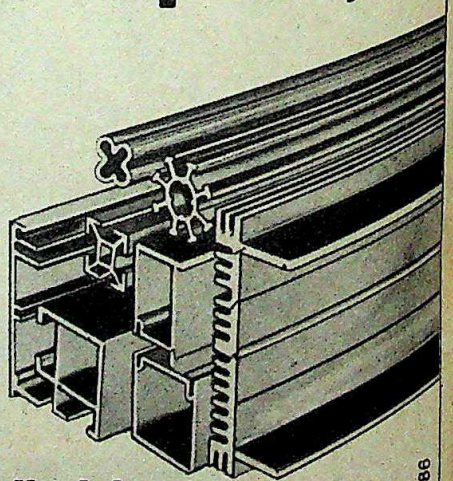

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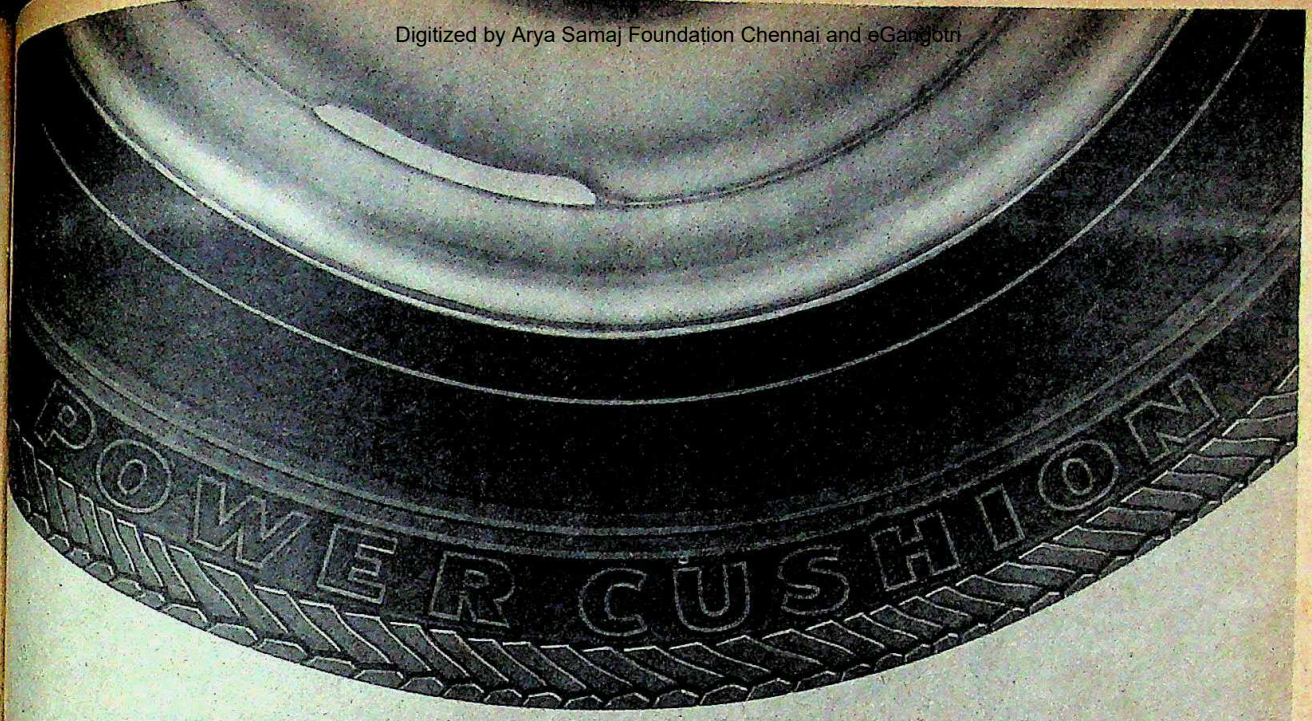

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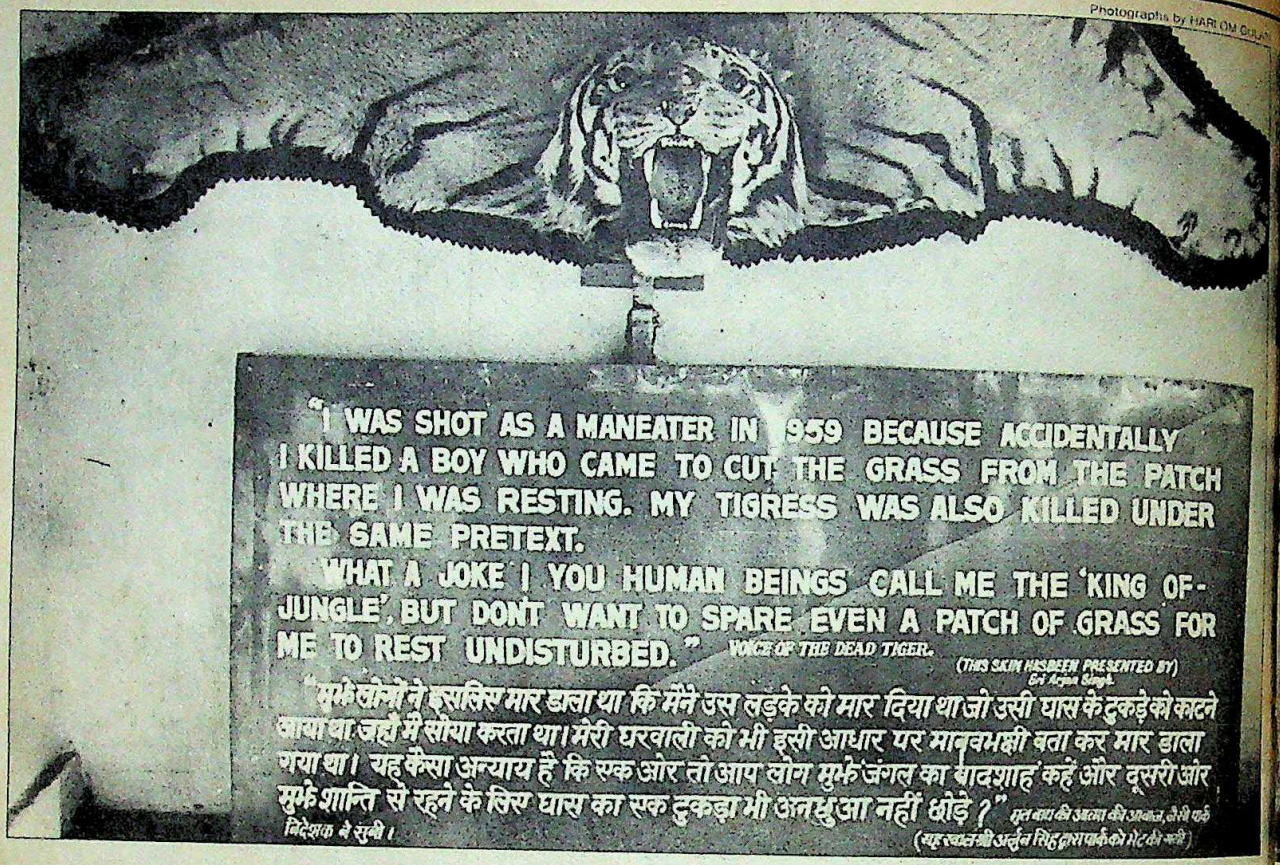

Poignant legend at Dudhwa

TIGER SANCTUARIES

Conflict in the Wild

A FARM worker looking for a place to relieve himself casually approaches a cane field on the outskirts of the Dudhwa national park in Uttar Pradesh. Unknown to him, a tiger lurks in the cane; the great striped beast pounces and one more digit is added to the statistics of man-eater victims.

Exacting gruesome revenge, the victim's grieving relatives leave a poisoned goat carcass on the spot, knowing the tiger will return. It does, finishes the poisonous repast and ambles off into the jungle to die a painful death. As the jungle reverberates to the sound of the tiger's death roars, one more number is added to the tally of tigers killed by human vendetta.

This seesaw battle has been going on around the Dudhwa national park for some time, taking a heavy toll of tiger and human lives. The human toll is properly tabulated: nearly 180 persons are known to have been killed by tigers since 1978 in Kheri district (which includes Dudhwa). But no one knows the precise count of tigers poisoned by prey turned predator.

Dudhwa has earned for itself the top spot in man-eating's hall of fame: between 20 and 25 people are killed by tigers every year. However, for many years the Sunderbans tiger reserve had occupied the gory position, with 40 to 42 deaths annually. That figure was brought down to 21 last year by concerted action to cut down the chances of confrontation between man and the king of the forest. Though officials say that the problem has arisen only in the Sunderbans and at Dudhwa, it occasionally surfaces elsewhere too: the news-letter of the Wildlife Association of South India recently reported a poisoned tiger near Masinagudi forest, and an injured tiger found dead in Kakankote forest near Mysore.

The battle between people and tigers around the parks has broken out with reason. With the tiger population in the country going up quite sharply (from 3,015 in 1979 to 4,005 in 1984), and those in the tiger reserves from 711 to 1,121 in the same period, the areas reserved for tigers have become increasingly crowded. The tigers often break bounds, and the conflict escalates with villagers going into the reserves to poach on the tiger's prey species (deer, cheetal and wild pig), and collect firewood, honey and grass.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature recommends a minimum habitat of 2,000 to 3,000 square miles for a contiguous population of 300 tigers; nowhere is this kind of territory available. But, argues R.L. Singh, director of Project Tiger, the area of parks like Dudhwa is sufficient for the tiger residents, provided the privacy and peace of the habitat is maintained and there is enough food. Unfortunately a major road and railway line trisects Dudhwa, turning it into three separate zones.

Prosperous farmers living in the three-mile buffer zone around the Dudhwa park brag about the number of tigers eliminated. Evidence is hard to come as those who do it cover their tracks well. Yet recently, a junior park warden at Dudhwa was detected burning the carcass of a tiger. The official inquiry did not solve the mystery but G.C. Mishra, the park direc-

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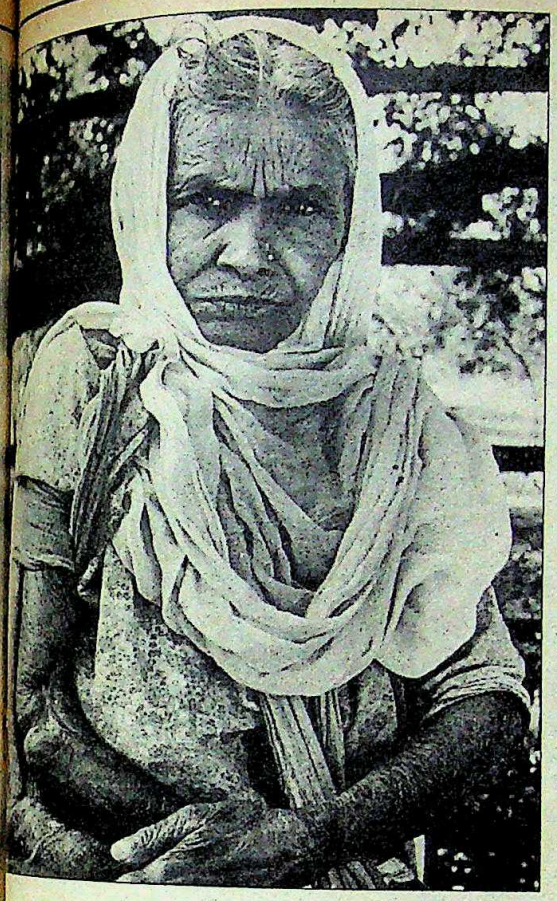

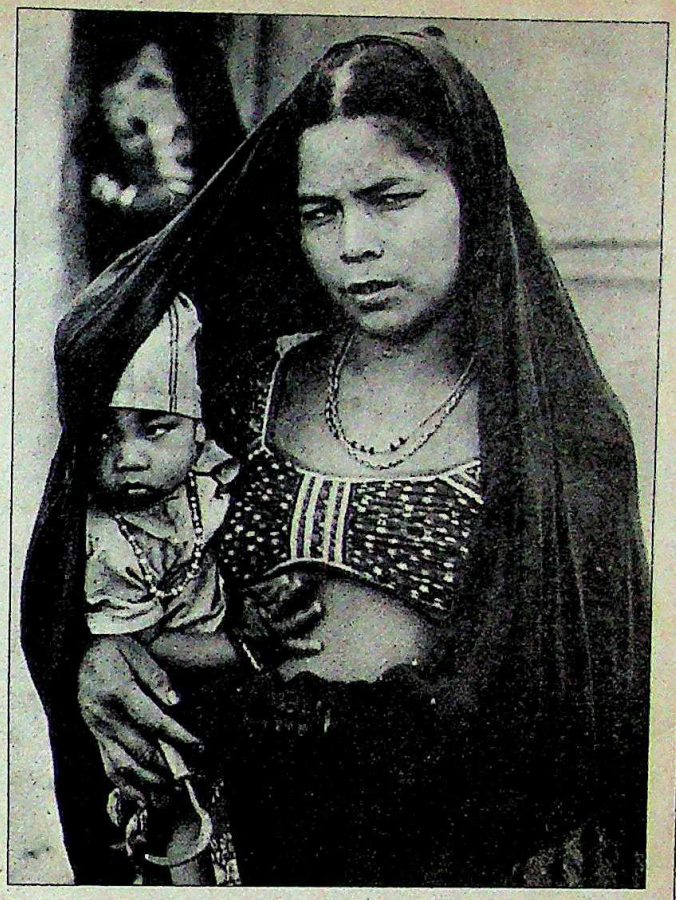

Mauled victim Hasina (left) and a widowed Phoolmati: close encounters

spects that the tiger had been
ed by villagers and the warden was
ying the evidence so that he was not
d for dereliction of duty.
me months ago, a limping tigress
ed and despatched to Lucknow Zoo
und to have been injured by pellets.
Arjan Singh, Dudhwa's honorary
e-warden, says another tiger had its
shown off because someone had
e a crude bomb in the carcass of its
d a young farmer, Gurnihal Singh
, 27, who lives two miles from the
said someone must be poisoning the
as those seen around his Ainthpur
seem to have vanished this year.
used to see pug marks of five or six
. Now I see no pug marks at all."
conservationists have realised that
only way to save the humans and
around reserves like Dudhwa is to
their habitats separate and inviolate.
ost states are taking steps to enlarge
core area of the parks where human
ement and forest exploitation are not
wed. The core areas of the Simlipal
arnataka) and Bandipur (Orissa) tiger
ves have been expanded. The Agri-
e Ministry had also been persuaded
its Kokilabari seed farm, and the

Arjan Singh: defending the cats

vacated area has been added to the Manas tiger reserve in Assam. Orders have also been issued to stop grazing in the Melghat reserve in Maharashtra. Two villages inside Kanha, Madhya Pradesh have been relocated and a contiguous forest of 100 sq km added to the reserve.

However, developments at Dudhwa have been in the opposite direction. Since 1978, the number of villages in its buffer zone has increased from 21 to 80, rendering the habitat conflict more acute. Wildlife conservationists, therefore, feel that the Dudhwa tiger is more sinned against than sinning, and that settlers around the park are in fact to blame for incurring the wrath of the ferocious felines. And when it comes to the crunch, the politicians and the state Government always intervene on the side of man. Inevitably, this brings tiger lovers like Billy and Misra into confrontation with local politicians.

"The trouble is that humans have a vote and the animals don't," says Billy. The Wildlife Act says there should be no disturbance to the habitat but because of pressures from the voting public, successive directors have allowed people to take park material out. Some weeks ago, Suresh Ajmani, the agitated local MLA of Dudhwa led a delegation of villagers to the park director to complain that the people were not being allowed to collect grass and firewood from the park grounds. "This has been allowed for decades and withdrawing the permission now is gross injustice," argued Ajmani. "Dictatorial" park officials were depriving poor people of fuelwood, and he threatened to complain to higher authorities.

Misra explained that in January this year Ajmani along with a local delegation had pleaded with the chief minister, who

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The Dudhwa tiger is more sinned against than sinning, and settlers around the park are in fact to blame for incurring the wrath of the ferocious felines.

was visiting Dudhwa, to allow villagers to collect grass and firewood from the park. In spite of protests, the chief minister conceded the demand. But the officials approached the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife in New Delhi, and a call from the prime minister's office to Lucknow made the chief minister hastily revise his order.

BUT THE conservationists' concern for wildlife and the eco-system is inexplicable to the poor villagers scrabbling for a living on the edge of the forest. Some years ago, several graziers were killed in police firing when they insisted on herding their cattle into the Bharatpur bird sanctuary. Elsewhere, outraged villagers recently told a senior wildlife official: "*Hum bhookhay mar rahen hain aur aap baagh paal rahe hain.*" (We are dying of hunger and you are more bothered about raising tigers.) To eliminate this kind of strife, villages near parks are now being offered grass at concessional prices to stall-feed their cattle, and firewood for burning. But these changes take time to get implemented. Lakhimpur's conservator of forests, A.P. Misra, disclosed that the Government had approved a proposal for the state's forest corporation to open depots around the park to supply grass and firewood at cost. But the project is still grounded as the corporation pleads that it does not have the staff to manage such an operation.

Officials point out that unless the people living on the periphery benefit from the wildlife area and are proud of it, that area cannot exist. "In a democracy wildlife cannot live without the will of the people," says Billy. Adds R.L.Singh: "Now our concern is to improve the conditions of the people living around the tiger reserves. And unless the feeling is removed that conservation is at their cost, conservation cannot succeed."

Near Dudhwa, park officials try to convince villagers that one or two good, stall-fed buffaloes will give more milk than a dozen head of useless cattle which need to be grazed every day. But till animal husbandry practices change, villagers like Lalla of Masaankhamb village, will be forced to take their cattle to graze in the grass fields near the park. Lalla was killed by a tiger in February, and for a while other cowherds didn't venture near the park. But, asks Lalla's grieving wife Phoolmati with a shrug: "*Wahan nahin to kahan jayen?*" (If we don't go there where will we go?). A short distance away lives Hasina, mother of a park mahout. Her right arm is a mangled mess, chewed up by a tiger last October as she slept outside her hut. Hasina was saved by her quilt; the tiger dragged it off mistaking it for her. Disabled, Hasina awaits compensation.

Taking advantage of the outcry following the man-eating incidents around Dudhwa and at the Corbett park, where two foreign tourists were recently mauled to death, a group of "sportsmen hunters" jumped into the fray and sought permission to bring in foreign trophy hunters to kill the man-eaters at $30,000 per head. If periodic 'cropping' of old, decrepit and man-eating tigers were allowed, wildlife could become a revenue-earning resource, they said in a proposal to the Central and Uttar Pradesh Governments six months ago.

But the proposal has little chance of going through. The director, wildlife, in the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, M.K. Ranjeet Singh, dismissed the proposal to trophy hunt the man-eaters: "Allowing cropping of decrepit tigers will open a Pandora's Box; permission to shoot one animal will lead to the shooting of others. We cannot take a chance with a man-eater; it has to be destroyed immediately. We cannot wait for trophy hunters and it may not be correct to view it as a revenue-earning exercise." Stressing the same point, R.L. Singh added: "So far nine man-eating tigers have been destroyed at Dudhwa and one trapped. Not one of them was old, disabled or a nursing mother."

No one is more incensed by the tiger-hunting suggestion than Billy. "These despicable proposals are triggered by self-interest," he snorts. "Before Project Tiger was started there were 26 *shikar* companies who got $10,000 per tiger. Now they want to get back into the act." Billy, author of four authoritative books on the tiger, dismissed as *bakwas* (nonsense) the theory propagated by some wildlife experts that the Dudhwa tigers have a man-eating "trait" which is passed on from mother to cub. Heredity seldom plays a part in such an aberration, he says. To a tiger, anything that moves is prey. When it gets used to seeing humans day and night encroaching on its forest habitats, the tiger sheds its awe of the human being. "With familiarity has come increasing contempt and the tiger has accepted the human as a prey species. When there is nothing to eat it attacks humans. The cause of man-eating is always human pressure," Billy said plainly. And Misra confirmed: "It is not true at all that a tiger starts hankering for human flesh having tasted it once. If that was the case there would be a human killed every seventh day. It's just that after having killed a man once the tiger starts considering man a part of his menu."

But man is not prepared to sit back and be killed. And the poignancy of this escalating conflict is best illustrated by the legend under a tigerskin which adorns one wall of the reception centre at Dudhwa. Signed 'Voice of the Dead Tiger', it says: "I was shot as a man-eater in 1959 because accidentally I killed a boy who came to cut grass from the patch where I was resting. My tigress was also killed under the same pretext. What a joke. You human beings call me king of the jungle but don't want to spare even a patch of grass for me to rest undisturbed."

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Dudhwa

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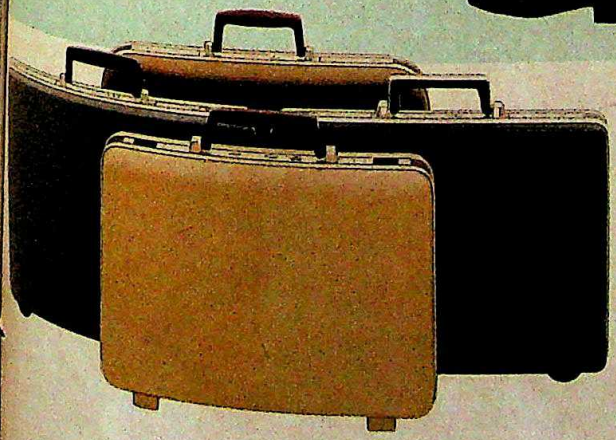

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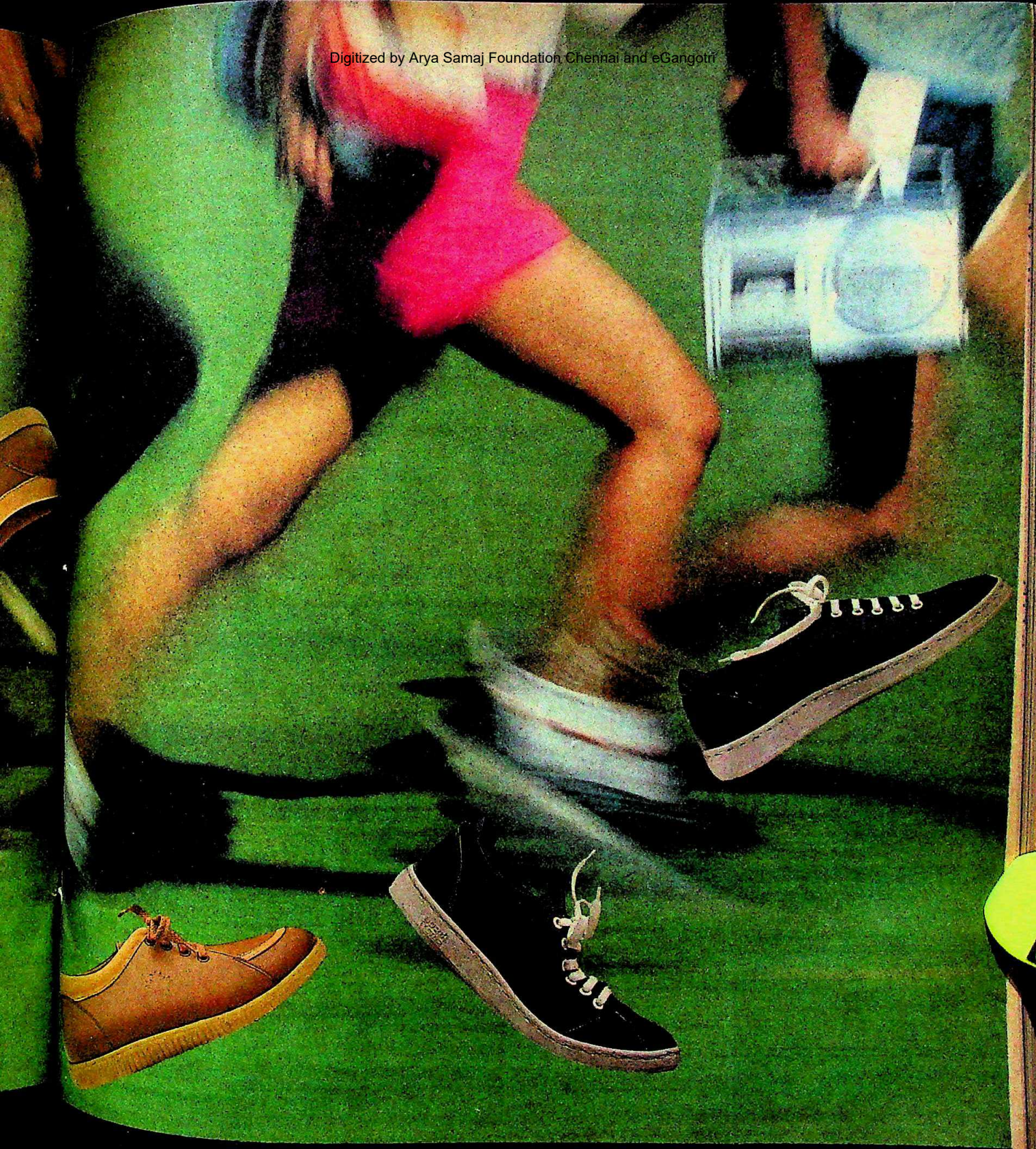

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It's a great feeling!

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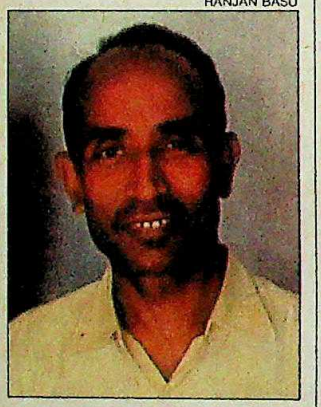
◆ Move over Germaine Greer. Make way for **Shyam Sunder Lal Gupta** of Delhi, a diminutive and nondescript man who has just struck a vital blow for Men's lib. Gupta, 51, became the subject of an unprecedented court verdict last month which ordered his divorced wife to pay him Rs 1,200 per month as maintenance. After 32 years of marriage, a daughter, a son and two grandchildren, Gupta divorced his wife last year "on grounds of cruelty". Since he had lost his job years ago and gifted his house to the wife, he had no option but to claim maintenance. Said Gupta: "I believe it's men who are persecuted by women. Even the laws are in their favour. And I

RANJAN BASU



Gupta: men's lib

am proud I have broken this." He has now started an International Federation of Indian Men to fight the oppressive tyranny of women.

◆ The Kapoor clan has a penchant for doing their own thing. While Papa Shashi Kapoor was busy in his world of art films and glamour, his teenaged blonde-haired daughter **Sanjna Kapoor**, upped and moved in with her current boyfriend Aditya Bhattacharya, son of director Basu Bhattacharya, who has been recently rated by one glamour magazine as "the sexiest man in India". Sanjna then made

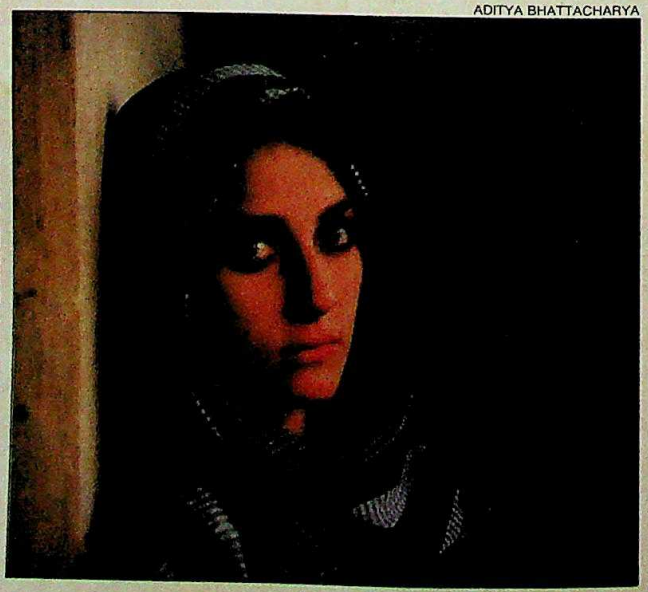
her second independent move, this one on stage—as Raina in Motley's production of Shaw's *Arms and the Man* in Bombay, thereby giving notice that yet another Kapoor is readying to join the big bad world of showbiz.

◆ Party-buffs all over Delhi were all agog at the familiar-looking female who turned up at all the important social events and seemed to know everybody, but they couldn't quite place her. The lady would've come and gone unrecognised had someone not

Puthli: the cross-cultural phenomenon

spilled the beans. It was none other than **Asha Puthli**—minus the streaks and tinsel in her hair but still aglitter and aglow. In India to do a music video for her talk show on cable TV in Manhattan, the jet-set singer flitted from party to party, dropping names and witticisms at the drop of a Kleenex. "It's a statement, an extension of my beliefs," she said of her show, expounding on the McLuhan concept of global media and cross-cultural phenomena to whoever would listen. "My show deals with a wide range of subjects. Any subject, anyone that shrinks the world into the brotherhood of man," she lectured, while her audience wondered whatever happened to the Puthli of an older, more recognizable era.

ADITYA BHATTACHARYA



Kapoor: flying into the world of show-biz

◆ "The problem is the image. And you use whichever medium is the most effective. You can use a knife, a pen, a brush, or a lens which can sometimes be sharper than a knife." Thus spake **Viswanadhan**, 46, intense and frizzy-haired, and laying down his brush, picked up a camera. The result was *Sand*, his first film in a proposed

HARI OM GULATI

Vishwanadhan: honoured

series on the five elements. That he wasn't merely dabbling was proved when his second film, *Water Ganga*, won the Grand Prix at the Cinema du Reel—the international festival of ethnographical films organised in Paris last fortnight. A wordless visual study in colour of the sacred and inviolate river and the people along its course, the film won the respect of the jury and critics for its stark beauty and sensitivity. Viswanadhan, who finds cinema a more tangible medium, says: "Painting is more personal, more internalised. It has the privilege and fear of solitude. It was to break this solitude that I made the film."

—Compiled by MOHAMMED ASLAM

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Storming the Citadel

Benazir Bhutto returned in triumph to Pakistan last fortnight to stake her claim to the legacy of her father, the late Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. Her tour of the country drew huge crowds. Her presence has altered the political scene and threatened President Zia's rule.

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The Pakistan Hand

The Indian Government's assertion of Pakistan involvement in Sikh terrorism in Punjab is based on solid evidence. INDIA TODAY has obtained details of interrogation reports of numerous terrorists detailing the extent and nature of the Pakistan hand in Punjab.

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Pre-emptive Strike

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi struck decisively last fortnight to stem dissidence in the Congress(I) by expelling Pranab Mukherjee and suspending three others from the party. An inside report plus interviews with Mukherjee and Kamalapati Tripathi.

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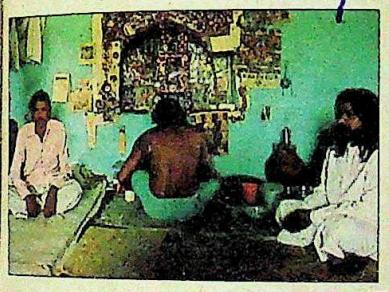

Dacoits' Dilemma

The dacoits in Gwalior jail, including Phoolan Devi and Malkhan Singh, face new tension and uncertainty with Phoolan's fate a bone of contention between the Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh governments. An exclusive report from inside the jail.

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Ershad's Gamble

As the countdown began for parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, the split in the Opposition paved the way for General Ershad to sweep the polls and legitimise his rule, despite a boycott by a major opposition alliance backed up by student militancy.

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The Smut Glut

The showing of soft-porn films containing 'blue' scenes that were not shown to the censors but interpolated later has become the biggest organised racket in Kerala. The censors are helpless because of police connivance with the producers of the films.

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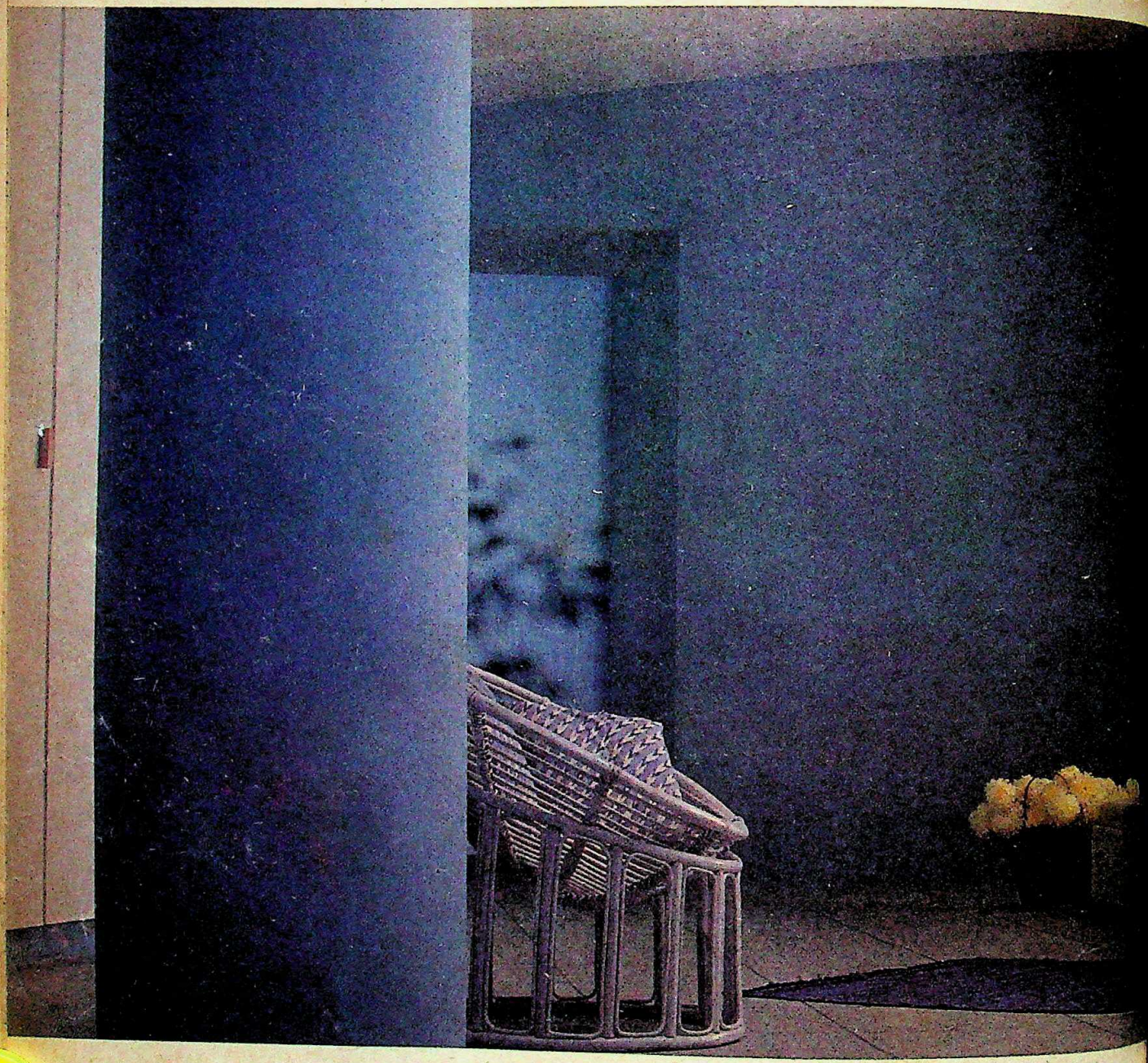

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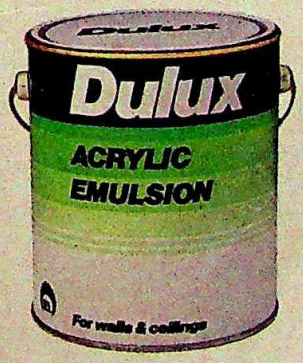

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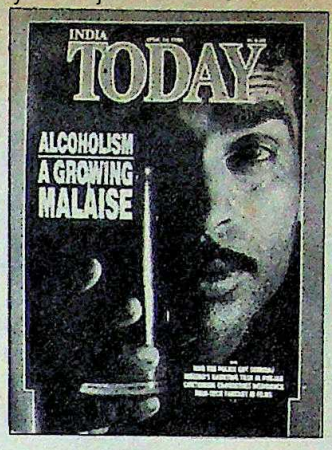

TAXING MALAISE

The cover story on alcoholism ("Growing Malaise", April 30) is both interesting and alarming. The only disincentive to excessive drinking and smoking would be an enormous price hike on these commodities. But the Government's collections from taxes on alcohol are substantial and a downward trend in sales would not be favoured. The growing malaise of alcoholism can only be controlled by the Government.

New Delhi — **SACHIN SAKSENA**

■ The reference in your cover story on alcoholism to 'Mathew', a copywriter in a leading advertising agency in New Delhi, has caused me serious embarrassment as I have been receiving calls from my friends and business associates. I have recently started out on my own after leaving Lintas, my last employers, with goodwill.

In the absence of the full name of the person you are referring to, your report is going to serve as a disincentive to my present and future clients and thereby affect my new business venture. I am sure you will agree that alcoholics do not embark on business ventures and employ staff and premises, as I have done. As far as I am concerned, I have never visited Alcoholics Anonymous anywhere any time.

New Delhi — **SAM MATHEWS**

The person referred to in our report on alcoholism was not Sam Mathews, and the embarrassment caused by the inadvertent coincidence of names is regretted.

—Editor

■ As a grateful and recovering member of the wonderful fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I wish to express my appreciation for your lead story on alcoholism. AA has perhaps one of the most successful programmes for treating addicts. I would also like to add that we at AA have no desire to dry up the world. Our purpose is to stay sober and help alcoholics achieve sobriety.

New Delhi — **MOHAN**

REASON WOUNDED

The only hope for Punjab ("Upsurge of Violence", April 15) lies in weaning the mass of Sikhs away from the militants. Those who believe that the militants can be suppressed by physical force are living in a world of illusion. Heinous as their crimes are, the reactions of the press, government and political parties only help the militants' cause. The people wonder why these same groups did not condemn as vociferously the murder of innocent Sikhs in June and October 1984. Why were those guilty of murder then let off, while those picked up as extremists are still kept in custody. Tackling militancy in Punjab is a delicate task requiring an understanding of the Sikh psyche.

Patiala — **KULRAJ SINGH AND OTHERS**

■ The unending crisis in the state is a pointer to the inefficiency and apathy of the Punjab Government, both the present and the erstwhile ones, in dealing with the fissiparous forces who are out to sunder the country. Determination has been the hallmark of the terrorists, and by their well-planned attacks on innocent people, they have time and again proved that they have the support of alien forces.

Ahmedabad — **M.V. RAVINDRAN**

■ The communal vein in the terrorist violence is disturbing. The divide between the two major communities in the state seems to be total. The police is totally demoralised and communal. Ribeiro's appointment should boost the sagging morale of the police.

Calcutta — **RAJVIR GREWAL**

■ Punjab has become another pawn on the political chess-board. Moves are made without consulting the people and the Government's decision is forcing people to make moves that they don't want to. The state needs to tread carefully.

Amritsar — **KAMALJIT SINGH GOLDIE**

■ The Government's policy of interfering and not allowing the police or those responsible for maintaining law and order to concentrate on one task has meant the weakening of defences. The

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state is bowing down to the terrorists' sinister designs by not ensuring communal harmony. It's an 'Upsurge of Super-Violence'.

Shimla — VIVEK MOHAN

■ Sometimes the Punjab problem seems quite hopeless. I can't understand why people feel Hindus and Sikhs are not brothers. Sikhism is as much a part of the Hindu religion as Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

Patna — MALAY VAHAN

■ Peace can only be brought back to Punjab by force. If we want peace we must prepare ourselves for war against the terrorists acting at the behest of foreign powers. Every party should unite and work jointly, fired by a spirit of national solidarity. National integration is the weapon for our survival.

Begusarai — RAJEEV BHARADWAJ

■ If the people unite to resist the growing communalism, the terrorists will be demoralised and return to the mainstream. The Akali Government should not be so weak-kneed.

Patna Saheb — MAJOR BALBIR SINGH

LAW OF THE GUN

In your Special Report ("Operation Disarm" April 15), you did not emphasise the fact that the verification procedure for the issue of gun licences is hardly likely to improve the efficiency of the understaffed Uttar Pradesh police. If the Government had the foresight to consider an armed people as a deterrent to crime, such senseless projects would never see the light of day.

Madras — MEHUL KAMDAR

■ At a time when law and order is practically non-existent and the police ineffective, people must be allowed to make arrangements for their own protection. Gun licences must be abolished. History is with us in this regard. It was the British who first introduced the arms licence in India, to disarm the Indian people, after suppressing the 1857 mutiny.

Calcutta — AROUN SHAHI

■ Your article faithfully echoes the sarkari tune regarding reducing the number of licensed weapons with citizens. Licensed weapons are rarely used in committing crimes—a fact which even the Lucknow SSP could have corroborated if he knew his facts. What needs to be curbed is the menace of illegal firearms which outnumber the former 10:1.

Shimla — VIJAY SUD

AGE OLD SCOURGE

"The Dues of Death" (April 15) on the Dom Raja is poignant and moving. Choudhury's pathetic statement, "If I open a shop who will come"? is a telling comment on our society. It is a pity that the scourge of untouchability is yet to free our hearts and minds.

Allahabad — R.K. SINHA

■ It is regrettable that a magazine of your stature has seen fit to publish such bizarre and nightmarish photographs. They are nauseous, to say the least. I have hidden the issue from my children lest they get scared.

Wellington, Tamil Nadu — USHA SUNDAR

BIG DADS

Your article ("Poaching Problems" April 15) has left out the fact that the IAS rules the roost in all departments. Rules are tailor-made to suit them. For instance, a deputation to the public sector means permanent absorption to all except IAS officers, who are free to jump from post to post. They refuse to work in the districts, except as very junior officers, and the IAS is the only service where everybody rises to the level of additional secretary irrespective of competence.

Bangalore — K. NIRMALA

GOODBYE HERO

Tamil Nadu's chief minister ("The Fading Star" April 15) has become a black hole! MGR is a spent force. He should gracefully retire when he is still widely admired and respected. After all, how long can Tamil Nadu tolerate this Rip Van Winkle?

Bombay — SHANMUGHAM MUDALIAR

NORMS FOR BANKS

Your story ("Vulnerable Targets" April 15) raises one question. When the banks do not take adequate security measures, why do the insurance companies compensate them? Is it because the compensation is paid out of public money and not out of their pockets? Also, insurance companies must insist on some security norms that all banks have to follow.

Varanasi — V.K. AGRAWAL

■ Your article quotes Police Commissioner Soman as saying that "nobody knows the procedure to be followed when there is a robbery". But he conveniently forgot the police who issue gun licences indiscriminately, endangering innocent citizens.

Nagaon, Assam — BIVASH MODI

PRESSING REFORMS

Your report on Sobhraj ("The Escape Scandal" April 15) raises a very disturbing thought. If Ved Prakash Garg had not been sacked for leaking his letter to the press, and his suggestions accepted and implemented, Tihar Jail would not be in the soup it is today. It also brings to mind President Zail Singh's statement about the prison: "It is shocking, shameful and unbelievable."

New Delhi — MAJOR SHAMSHER SINGH (Retd)

CORRUPT CAST

The Doordarshan article ("The Money Machine" April 15) made shocking revelations about high-level corruption. Will 'Corruption in TV' figure as the next episode in *Sach-ki-Parchhaian?*

Allahabad — ANUNTH SHREENIVAS

■ On the day I was reading your article, Doordarshan screened the telefilm *Hum Nahin Sudhrenge*, which centred on corruption. Perhaps by showing this film, which was suddenly brought in place of another film, Doordarshan wanted the viewers to know that things just won't improve.

Bombay — K.S. VENKATESWARAN

JUMBO EXPOSE

Your exposure of Air-India's manner of leasing freighter aircraft ("Double Dealing", March 31) has put the airline's officials on the mat. Instead of setting their house in order, the Maharajah's men have inserted a quarter page advertisement in leading newspapers in defence. There is nothing new in their denials, which could have been made through a press release as is the practice.

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia — NAJMA WARSI

■ Your article ("Bad Taste" March 31) ridicules our efforts in exporting fresh fruits and vegetables. On the contrary, Air-India should be congratulated for not cutting its freight rates since now there will be more going round for the common man at reasonable prices.

Pune — D.B.N. MURTHY

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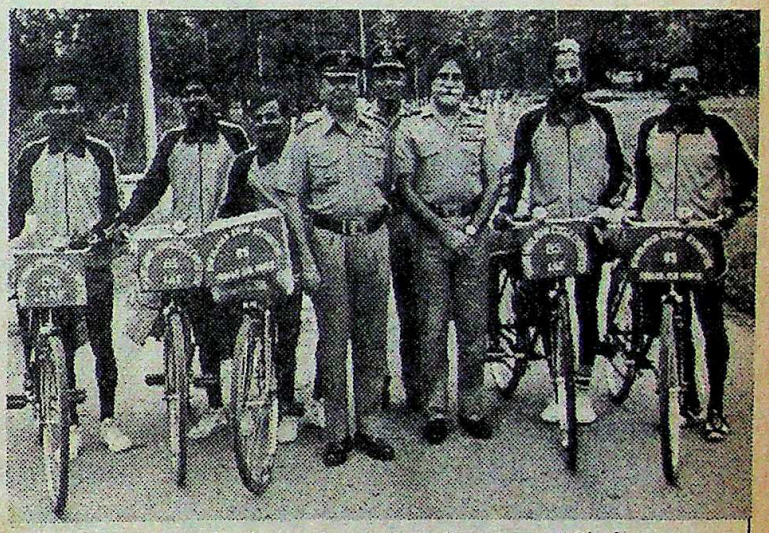
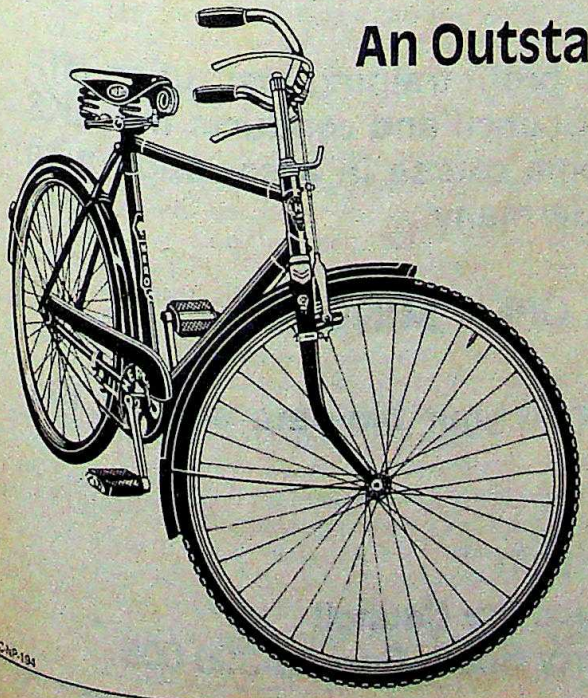


Air Marshal P.P. Singh receives the team at Chabua



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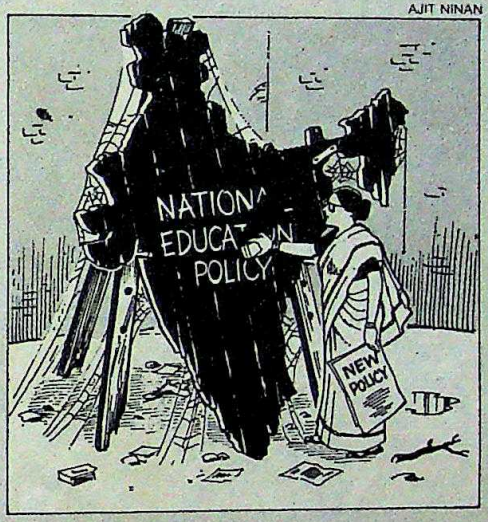
Learning Reform

THE SPECIALISTS may say what they will, but the problem with education in this country is very easily put. Too serious a business to be left to governments alone, education is a mess because there isn't enough money, teachers don't teach, children often don't learn, most schools and colleges don't really equip the young for productive work and education by and large doesn't prepare the next generation for modern, civilised, responsible living. Everything else is a matter of detail.

What is easily put, however, is hard to change. The answer to reforming education is clearly more than a matter of issuing a policy. There have been policies before; there was nothing wrong with the education policy of 1968, nor with the concept of the 10+2+3 system unveiled some years later. The problem was not in the ideas they espoused; it lay, much more, in the determination and ability of the authorities to implement them—and, still more, in the obstacles to a thorough overhaul.

AJIT NINAN



The new education policy must be viewed against this sort of background. The new document says little that isn't well known already. The aim to create a new education service or to set up *navodaya vidyalayas*—model schools which were first put forward by the Kothari Commission in 1966—may or may not turn out as intended, but no one can quarrel with the emphasis on improving the education of the so-called backward communities or women, or with the idea of reforming the examination system or creating a national curriculum with a common core and variable add-on components. The idea of vocationalisation, or shifting a growing stream of school-leavers (almost a quarter by 1995) to vocationalisation is admirable, as is the intention to de-link jobs from degrees, and the move to put education on the concurrent list of the Constitution and thereby make it the joint responsibility of both the Centre and the states.

But, as in the past, it isn't intentions that are the problem. These intentions, and others that will undoubtedly be thrown up in the public debate that is to follow, are good and deserve to be supported. But they don't address some of the crucial issues which have made a mockery of education and caused it to deteriorate so sharply in the past few years. The facts are indisputable and at one level it is the steadily eroding quality of educational institutions everywhere that needs to be addressed. Why, for instance, is there an increasing trend to privatisation, especially in professional institutions where serious students are willing to pay capitation fees and those who can't afford it must make do with lesser quality government institutions? Why is it that in Kerala, government schools close and private ones flourish?

What is there in the new drive for vocationalisation that may cause it to succeed when all such previous efforts to do so have failed? What will the Government do about the growing criminalisation of campuses which obliges it to post policemen as vice-chancellors? Or about the widespread cheating that has become virtually a national characteristic, leading to the extraordinary high rate of failure in public examinations which are properly conducted? Or, indeed, the rampant political interference—and not just of the Nilangekar kind—which bedevils the campuses and which has little to do with the nuts and bolts of education. And these are only the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

Yet they indicate that the answers do not lie merely in statements of policy, and a new policy is not, in itself, going to usher in the sea change that is being sought. The problem, at a deeper, more fundamental level, is that reform can come only with a change of social attitudes, and money. For example, is society, for instance, willing to accord teachers the sort of monetary and public status they enjoy in western and some eastern countries where they are looked up to and paid decently so that better talent is attracted to the profession and they are properly motivated and can inspire their wards? In reforming the examination system, is the Government, along with parents and students, prepared to invest the confidence in teachers that is needed to make for a proper, fair and progressive evaluation system? It is precisely because the answer to this has so far been en emphatic 'No', that students are forced to learn by rote and cram their way through exams. Are parents, for instance, willing to rebel against the payment of bribes for admission or force their children not to cheat if that is the only way they will obtain that priceless piece of paper, a degree, which qualifies them for employment of any kind? Consider the move to de-link degrees from jobs. Even if the Government takes a lead, is the upwardly mobile working class and the middle class willing to divert its young, all but the brightest of them, to vocational institutions to learn a trade or profession rather than prepare for a generalised written test at the end of a meaningless three years spent in a college to get a clerical job?

A society gets the kind of education system that it deserves, and change will come only if society at large is not just willing to but actively wants to make that change. The impulses that guide the conduct of schools and colleges emerge not from what the Government decrees but from what society wants. People, who are simultaneously products of the education system and its users, must want change and want it badly enough to actively participate in that change. Unless this realisation goes home, all policy changes put together will result in little more than superficial change, and a new education culture will remain a distant dream.

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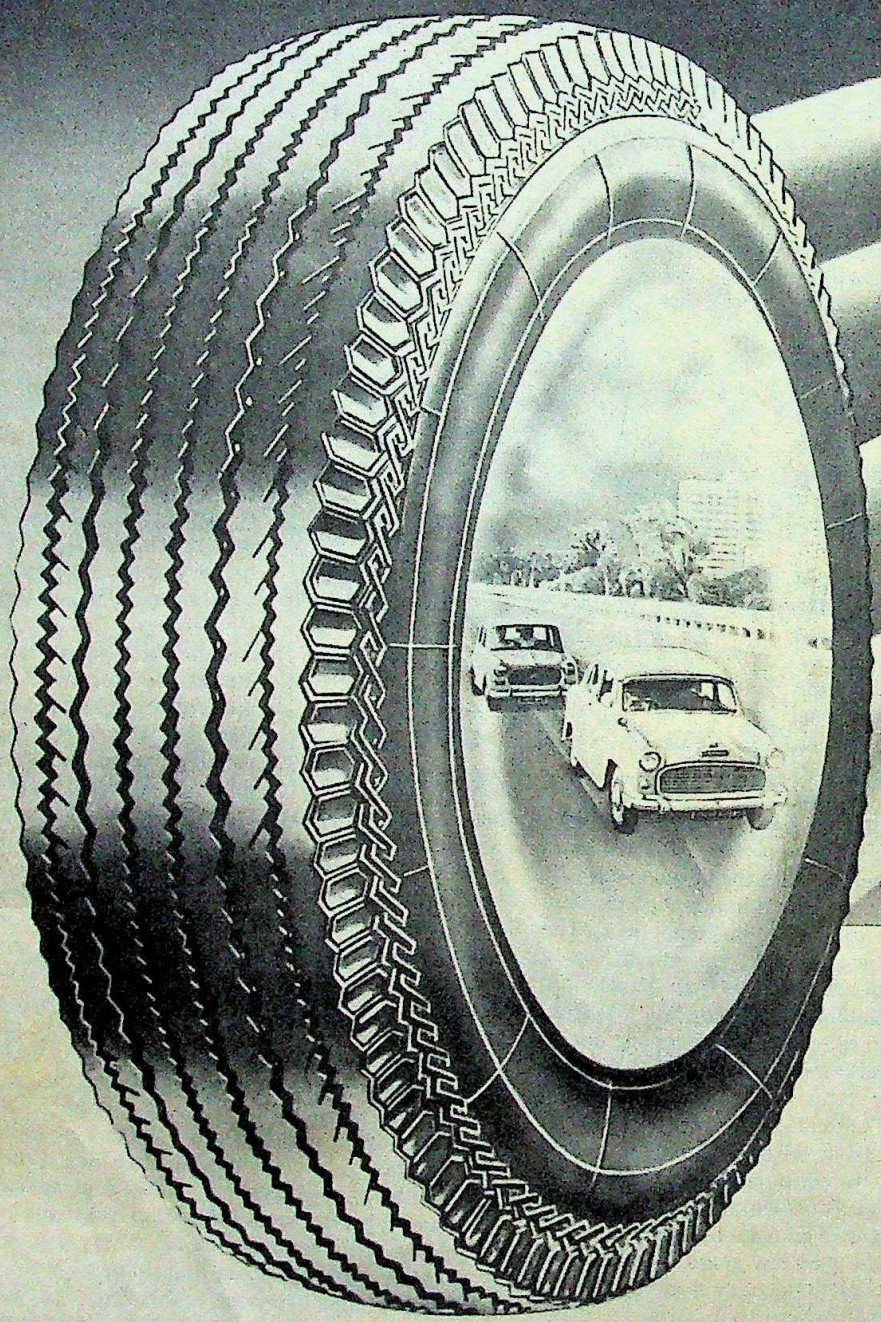
Breakthrough beyond expectations



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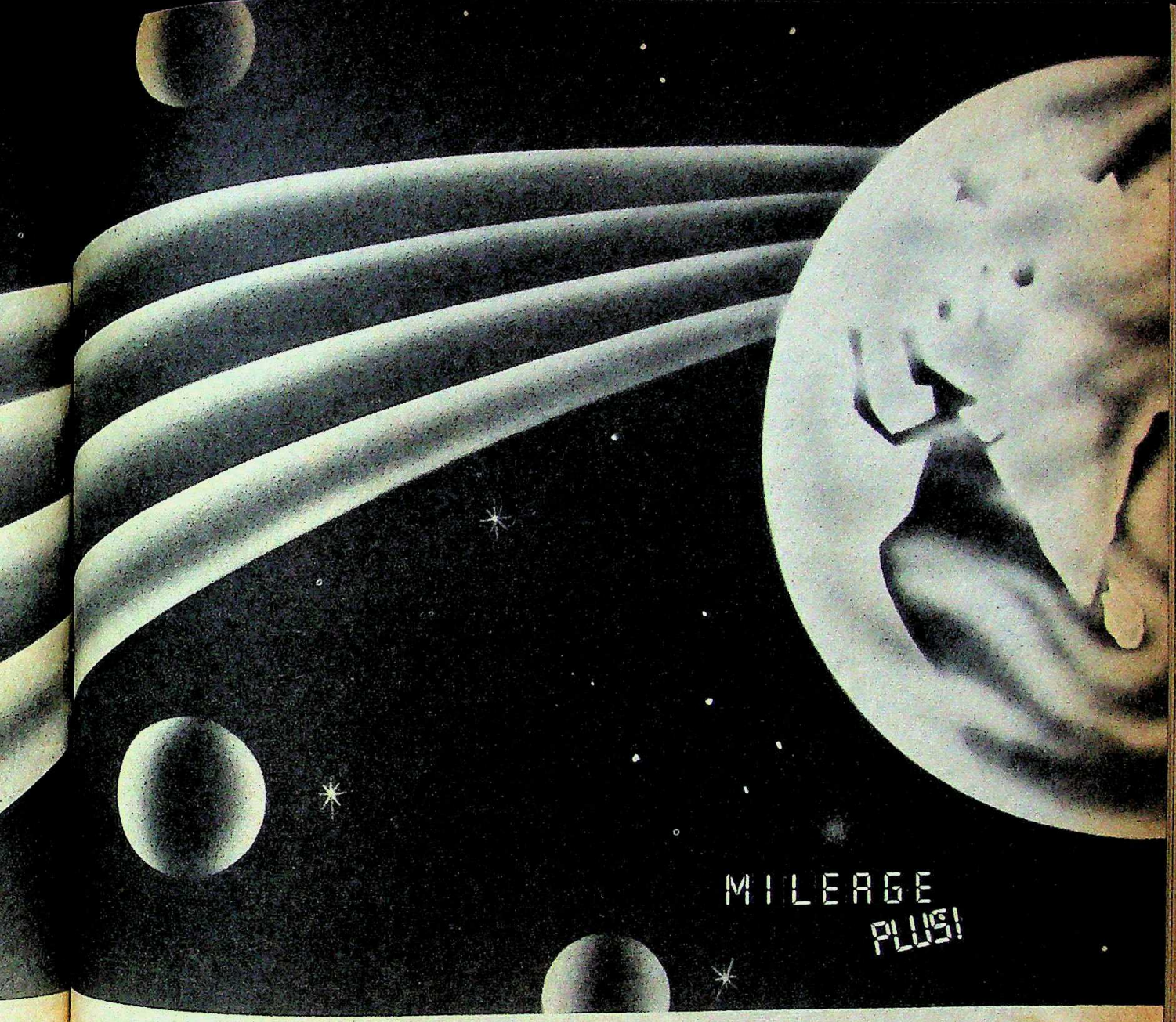

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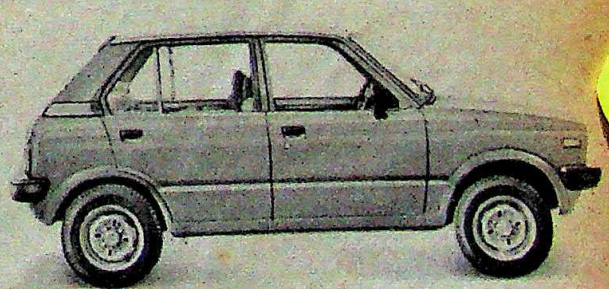

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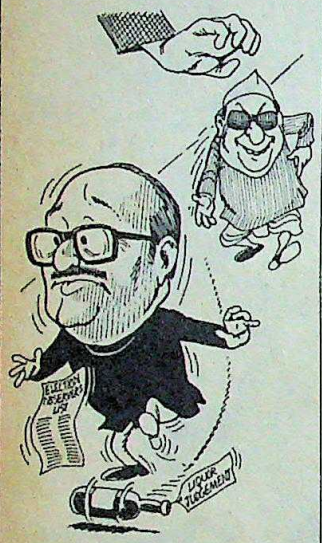
Falling Out

● Even though the Congress(I) is yet to formally announce the dates for the all-important party elections, the run-up to the event has already started taking its toll. Party Treasurer Sitaram Kesari and Vice-President Arjun Singh, once the closest of political allies, have fallen out over the list of observers for the elections.

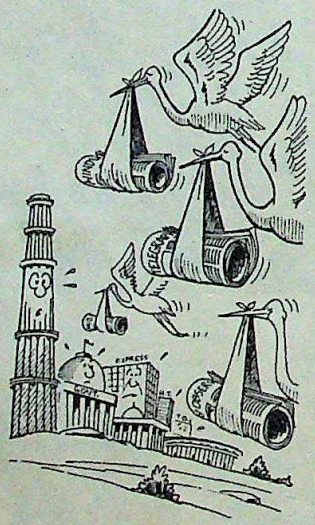


Kesari, who was known for the way he had successfully managed the party elections the last time they were held in 1972, was offended that the list had been drawn up without taking his advice. Singh had drawn up the list himself without consulting other party functionaries and then asked Kesari, and some others, to have a look before it was finalised.

Kesari pounced on the Madhya Pradesh High Court judgement striking down the liquor policy, decided upon by Singh when he was the chief minister, as a handy lever to get his own back. Kesari, who is also minister of state for parliamentary affairs, made no attempt to disguise his feelings and openly declared in the Central Hall of Parliament that the judgement was a "shame" and the party could not but take serious note of it. Obviously, word of this reached the prime minister and Kesari was chastised because the very next day Kesari, a regular in the Central Hall and one of its most vocal stars, was missing from his regular haunt.

Media Rush

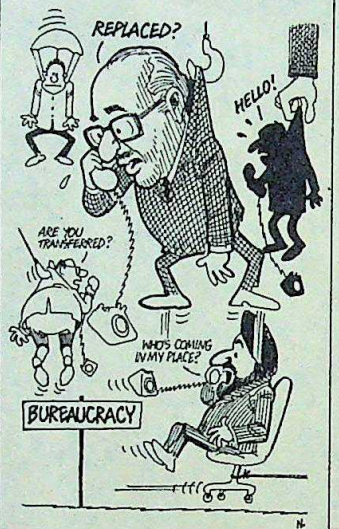
● Delhi seems to have become the new media Mecca if current publication plans are any indication. The Bombay tabloid *Mid-day* has already made its appearance on Delhi news-stands along with the weekly *Sunday Mail*, and a host of others are waiting in the wings. The Madras-based *Hindu* has plans to launch a Delhi edition shortly as do the Calcutta-based *Telegraph* and the Bombay weekly paper, *Sunday Observer*. Meanwhile, the Singhania group's plans to launch a daily from Bombay called *India Post* also includes an eventual Delhi edition.



Considering the fact that Delhi already has five general and two financial dailies, the rush to Delhi also heralds a new media war. The Singhania paper, the brain-child of Vijaypat Singhania of Raymonds, is offering fat salaries in a bid to lure away the best journalistic talent and give the established national dailies a run for their money.

Transfer Mania

● The country's top level bureaucracy has been bitten by the transfer mania. The imminent retirement of three secretaries to the Central Government has galvanised the bureaucratic gossip grapevine and over a dozen secretaries are rumoured to be in line for transfers or promotions very shortly. The transfer trauma has temporarily suspended work in the ministries as the concerned secretaries make frantic attempts to decipher their fate by trying to exchange rumours and extract information from each other about their prospects in the Goverment. As soon as the prime minister and his cabinet leave for Parliament, the RAX telephone starts buzzing in the offices of the secretaries concerned. One senior secretary rang Revenue Secretary Vinod Pandey and told him that he was being shifted to Krishi Bhawan as Agricultural Secretary. Yet another senior bureaucrat floated a rumour that Civil Aviation Secretary S.S. Sidhu, is replacing Cabinet Secretary P.K. Kaul. But the most interesting of bureaucratic gossip was that some senior secretaries are being shifted so that both G.K. Arora an additional secretary in the prime minister's office and Roop Krishan Tikoo, the central government's establishment officer may both be promoted as secretaries. They belong to the 1957 batch of the Indian Administrative Service.



Twisted Tale

● The Government has awarded the controversial Hazira-Bijaypur-Jagdishpur (HBJ) pipeline contract to a consortium of firms led by France's Spie-Capag, but the story is not quite over. In a surprise twist to a convoluted tale, Majestic Contractors Ltd, one of the members of the unsuccessful Canadian-French consortium, has now decided to virtually pull out of the country, leaving behind only a mailing address at a firm of accountants in the capital.

Majestic has bid for a number of pipeline contracts in the last four years but has not achieved any great success so far. In the wake of losing out on the prestigious HBJ contract therefore, the company has decided to wind up its offices in the commercial wing of New Delhi's Ashok Hotel and, after giving its handful of Indian employees the golden handshake, is currently shopping around for buyers for its office equipment.

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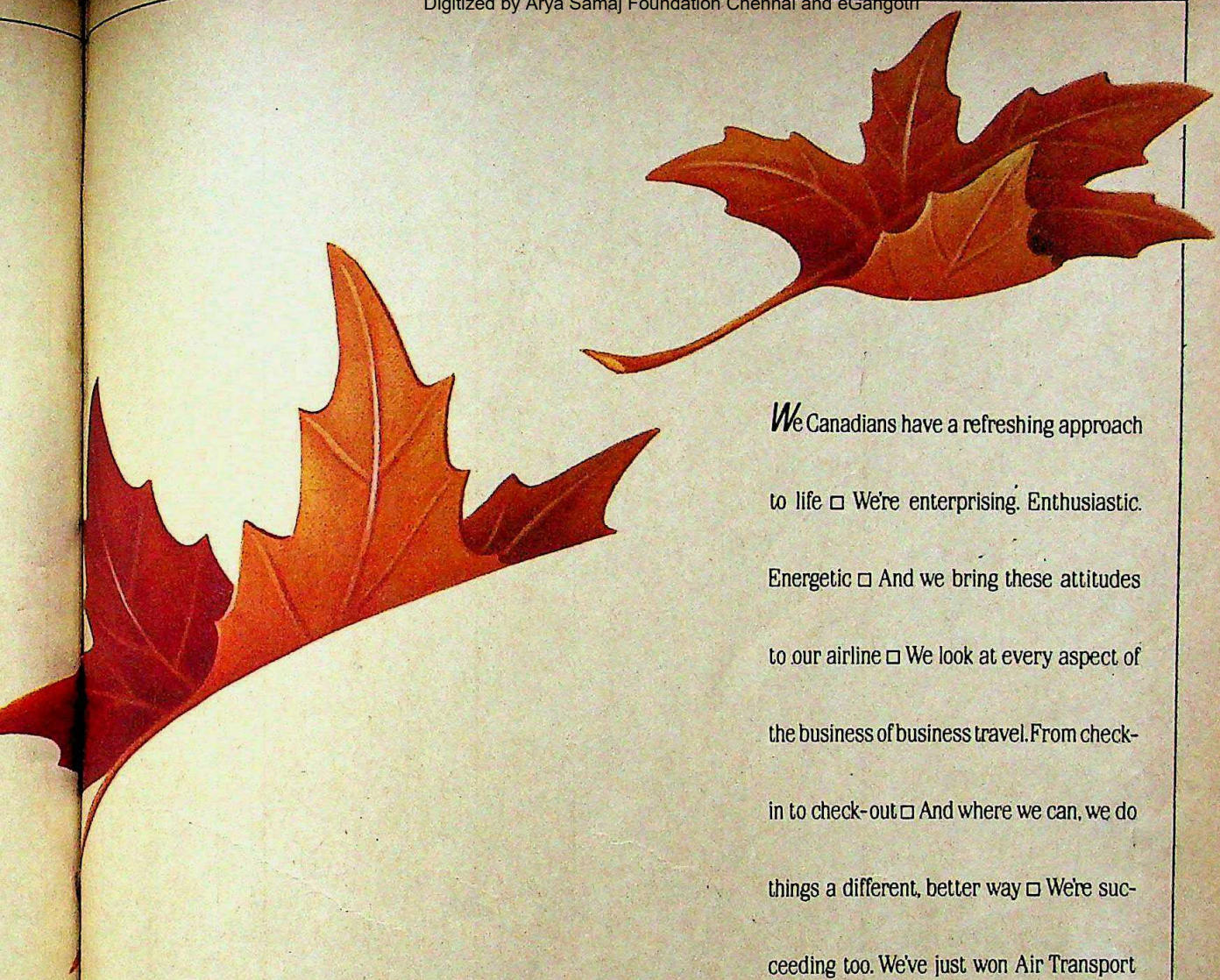

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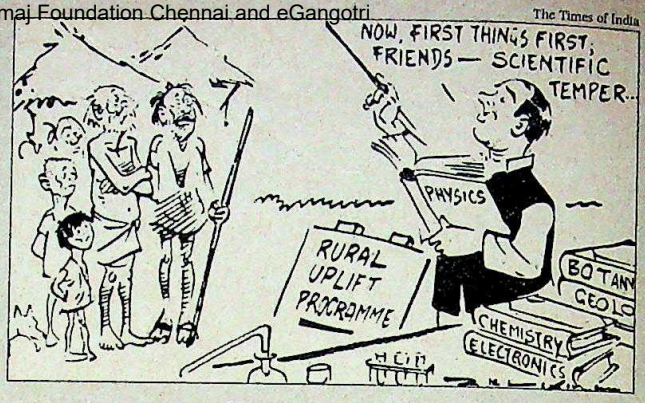

● *Within a few weeks the prime minister seems to have shed some of his wide-eyed innocence. He seems now to have acquired a sharper awareness of the gravity of his problems, partly because the easy confidence with which he set about solving some is now clearly seen to have been misplaced.*

■ Editorial comment in *The Statesman*

● *The post of Lok Dal president is not vacant. As long as Chaudhary saheb is among us, and we hear that he is recovering fast, he remains the president.*

■ H.N. BAHUGUNA in *The Sunday Observer*

● *By the same yardstick, doesn't that mean that the press is very fickle?*

■ Prime Minister RAJIV GANDHI in answer to a question on whether his honeymoon with the media was over

● *Whenever there's a negative reaction from the Opposition, I take it to be a compliment. If they try to disturb the meetings, abuse or stone the gathering—it means I made my presence felt, that I'm bothering them.*

■ AMITABH BACHCHAN in *Onlooker*

● *I feel deeply hurt since the statement demanding my resignation came from you and since I am also trying to bring about a clean administration as you are perhaps trying to do at the national level. It appears this itself is an offence.*

■ R.K. HEGDE, Karnataka chief minister, in a letter to the prime minister

● *Sobhraj is smart but obviously I'm smarter than he is.*

■ M.B. ZENDE, Bombay police inspector, after arresting Sobhraj

● *History will prove that Thimpu was an act of statesmanship. We have known that Jayewardene was wily...I don't think anybody felt an answer was around the corner.*

■ ROMESH BHANDARI in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *You must realise that those wanting to create Khalistan want that Lahore should ultimately be its capital. They (the Pakistan Government) allow the Sikhs to take out processions in Lahore, but when our mothers and sisters try to come out to demand democracy, they treat them ruthlessly.*

■ BENAZIR BHUTTO at a public meeting in Sargodha

● *As an Indian citizen I protest against the appointment of Pierre Cardin as designer for our hostesses' uniforms. Do we have to march into the 21st century in somebody else's clothes?*

■ M.V.KAMATH in *Mid-Day*

● *There are several other ways by which you can fuse the East and West. Marry a European, eat their food, speak like them. But leave* shastriya sangeet *alone.*

■ USTAD VILAYAT KHAN commenting on East-West fusion music in *The Sunday Observer*

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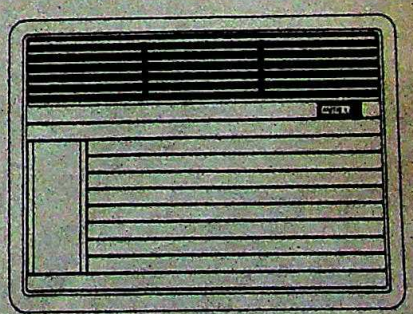

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TELLING TUNE

■ If you can't lick 'em, join 'em, is one of the wisest of old sayings and if any enterprising person interested in old sayings wanted to confirm the truth of this hoary utterance, he couldn't have done better than to visit SSN College at Narasaraopet in Andhra Pradesh.

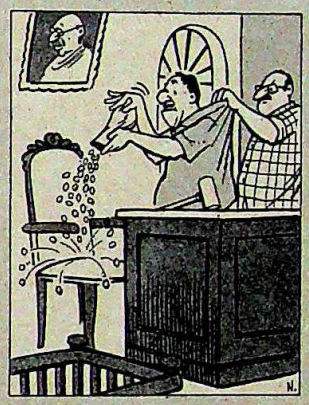
There, in the heat and dust of the afternoon, students were poring over question papers for the junior intermediate exams. Soon, as has become the practical norm these days, they began poring over their notes and books in order to be better able to answer the questions. And oblivious of the invigilator who sauntered leisurely around. To be fair to him, he wasn't the usual invigilator but a stop-gap panchayat babu who had been rushed in to fill the breach caused by a teachers' strike.

And he had his priorities right: for when the chief superintendent of examinations came calling, the vigilant invigilator burst out whistling Mandakini's air from *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*. The students were nonplussed for a moment, but had the sense to put their books away, just before the chief superintendent's un-Mandakini-like features hove to round the door. If music be the food of success, play on!

SEEDY STORY

■ Arutha Rao is an inspector of factories in Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh who had clearly inspected well but not wisely, with the sad result that he ended up before the disciplinary tribunal. Not a man to be cowed down by events, he took this setback phlegmatically, determined, apparently, to turn it to his best advantage.

So he appeared in court, armed with nothing but his virtue and a small pouch. Judge K. Taranath hadn't come yet, and Rao walked up quietly to the judge's chair, opened his pouch and started sprinkling seeds on it. Even as the seeds rolled this way and that, a bank clerk noticed Operation Seedstar and grabbed Rao. Rao offered him seeds, was refused, offered him money, but even that



didn't work, and was hauled up by the police.

In the police station, he explained his sudden change to farmer. The seeds were potent things, capable, it was said, of influencing anybody to change his mind. Rao had tried to make the judge change his, but ironically succeeded in making him more determined than ever to teach Rao a lesson. These seeds fell on barren ground.

SACK KNOWLEDGE

■ Books are the cream of civilisation, and no home is complete without a few of the paper oblongs adorning a shelf or two. And the best haven for a tired mind and body is a library with a high ceiling, thick walls, and rows upon rows of shelves groaning with the wisdom of the ages.

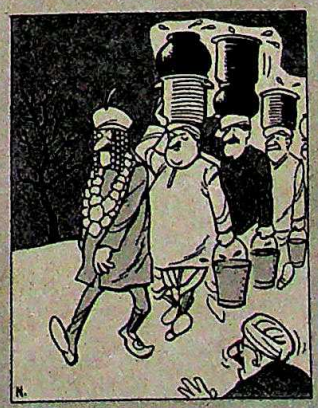
The government KKTM College at Pulloot near Kodungalloor in Kerala is quite a nice place. But this abode of learning has one startling deficiency: it doesn't have a library worth the name, the library being a small room with a couple of cupboards. But the KKTM College would not like to lag behind anybody and so it has gone ahead buying books by the dozen for its eager students to imbibe information from.

The only problem is, there's nowhere to keep them. Therefore, the management, even as it waits for some good Samaritan to come forward with the price of furniture, has made use of the cheapest and most versatile packing material: gunny bags. Hence the curious sight of young boys and girls going about their studious business with gunny bags slung on their shoulders as they search for the particular book they want. Well, no one said that the search for truth was easy.

WATER OF LIFE

■ As Rajiv Gandhi knows by now, Rajkot in Gujarat is facing what stony-faced Doordarshan news-readers call an "acute water shortage": so everybody is wandering around with his tongue lolling out and anything will do.

The father of a bride in a village in Banaskantha district pondered the problem one morning. The groom and his horde were due to arrive and though he had tried to get as much water as he could, he knew there wasn't enough. And when there wasn't enough one knew that tempers could rise with little to cool them down. By the time the bridegroom's bus signalled its presence by a cloud of dust, he was tearing his few hair out and biting his last serviceable nail.



But an angel stepped off the bus, a rather dusty angel in the shape of the groom's father, who pointed to the water cans his followers were unloading. "This," he told his opposite number who, not believing his eyes, was almost touching his feet, "is Palanpur water. Have a sip and let's keep the rest for the happy occasion." And they drank happily ever after.

—Compiled by JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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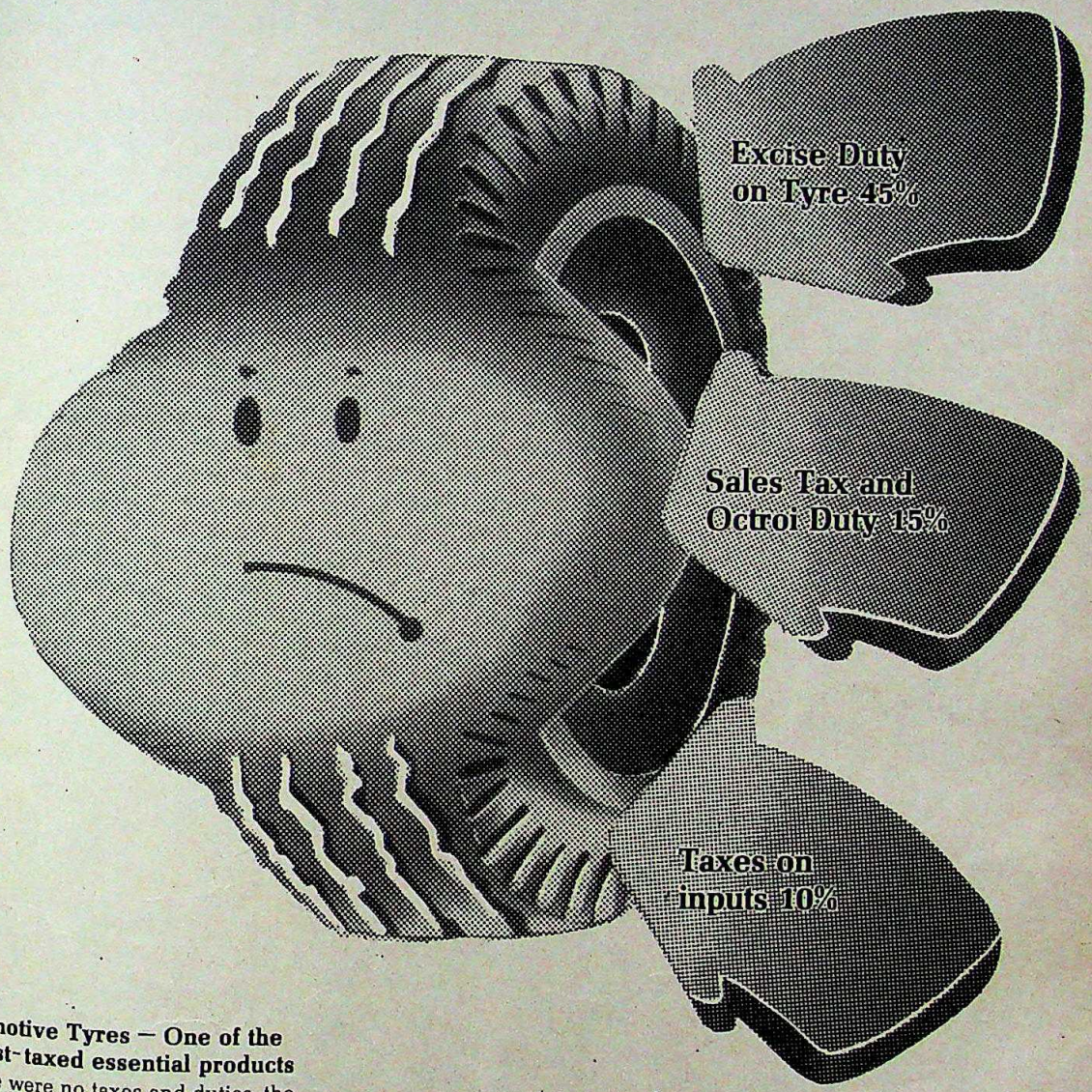
What Inflates Tyre Prices?



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SPACE PLAN

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BENAZIR BHUTTO Storming th

THE FRAIL arms rise majestically over her *chadar*-covered head, much in the fashion of an orchestra conductor, beckoning, at the same time, to the crowd to join in. But the waiting multitudes hardly need any such exhortation and hundreds of thousands of palms reach skywards in frenzied clapping, rhyming with the slogan of *"Ajj tan ho gayee Bhutto"* (everyone chants Bhutto's name today). The frenzy builds up to an even higher peak as the conductor begins to hurl flower-petals at the crowds in almost child-like enthusiasm and even the content and tenor of the slogans changes rapidly. A new chant begins: *"Zia-Junejo, laanat bhejo"* (rid us of Zia and Junejo) and many more follow growing increasingly angrier and abusive.

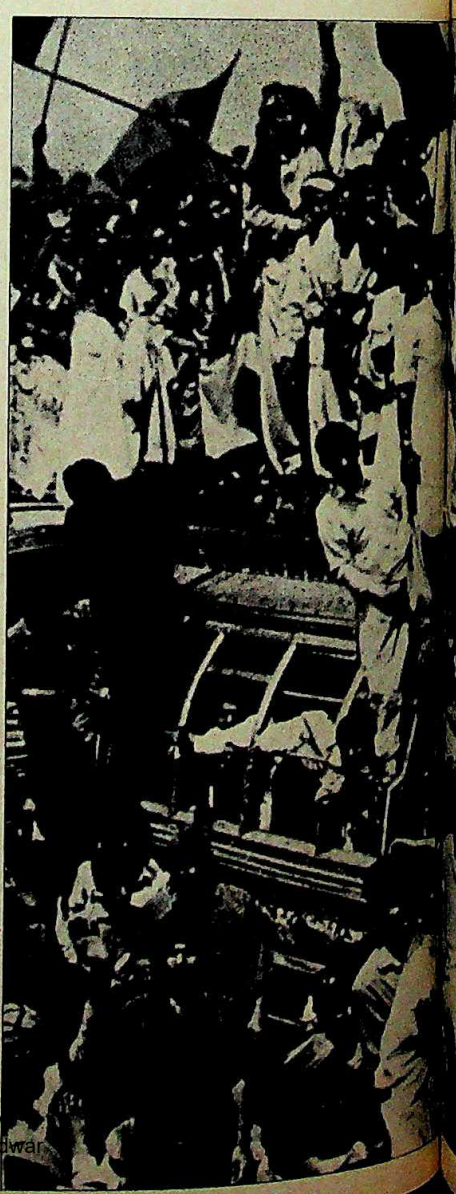
Suddenly, in the burning Punjab plains this summer, the political temperature has shot to a degree no one anticipated, surprising even Benazir Bhutto, the 32-year-old daughter of late Pakistan President Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, now making a bid for her late father's legacy and bringing in grudging nods of acceptance even from her arch rivals, the leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League who run the national cabinet. And, above all, General Zia-ul-Haq, the longest lasting military dictator in Pakistan's history who, for the first time, faces a serious challenge to his regime. "This kind of a thing isn't surprising," he said at Islamabad last fortnight, arguing, "the steam always blows when the lid is taken off the vessel of boiling water."

On another plane, a better expression could hardly have been found for the

Growing from strength to strength and reassured by the massive show of popular support, Bhutto's daughter was threatening to change the political scenario in Pakistan.

Benazir surrounded by her supporters (left); and a section of the crowds at a public rally

ASHRAF NAGI



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the Citadel

current mass upsurge that is engulfing Pakistan with the rapidity of a flash flood. Suppressed for nearly a decade, their right to free speech and political activity kept in the deep-freeze of martial law, and their popular leaders either in exile or incarcerated in prisons, the masses of Pakistan last fortnight were drowned inextricably in a catharsis, a sense of release and relief and, more vitally, a belief that the worst was finally over. "With such an expression of popular mood, rest assured, no one in Islamabad will think of imposing martial law again in a hurry," argued a Lahore academic. Added S.M. Zafar, law minister in Ayub Khan's cabinet and a Muslim League leader: "This successful solo flight by Benazir has rendered the very logic of the politics of the last nine years irrelevant. All of us politicians have to change our thinking and strategy to the changed situation now. Everything has worked out for her like a dream and she has an extraordinary opportunity."

For Benazir, making a political comeback after nearly two years of exile in London, it indeed was an extraordinary opportunity. And the exuberance of success was evident from day one. Said an exhausted but excited Benazir, shortly after the tumultuous, 10-hour truck ride into Lahore, the gateway of Punjab: "With that kind of following, today I could have taken over by force, burnt the cantonments, burnt the ministers, houses and taken over the secretariat. But our party is against violent means. I hope Zia gets the message now and does not try to dig in his heels."

If the million-and-a-half strong gathering at Lahore was dismissed by her detractors as merely a crowd of inquisitive Pakistanis curious to see Bhutto's attractive daughter, doubts were soon laid to rest. Growing from strength to strength and reassured now by the massive show of popular support, Bhutto's daughter was threatening to lock horns with Zia, announcing a deadline of autumn for holding fresh elections. "Or else," she threatened, "we will launch a peaceful campaign to throw out this government."

Suddenly, the arrival of the young former President of the Oxford University

ASHRAF NAGI

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Union was threatening to change the whole political scenario in Pakistan. A bit like Indira Gandhi (she begins her speeches with a deadpan *"Bhaiyon aur Behnon'*) and every bit a Bhutto replica spouting populist jargon and socialist rhetoric, she was soon engaged in a blistering campaign that took her across Pakistan. From Rawalpindi to Multan and Sargodha to Lahore, where political fortunes are traditionally made, and into the North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP), she was delivering the same message with telling effect: that the days of dictatorship were over, that the country needed an immediate mid-term poll and finally, though not in so many words, that it was time power was restored to its rightful heir.

If none of the other meetings broke the record in numbers that Lahore had notched on April 10, in each city or highway intersection where she stopped to address a meeting, record books were being rewritten. At Peshawar, lakhs of people gathered to the Pushto chant of *"Zia za"* (Zia go), and in the interior of Punjab at Gujranwala and the textile town of Faialabad, lakhs waited until the early hours of the morning to hear Benazir who had, by now, perfected her message, ending each speech with "and you have all decided now that Zia should...*Jaawe..*" Repeated a dozen times while crowds joined in the rhythmic incantation which echoed long after she had driven away atop the highly decorated truck that has become her favourite pulpit.

While this new political gale swept the Punjab plains, the men in power in Islamabad were trying to work out just how bitter was their moment of truth, and in the absence of reassuring political logic, were pinning their hopes on the theory that Benazir's crowds were nothing but a seasonal phenomenon driven by curiosity more than by any political commitment. "This is just a short drama," said Federal Information and Broadcasting Minister Shujat Hussain, whose father, Chaudhri Zahoor Elahi, had been murdered by Al Zulfiqar, the pro-Bhutto extremist organisation many years ago, adding "The people who are going to see her at the rallies are mature and understand the meaning of destabilising the democratisation process we had initiated. Her appeal will fade away in no time."

Prime Minister Mohammed Khan Junejo, who initiated his own round of public meetings in various parts of Pakistan, was more hesitant. "We will put no restriction on these rallies as long as they conform to law. But no one can question

While this new political gale swept the Punjab plains, the men in power in Islamabad were trying to work out just how bitter was their moment of truth.

President Zia (left); and banners graphically painting the popular mood

RAGHU RAI

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the fact this is a democratically elected government," he said at Sukkur, and diplomatically added: "If the people want elections at some stage we could look at that demand."

His anxiety was amply reflected in the actions of Arbab Jehangir, the chief minister of NWFP, who took the risk of attending Benazir's Peshawar meeting to get an idea of the crowd strength, and in a rash of decisions by the Government to please the people. While Junejo promised to give possession of land to slum-dwellers, a process first initiated by Bhutto, there was a stray reduction in prices, and even a hint that the Government was considering a substantial cut in oil prices. "We want to counter this campaign of curiosity with sound work," said Punjab's savvy Women's Affairs Minister, Shaheen Atiqur Rehman, who asserted: "Surely, people will realise who stands for development and who for revenge. I can say most emphatically that people want no more destabilisation in the country now."

General Zia himself launched straight into the campaign against the Bhutto demand for mid-term elections stating repeatedly that in no circumstances could "street-power be allowed to take over power from a legally elected government." But there were signs of nervousness even among circles close to the Government. Late last fortnight, Shujat Hussain had begun loudly declaiming the "persistent use of abusive language" in the Bhutto rallies, and at lower levels, government supporters were warned of the possibility of violence if the campaign continued.

At the same time, there were also indications of another kind of change of mood. The most telling instance, obviously, was the backing for the mid-term poll demand by none else than Yusuf Jogazai, the deputy speaker of the Pakistan National Assembly, just as Speaker Sayed Fakhr Imam—considered a political heavyweight sitting on the fence—spoke of such a possibility in London. And Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leaders did not mask their optimism. "A new realism is dawning on these people who have no people, not even a cat or a dog behind them," said PPP spokesman Salman Taseer, claiming: "I have seen people run miles, barefoot, along the Grand Trunk Road just to get a glimpse of Benazir Bhutto. She is their Joan of Arc, with courage, credentials and she is attractive. The people are bowled over."

If indeed the people were bowled over, it was due to Benazir's tellingly effective use of the three most potent weapons in her arsenal: the nostalgia for her father and his family, the craving for a freer political system and the insecurities inherent in Pakistani society, such as the apprehension of an economic crunch and the acute xenophobia given the presence of India and the Soviet Union on the flanks. But her stock weapon was the first of these. Her cheer-leaders called her *"Benazir, Bhutto ki Tasveer, Qaum ki Taqdeer, Inquilab ki Shamsheer."* (Bhutto's reflection, nation's fate and the sword of revolution) and she herself played up to that sentiment with consummate skill. Seek-

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ing to cash in on her father's execution exactly nine years ago, she and her partymen rarely refer to him by name. He is just called *shaheed* (the martyr), and at each rally crowds shout the slogan of "*Jab tak suraj chand rahega, Bhutto tera naam rahega*". A cry so familiar across the border in India. True enough, the Government had realised where the threat lay and had decided to counter it directly.

Zia himself led the campaign in Karachi asking how could the people allow someone to claim right to power "generation after generation" without asking questions on the past record of the family. "Even when you go to a cattle or horse fair, you asked questions about the pedigree of the animal you want to buy," he said regretting that the same question was not asked of politicians making hereditary claims to power. At another level the Government supporters were accusing her of raising fascist slogans and perpetuating a personality cult.

But it does not take much to see who is winning in this game. Said Murtaza Sheikh, a Rawalpindi businessman: "The real surprise is the kind of sympathy wave we see for Bhutto today, nine years after the event," and added, "now they wave his huge portraits saying he brought glory to the gallows anew and the day he was executed not a dog barked on the streets." That bit of analysis, however, has another significant aspect. A lot of the sympathy that Benazir is able to draw today comes from a sense of guilt among large sections of the population for having taken the execution so timidly. At her roadside rally at Chungi Amar Sidhu on the outskirts of Lahore Lubna Butt, a teenaged cheerleader orchestrating the crowds said: "Nine years ago Zia committed a murder. But we committed a bigger crime by keeping quiet. This is time for revenge and for making amends." The Bhutto nostalgia is an integral part of the Benazir gameplan: her bodyguards invariably turn out

INTERVIEW

"We want to bring popular rule"

SHE SITS taut and erect, her frail frame sinking into the plush upholstery of the sofa. Surrounded by the shouting, screaming, shoving mob of males around her, she looks like the young damsel in distress. But her aura of authority permeates the large drawing-room of the mansion in Lahore's exclusive Gulberg locality. At 32, Benazir Bhutto, or 'Miss Sahiba' as she is called by her reverent, partymen, is a woman in control. "I am a tough person now," she says. It is this toughness and tenacity that makes her so dominant in Pakistan's political firmament today. Last fortnight, she gave an exclusive interview to Principal Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA *in Lahore. Excerpts:*

Q. Did you anticipate the kind of reception you have got in Pakistan? Why did this happen?

A. We did indeed anticipate that people were in this kind of mood. What has happened is historic and unprecedented in the history of this country. People think they have, in the PPP a vehicle of change to democracy. They see it as their best chance to get rid of the tyranny of nine years and Zia has no choice now but to go.

Q. What do you think will be General Zia's next step?

A. There is nothing very much he can do now. We do not want to be vindictive. There is a door open to him and he can walk out of it. But if he doesn't and tries to play tricks, people will not tolerate it. We will remove him surely but through peaceful means.

Q. Don't you think he could bring in the army to crush your movement? He has used the gun before.

A. I am not sure he can rely on the same gun any more. The army also gets influenced by the popular mood. I am not sure if they will shoot at their own people again. Also, General Zia must understand the possible consequences of calling in the army when he has himself lost popular support. In Pakistan that happened once before when Ayub Khan decided to call in the army and then General Yahya Khan immediately said thank you sir, khuda hafiz (good bye), and took over the power himself, I hope the same mistake is not repeated now.

ASHRAF NAGI

Q. Are you not trying to usurp in the streets the power that some say they acquired through elections?

A. To begin with General Zia came to power by deposing a popularly elected government. He never had the people's mandate to take over power in the country. Now they held a sham election and claim popular backing. The other day a minister had the cheek of claiming that the Pakistan National Assembly members had been voted in by 50 per cent of our people. I say just this. Can you come out in the streets and collect even 50 persons behind you? They must understand now that their time is up.

Q. Are you not trying to perpetuate dynastic rule?

A. What do you mean by dynastic rule? Dynastic rule means ruling by divine right. But when we have such overwhelming support of the people who are totally disillusioned with the regime it is not the perpetuation of a dynasty.

Q. What do you think is the greatest challenge facing you today?

A. The immediate challenge is to translate this mass upsurge into a meaningful movement to bring in democracy.

Q. What will be your future strategy? How do you plan to translate this support into a movement leading to power?

A. I am not making a bid for power. We only want to bring popular rule back to Pakistan. The people's courage and enthusiasm is enormous and we plan to gradually raise the pace of the movement while keeping it absolutely peaceful. I hope good sense will prevail and Zia will see the fait accompli. But if he

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in T-shirts reading "long live Bhuttoism".

But in a country obsessed with future gazing there are as many voices as there are 'political maulvis' as to the exact contours of her game-plan. The most acceptable scenario, however, is that following the demonstration of her mass support through public rallies across the country she would have proved two points: that the people want change and for this the vehicle they prefer is her party and not the smaller parties in the loose conglomerate of the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD).

"It is a bit tragic," says MRD idealogue and prominent Lahore lawyer Aitzaz Hasan, "that she has decided to make the rest of the MRD irrelevent to begin with rather than attacking the army which will be her biggest rival in the quest for power." But such niceties apparently did not figure in Benazir's scheme of things though she made an effort to placate the other opposition leaders by holding a long meeting with the frontier leader Khan Wali Khan at Peshawar and planning another with Baluch Patriarch Ghaus Bux Bizenjo at Quetta in the first week of May. But she had, so far, deliberately avoided making a frontal attack at the army though she repeatedly taunted the generals for giving away the Siachen glacier to India.

According to political analysts in Pakistan, she is possibly hoping for a deal with the army leading to Zia's ouster. Says Maushahid Hussain Sayed, the articulate young editor of Islamabad based English daily *The Muslim*: "Her assumption number one is that the Americans would be prepared to ditch General Zia-ul-Haq the way they have done with their long standing but unpopular allies in the Philippines and her assumption number two is that her demonstration of mass strength will produce cracks in the 'club' (the military coterie around Zia), and that, finally, with a wink from the Ameri-

doesn't there will be problems.

Q. Do you foresee a problem of dissidence within your own party? Your detractors claim that you face an uncles' problem in the sense that it is tricky for you to deal with the men who were your father's contemporary and knew you as a child.

A. I do not think we have that problem (Laughs). Yes initially, more than me some of these people themselves found it awkward communicating with me but now there is no problem. I give them respect and there should be no complaints.

Q. But there are problems. For example hasn't your senior party leader Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi accused you of "dictatorial tendencies"?

A. Well, I do not know why he said it. I will not comment on it even though I have been hurt by that allegation. Now that he is going on his vacation to London, I only hope that he will use the time to think about the line he has taken. I did nothing to offend him and I do not know why he should have made a statement like this.

Q. And there are also problems with your other allies in the movement for the restoration of democracy. Are you planning to go it alone now and hijack the whole movement as they allege?

A. We have always been with them and there is no reason for them to feel left out. At the same time they must realise that the PPP has always been the most dominant partner in the MRD, when they talk about the MRD's sacrifices they are actually talking about the PPP's sacrifices. We do not intend to hijack the movement but at the same time we cannot let them hijack the peoples party. Our workers have gone to jail, been hanged and given stripes and it is thus understandable that people have a special feeling for us.

Q. Why have you refrained from making any reference at all to India in your public speeches?

A. There has been too much rhetoric

ASHRAF NAGI

for far too long, now let us talk substance. This is the time to talk of peace and democracy and not for rabble-rousing.

Q. Do you mean that India is no longer such a useful bogey in Pakistan politics? Is it no longer the best way to get people charged?

A. Yes, I think there can be peace and the two countries can live together in harmony. There is no such problem between the two countries that cannot be sorted out bilaterally in the spirit of the Shimla agreement. The central issue between the two countries is still, ultimately, Kashmir, but normalisation is possible provided the process is initiated sincerely and at an absorbable pace. We do not want any regional instability. We just want peace so people could progress.

Q. In India there is an apprehension that Pakistan is backing Sikh terrorists. What do you think of the Khalistan campaign?

A. As I said before we stand for regional stability. We do not want any more break-ups in our subcontinent. How can I ever sympathise with the Khalistan demand. As you know the capital of Khalistan is Lahore. The Khalistani maps also include half of Pakistan. I am not going to be party to further breakups of Pakistan. My duty is to preserve the federation and not to break it.

Q. Then how will you counter those in Pakistan who want revenge for the break-up of the country?

A. I do not understand this kind of two-way game. You give it to somebody and invite retaliation. How can we afford this? My answer to the question is, you do not take revenge for such things by dividing your own country.

Q. What is your view of Pakistan's nuclear programme?

A. Pakistan's nuclear programme was unfortunately misunderstood during my father's time and was established as a quid pro quo. My father wanted a peaceful nuclear energy programme, but there were doubts that should not have been there. We want to remove all doubts. We do not want to bomb. We stand for a peaceful nuclear programme.

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cans and a nod from the 'club' General Zia will be forced to step down". The rest could be easy, swearing in the senate Chairman Ghulam Ishaq Khan as the action president and a mid-term poll under Junejo's caretaker dispensation. Benazir has made it clear that she is not exactly averse to the idea.

While on this there is no great dispute, there are grave doubts within the MRD about her willingness or the ability to take on the army. "There are two clear choices before her, confrontation or conciliation", says Iqbal Haider, general-secretary of the Karachi-based, left-of-centre Qaumi Mahaze Azadi, a constituent of the MRD, pointing out that "it will be tragic indeed if she were to compromise with the army to remove this government since this will only mean a change of face and not of the system, and the army will use her and the PPP as a kind of sandbag in its own defence."

Government spokesmen claim that there is no chance of any fissures dividing the army leadership. They argue that even after the civilianisation of the Government, Zia has not alienated them. Even the western diplomatic corps finds it hard to believe that the army would turn against Zia as long as he remains in uniform. But PPP ideologues say their approach takes this possibility into account. Their strategy hinges on isolating Zia from the Pakistani masses as well as Junejo. In fact, Benazir has attacked Junejo only very sparingly.

If much of the challenge facing Benazir today is the army and the US, it is because both factors have been integral to the calculus of politics in Pakistan. Political analysts are near unanimous on the view that American interests are inextricably tied with the Pakistani army. "This is their most allied ally in this part of the world," says Wali Khan. It is through the Pakistani Army that the American channel all their arms aid to the Afghan Mujahideen and given their close relationship with the generals, invariably influence national decision-making. "The Americans need a surrogate Islamic mercenary army capable of absorbing modern technology," says Aitazaz Ahsan, arguing that in keeping with their global interests the Americans are hardly likely to back Benazir against the army.

Benazir, for her part, studiously refrained from saying anything against the US, but as her campaign gained momentum, she found it increasingly difficult to contain the growing anti-US feeling among her supporters. As a matter of fact, her detractors within the MRD had only one criticism to level against her—that she was soft on the Americans and had visited that country on the eve of her return to Pakistan basically to remove their apprehensions. Benazir, however, defends her visit as merely an effort to acquaint the Americans with the human rights situation in Pakistan.

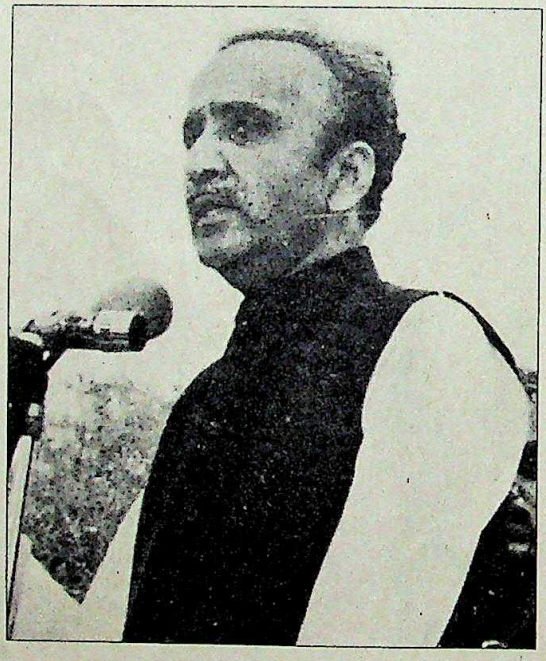
The reason why the US looms so large in Pakistani politics is not far to seek. The Zia regime has been the Americans closest ally in their most ambitious overseas military operation of all times—Afghanistan—and rightly or wrongly, there is hardly anyone in Pakistan who believes that a change is possible without the Americans okaying it.

That, indeed, poses one of the more serious dilemmas facing Benazir. She cannot afford to alienate the Americans and yet has to cater to a constituency that does not exactly love them. Her approach on the American issue will also determine, to some extent, even the prospects of her relationship with the other parties in the MRD most of whom have a pro-left orientation. But today, even more than the old issue of Kashmir, Afghanistan is on the mind of every Pakistani who feels a little mystified by Benazir's lack of commitment or even comment on such a crucial issue. "She is orchestrating a populist rhetoric but is evading the crucial question," charges Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri, spokesman of the Tehrik-e-Istiqlal party and an increasingly estranged member of the MRD.

It is, however, not merely among the pro-government circles and the MRD that Benazir faces criticism. Some of it has come from her own partymen who accuse her of being brash, arrogant and ignorant of the art of realpolitik. While two of the old stalwarts, Abdul Hafeez Pirzada and Mumtaz Ali Bhutto have already made their way out of the party, the other two, Ghulam Mustafa Khar and Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi have made critical references to her. While making light of the dissensions, Benazir's own supporters also underline the need for a unified, strong party infrastructure if she is to take on the Government with any chance of success. "Bhutto had the courage to take to the streets and protest. That should underline to Benazir the need for a strong party organisation," reasons Nisar Osmani, chief of bureau of the *Dawn* in Lahore and a veteran political analyst.

Benazir herself is conscious of that need. Last fortnight, as party workers from Faisalabad made claims to the post of the district president, Benazir angrily retorted: "Show me your detention order. How many times did you go to jail? Chairman *Shaheed* appointed a lot of people, but when he was being hanged no one said a thing." She has been voicing the same concern in private discussion with close confidantes. She feels resigned to the possibility of arrest and incarceration in case the Government decides to put down her campaign forcibly. But when that happens she would like to leave behind a strong party organisation capable of taking the protest to the streets.

Refreshingly however, in spite of all these problems within her own constituency and support base, she has not fought shy of joining issue with the Government on many controversial questions. She has been prepared to adopt stances that could hardly make her popular with many



Prime Minister Junejo addressing a rally

Their (the PPP's) strategy hinges on isolating Zia from the Pakistani masses as well as from Junejo. Benazir has attacked Junejo only very sparingly

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INDIA

No Illusions

HER FIRST appearance in India was at the historic Shimla summit, where her svelte figure encased in chic outfits striding down the Mall almost stole the show away from her illustrious father and Mrs Gandhi. Benazir Bhutto is back, and though not in India she could very well be, considering the eagle-eyed attention with which her tumultuous home-coming is being tracked by the Pakistan desk at South Block. Overnight, the Benazir factor has altered Pakistan's domestic political profile and added an intriguing new element to India's equation with its combative neighbour, an equation that has for decades formed the corner-stone of Indian foreign policy.

Perhaps for the first time in the last nine years, Pakistan's military dictatorship faces a serious internal threat to its tenacious hold on power. Despite President Zia-ul-Haq's cosmetic concessions to democratic privileges and the easing of the military stranglehold, it is obvious that Benazir represents the oasis in the Pakistani desert for a predominantly large part of the population and is capable, on current form, of backing Zia into a tight corner.

In that context, South Block cannot but be elated at last fortnight's developments. For one, a domestic crisis will not only force Zia on the defensive, it will also concentrate his efforts inwards rather than across the border in Punjab, as the Indian Government is convinced he has been doing.

But the elation is also tinged with a certain amount of scepticism. "We were not really surprised at the kind of reception Benazir was afforded in Pakistan. It was along expected lines. She was the safety valve for popular expression," said a top official in the Ministry of External Affairs. What has been of some surprise is the kind of political savvy that Benazir has shown since her return. "Originally, her tour programme was not scheduled to go beyond Rawalpindi. The fact that she extended it is an indication that her political antennae are finely honed to the popular mood," said the official. The fact that her supporters have shown a high degree of discipline so far also indicates, in the eyes of South Block, that she has total control over them.

The Ministry of External Affairs also believes that her strategy has been meticulously planned out in London before her return, as witnessed by her carefully calculated visits to Washington and Moscow before her arrival in Pakistan. Though there was no official recognition of her presence in either capital, her meetings and media coverage were of the level of a major political personage. "She knows full well that the route to Islamabad is via Washington," said a Foreign Ministry official.

PANA

A young Benazir in Shimla during the 1971 summit

Other Pakistan analysts in the ministry have taken careful note of the fact that her criticism has not only grown more strident but, significantly, focussed on Zia and not on the heavily-politicised Pakistan army, whose backing she will undoubtedly need in her bid for "people power". They also applaud her politically sagacious statement to members of the National Assembly, another power group, that "You have an important role to play in the transition." The Indian estimation is that Benazir is banking on the fact that key National Assembly members will resign and switch their support to her once the tide turns. "Already, the deputy speaker of the Assembly has issued a statement in her favour and if other members follow suit, we think half her battle will be won," said one analyst.

There is, at the moment, no change or shift in the Indian Government's policy on Pakistan. "We have to see whether she can maintain the momentum or whether her campaign can force Zia into some sort of panic," said an official. In any case, Indian analysts are fully aware that Benazir has till May 10 to make her move, after which the Ramzan period will halt activity for a month. "We believe that Zia is not going to be so foolish as to try and curb her activities in any way, as that would only boomerang on him," said one observer.

The Indian Government is also careful not to overreact to the fact that many of Benazir's statements on the no-war pact, the nuclear bomb issue and Sikh terrorists have been favourable to India or have coincided with the Indian viewpoint. "She has also made some very negative statements, like the one on the Siachen glacier where she said the Indian army would not be in control had she been running the country," said an official. "So we are not harbouring any illusions. Make no mistake about it. Benazir as president of Pakistan will be a lot different from Benazir as an opposition leader mustering support for her cause. If she ever does seize power, we know that she will be one tough customer to deal with. Probably tougher than any of her predecessors."

—DILIP BOBB

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sections of the population. Her clear-cut rejection of the separatist Sikh cause in India is one such instance. Similarly, her indirect rejection of the process of Islamisation that Zia initiated is bound to upset some people. But her supporters insist she has chosen the approach consciously. As one of her close aides explained: "Miss Sahiba believes that it is better to take up the inevitable inconvenient positions now rather than make hawkish statements and then be left with promises that are impossible to fulfil."

Similarly, her conciliatory statements on many other issues relating to India, such as Kashmir and the nuclear programme, are unlikely to prove great vote-catchers in times to come. Understandably, the new stance so typical of a mainline Pakistani leader hoping to ride populism to power, has caught the attention of the Indian foreign policy planners in New Delhi. There is an increasing feeling there that the Government should slow down the process of negotiations with the Zia Government as that tends to give greater legitimacy to the military ruler's position. Also, Indian planners wonder if it is worthwhile

UNITED KINGDOM

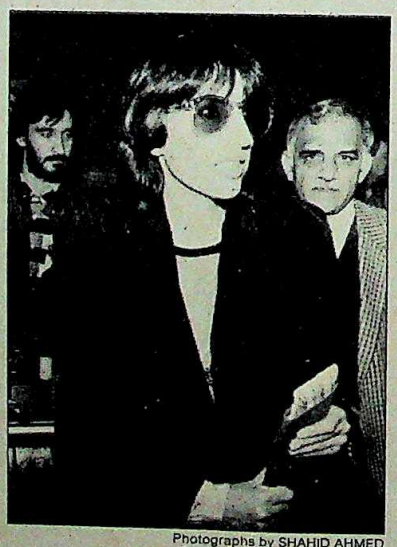
From Exile

AS BRITAIN'S television screens showed the massive crowds milling around Benazir Bhutto in Lahore and elsewhere in Pakistan, the huge Pakistani immigrant population faithfully following her progress also seemed caught in the same excitement. The interest was only natural, for London has been the nerve-centre of the activities of the PPP from where most of Pakistan's prominent opposition leaders have been fighting their battle against martial rule. As one PPP member pointed out, the "thrust and momentum" to Benazir's current "mission" had begun in London. She had been given a tumultuous send-off from London last month after addressing a series of meetings in such Pakistani strongholds as Bradford, Yorkshire and the suburbs of London.

Whilst many jubilant PPP followers were hailing Benazir as "Pakistan's Corazon Aquino" and beginning to hope for general elections in the near future, several important leaders viewed the latest developments in Pakistan with cynicism. Abdul Hafeez Pirzada, who along with Mumtaz Ali Bhutto recently formed the Sindhi-Baloch-Pushtoon Front for achieving greater autonomy for Pakistan's minorities against Punjabi domination, was one of those clearly distrustful of the unfolding events. "In her first rally, Benazir has spoken about Lahore being the heart of Pakistan. She is not averse to reinvoking the hated 1973 Constitution. She has pandered to the army by appointing the butcher of Bangladesh, General Tikka Khan, as the secretary-general of the PPP without holding any elections. She wants Pakistan to be a nuclear power. She has also stated in press interviews that the Siachin glacier would not have been lost if she were in power. What kind of conclusions do you draw from all these statements? She is desperate to come to power and for that she will go to any extent to please the generals. Benazir personifies a new brand of militant Pakistani nationalism," Pirzada said.

Benazir's critics say she owes her charisma solely due to her father's undiminished magnetism, a point echoed by Ghulam Mustafa Khar who, perhaps next to Benazir, is the best-known of Pakistan's politicians in exile. A razor-tongued, flamboyant politician, Khar was one of Bhutto's closest advisors and considers himself the "senior-most" amongst all PPP leaders. This has often been the cause of the protracted squabbles between Benazir and Khar over "political strategy" which finally led to the latter's suspension from the party—a move that Khar has refused to acknowledge. He is unremittingly critical of Benazir's lack of knowledge in party affairs. Says Khar: "I think she began with a blunder. Lahore ought to have been her last stop. She ought to have stormed through the country ending with a bang at Lahore, forcing the Government to react. Instead she created a big impact at first and will now progressively end with a whimper. She is totally ignorant about the realities of Pakistan. Her westernised outlook is a drawback. It's fine to talk flowery English but where is your ideological base? Does the party have a programme, a strategy?"

(Clockwise) Benazir, Mustafa Khar and Mumtaz Bhutto



Photographs by SHAHID AHMED

However, most of the opposition leaders plan to eventually return to Pakistan in spite of these grim predictions. Under the present circumstances, they cannot leave as there are a number of cases against them in Pakistani courts. Khar for instance, could face up to 14 years imprisonment in a martial law case, a charge he is fighting in a civilian high court. But for the present, they predict a time when Benazir will not be able to carry the PPP with her. Lacking her father's abilities, they prophesy a leadership staggering from one crisis to another, a point roundly disputed by thousands of her excited supporters in the UK who anticipate a dream-like future for Pakistan under Benazir.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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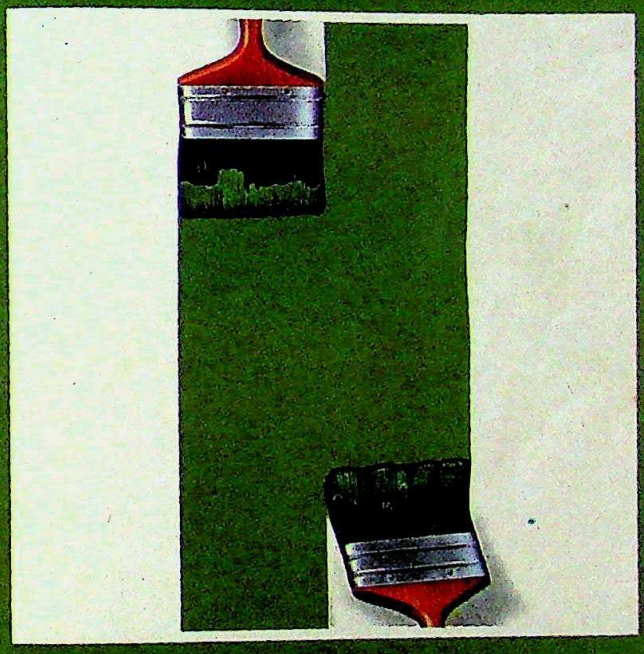

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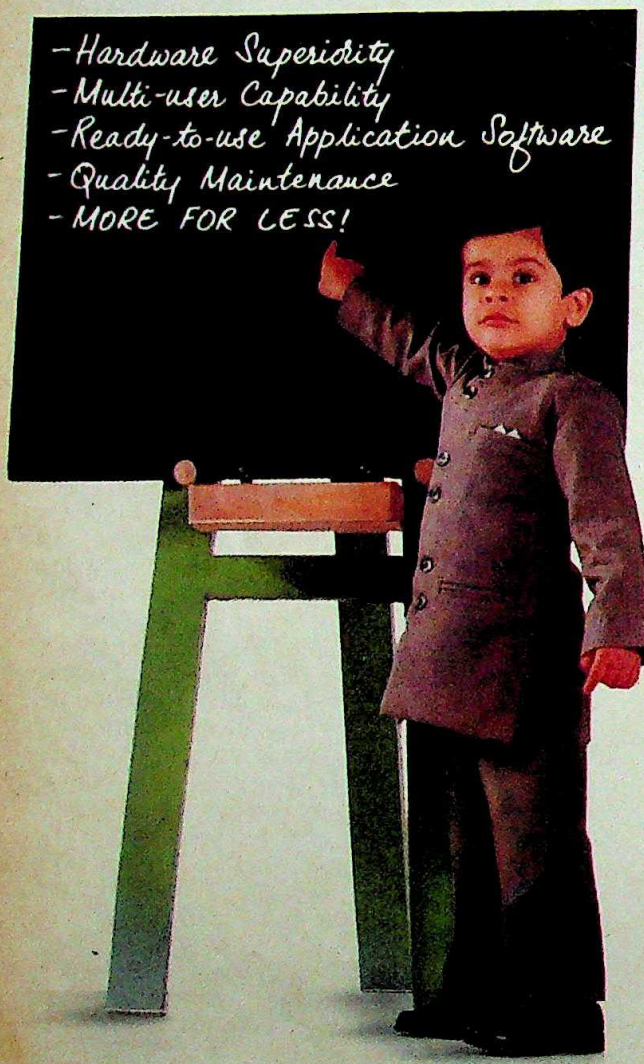

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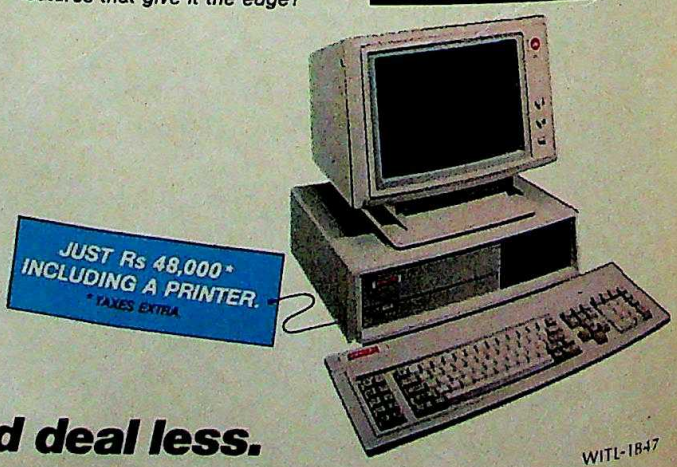

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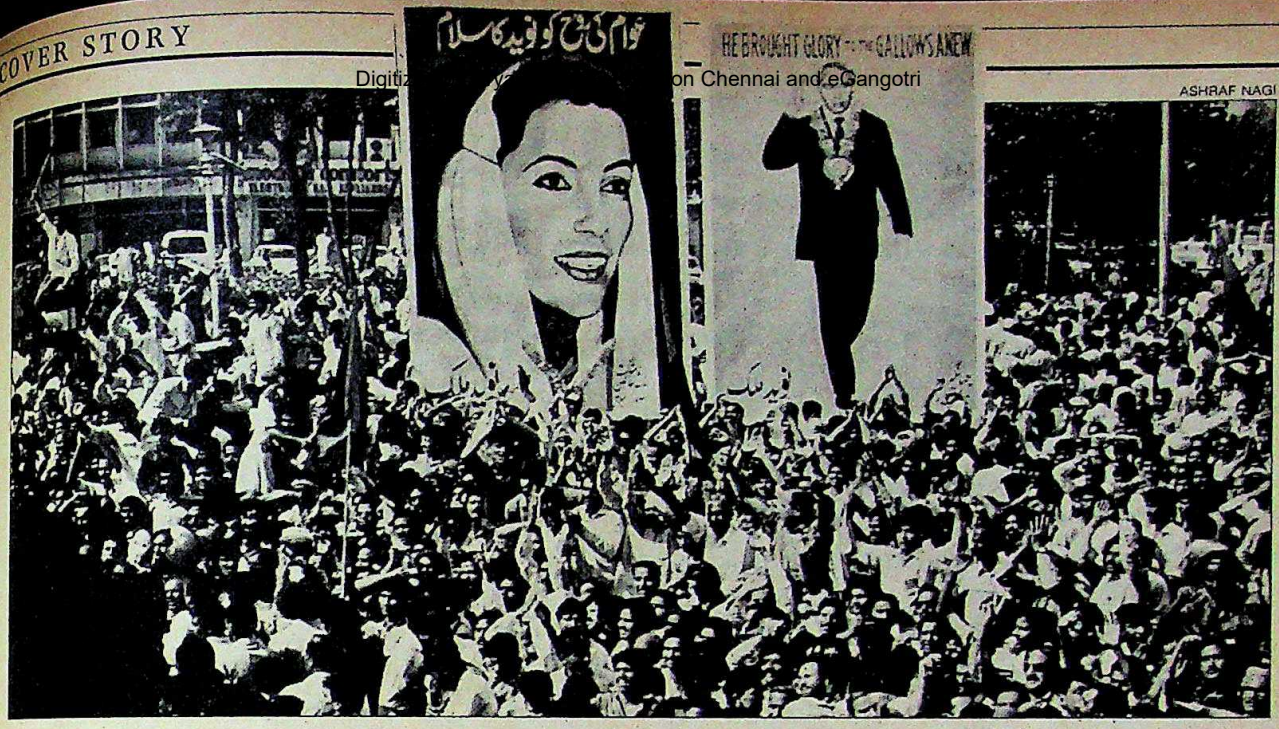

ASHRAF NAGI

Placards at the public rally in Lahore

making long-term commitments to a regime that may not survive long, at least not in its present state.

Diplomatic circles in Islamabad believe that the long delay in Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's proposed visit to Pakistan is a consequence of this new rethinking. Indian officials themselves do not deny this but claim that the delay is not solely due to this. Said India's Ambassador in Islamabad, S.K. Singh: "Gen Zia had himself said that our prime minister's visit here would be the culmination and climax of the process we initiated in December. Now that there has been a go slow on this there is nothing unusual about the delay in the prime minister's visit."

But so fluid is the situation in Pakistan now that even in the Indian External Affairs Ministry there is a growing feeling that the best policy is to wait and watch. The argument goes that it is all right for Benazir Bhutto to make conciliatory statements now, but there is no overlooking the fact that it was her late father who gave the slogan of waging a thousand years war against India and who exhorted his people to make the bomb even if it meant having to eat grass. "With Benazir swearing by Bhuttoism," says an Indian official, "it will not be easy for her to pursue such an independent, original foreign policy."

But that is just one of the numerous problems confronting Benazir today. In her bid for power, she has started talking about economics as well, promising higher minimum wages, self-reliance and a greater role for the public sector. But it is unlikely to cut much ice with large sections of society in Pakistan who wallow in the luxury of the Gulf boom. "Economic nemesis has already hit us," says economist Akmal Hussain, adding, "from 15 per cent in 1975, today the country spends 92 per cent of its aid inflow on debt servicing. At this rate, by 1990 we will have a negative aid inflow." Other problems relate to the extremely slow pace of industrial development—at a time when hordes of skilled labourers are returning in increasing numbers from the Gulf—and the abysmally low literacy rate (13 per cent). Says Hussain: "If macro-economic independence is the index of national sovereignty, we have already lost it to our debtors and any new regime will now face the challenge of reversing that." Unfortunately for Benazir, it is difficult to translate these facts into the kind of language ordinary people would understand and thus, when she talks of economic reform, she hardly finds many listeners.

But in spite of the problems and the challenges, the honours in round one have gone to her. Her campaign has caught the imagination of the middle classes, of the youth and a large section of the poor. The international media has given her wide notice and searched all round for parallels ranging from Cinderella to Corazon Aquino and Eva Peron. Barely three weeks since she stepped on the soil of her homeland after twenty five months in exile, she poses the toughest challenge to General Zia's nine year rule.

There is no going back for her now and she will either end up on the pinnacle of her and her late father's ambition or fall by the wayside to join the huge heap of political castaways in Pakistan

But that, as Benazir herself admits, is just the beginning. The crucial second round will begin on May 10 when the month of Ramzan begins making it impossible to hold rallies. The Zia regime is banking on this cooling off period while Benazir will attempt to politically consolidate her position by working out practical arrangements with other factions in the MRD. But she knows that she cannot stay away from the limelight for a whole month and her supporters claim that even *iftar* gatherings will serve as a political platform.

Whether she can do it or not the coming weeks will tell. But Benazir seems unrelenting in her hop, step and jump quest for power in which she has made a satisfactory first move. There is no going back now and she will either end up on the pinnacle of her and her late father's ambition or fall by the wayside to join the huge heap of political castaways in Pakistan. Whichever way his ambitious daughter ends up, whether in power or in the dustbin of history, she will without doubt be at the centre of the drama rapidly engulfing her country now.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Pakistan

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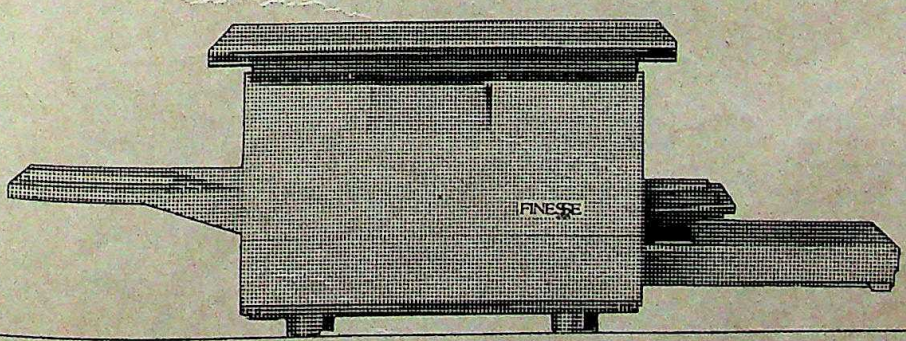

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SIKH TERRORISTS

The Pakistan Hand

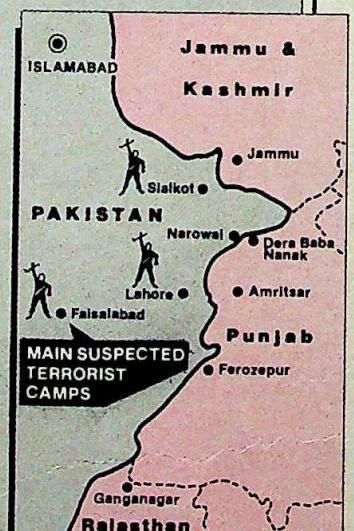
THE INDIAN Government's allegations of a "Pakistan hand" in the terrorist network in Punjab has achieved a certain credibility mainly because of the sheer weight of its frequency. But so far, the charges of camps across the border have not been backed by decisive evidence. However, last fortnight, the Government said in the Lok Sabha that it now had irrefutable evidence of Pakistani involvement in Sikh terrorist activity appeared to be more than mere wishful thinking. Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *and free-lance contributor* TAVLEEN SINGH *investigated different aspects of the evidence. Badhwar spoke to intelligence and foreign policy sources while singh managed to obtain confidential interrogation reports of terrorists captured in the last few months who have been trained in Pakistani camps. Their report:*

TWO WEEKS ago, Minister for Internal Security Arun Nehru informed the Lok Sabha that the Government had "clear evidence" of Pakistani involvement in the training of Sikh terrorists. "We have details of names, locations, training schedules and the type of assistance Pakistan has given to these terrorists," he informed the house.

Nehru went on to add that in the past six months, between 25 and 30 terrorists had been captured. During interrogation, they had admitted to having been trained in Pakistan, and gave specific names of people they had met, the dates on which they had met them, and the places they had been taken to. Though there is always a certain element of doubt attached to confessions extracted in the privacy of an interrogation chamber, the latest statements obtained by INDIA TODAY have more credibility than most.

This is mainly because of the damning similarity between almost all the confessions despite the fact that the terrorists have been arrested and interrogated at different districts in Punjab and Rajasthan. In addition, the details in the confessions dovetail with the information collected by Indian intelligence agencies on Pakistani involvement in Punjab terrorism. The Government, for instance, has long suspected that the terrorists being trained were kept in technical custody at Faisalabad jail, a fact that a majority of the terrorists interrogated recently have admitted to.

> "One basic reality established by all the interrogations is that crossing the Indian border into Pakistan poses no major problems. Most of the terrorists who were captured said that they were taken to Faislabad jail where they were subjected to intense indoctrination."



Intriguingly, a profile of the terrorists captured in the past six months indicates that most of them were hard-core criminals before they took to terrorism. They include Harjinder Singh Jinda, a convicted bank robber who had escaped from Ahmedabad jail, Devinder Singh Bai, a suspected murderer who later became a close associate of Bhindranwale, and Upkar Singh and Bakshish Singh, two notorious drug smugglers.

One basic fact established by the interrogations is that crossing the border into Pakistan poses no major problems. One terrorist, Gurvinder Singh, stated that he crossed over from Harowal village near Dera Baba Nanak. Another, Sarabjit, admitted that he took a bus from Jammu to the Kashmir border and slipped across to a village called Kharuaray. Yet another, Jindal, said he crossed from Ganganagar, and Devinder crossed over from a point beyond Ferozepur to a village in Pakistan called Ghodachak. As he states in his confession: "Every third day, somebody was crossing over and so we always knew exactly what was taking place in Amritsar." In fact, long-time drug smugglers-turned terrorists like Bakshish and Upkar Singh, used their intimate knowledge of the border gained in their clandestine heroin smuggling trade, to assist fellow terrorists in crossing over.

The interrogations revealed that in most cases the initial contact with Pakistan was made either in the Golden Temple in Amritsar or in other gurudwaras in Punjab through recruiting agents.

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Gurvinder stated that he met a man called Balwinder Singh in the Golden Temple in November, 1984. The agent told him he should cross the border for training and also that he could help him get across. Devinder also stated that his initial contact was with a recruiting agent in Huzoor Sahib in Nanded who also told him that Bhindranwale was alive and in Pakistan.

Once across the border, matters are well-organised. In Devinder's words: "We went to a Pakistani chowki (police picket) after crossing and when we said we were the Sant's (Bhindranwale's) men they welcomed us and gave us milk and sweets." Other interrogation statements follow the same pattern. Jindal says: "At the Pakistan picket they gave us food and then a jeep arrived with some men in uniform. They took us to a house in a town and the next day we went by army jeep to another house some five hours away." Jindal says that he was in Pakistan for about six months. Sarabjit, Gurvinder and Devinder, however, were all taken to Faisalabad jail where they came across over 200 others, most of whom had arrived there after Operation Bluestar. Devinder says that at least 100 were from Gurdaspur.

For several weeks, the terrorists were subjected to intense and sustained indoctrination. According to Gurvinder, "Pakistani officers would come and talk to us every day and tell us that we had to work against the Government of India when we got back and that we had to create Khalistan. We were told that we must make sure that we kill Hindus only so that there would be communal riots in Punjab. They said there must be complete havoc, a bloodbath, because that was the only way we would get Khalistan. We were also given lectures by other Sikh leaders who were brought there." Devinder, who was in the Golden Temple with Bhindranwale till two days before Operation Bluestar, identified these leaders as Bhai Jasbir Singh, Bhindranwale's Delhi-based nephew who was later extradited to India and is now in custody, Balbir Singh Sandhu, self-styled secretary general of Khalistan who was earlier believed to have been killed in the Golden Temple action, and Sukhdev Singh, head of the Babbar Khalsa.

Devinder, Sarabjit and Gurvinder were also taken to Lahore where they met other Sikh extremist leaders who had fled the Golden Temple. These included Attinder Pal Singh, former acting president of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) and Gurjit Singh, another nephew of Bhindranwale. It was in Lahore that the arms training started. According to the confessional statements, they were trained in the use of .38 and .455 revolvers, Sten guns and grenades. Sarabjit also admitted that they were taught the use of chemical weapons and given instructions on how to blow up bridges, open handcuffs and manufacture home-made bombs.

> "Sarabjit admitted that they were trained in the use of .38 and .455 revolvers, Sten-guns and grenades. He said that they were instructed in the use of chemical weapons, how to blow up bridges, how to open handcuffs and manufacture home-made bombs."

The training over, they were helped back across the border. Said Gurvinder: "On September 9, 1985, we were taken to the border near Ajnala and Bakshish Singh and Malikiat Singh (two drug smugglers) helped us to cross. After crossing, we were met by Hari Singh who belonged to the Khalistan Commando Group. He told us to go to the Golden Temple and meet Mohkam Singh who would give us further instructions. We met him and he told us that Makhan Singh, the AISSF president in Phagwara, had to be killed." But Gurvinder was arrested outside the Golden Temple before he could carry out his instructions.

Sarabjit and Devinder, however, returned from Pakistan with about 20 other terrorists and with clear instructions to prevent the state elections from taking place. In Amritsar, they made contact with the new AISSF leaders like Harinder Singh Kahlon and United Akali Dal leaders like Baba Joginder Singh, Inderjit Singh Sekhon and Jagdev Singh Talwandi. They were told that their target would be Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the Akali leader. Admits Devinder: "I crossed over just before the Punjab accord and went to the Akal rest-house (in the Golden Temple) where we all discussed how Tohra should be killed. We tried a few days later in the Jyoti Swaroop Gurudwara, but we failed."

Acting under the orders of Baba Gurbachan Singh, one of the members of the AISSF ad hoc committee, Devinder says his next assignment was to kill Ram Lubhaiya in Tarn Taran. As he described it: "We stole a scooter and went to his (Lubhaiya's) house where he was distributing milk at that time. I emptied my revolver into him and then ran towards the Sadar police station where I started reading a newspaper outside the main gate. I saw lots of policemen rushing around but they didn't bother about me. I later even attended the funeral."

Sarabjit, in his confession, detailed some of the places in Pakistan where some extremist leaders of the Bhindranwale era are housed. According to him, Attinder

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Pal Singh, Gurjit Singh, Sukhdev Singh and Balbir Singh Sandhu were living in Lahore while Bhai Kanwar Singh was the main extremist leader in Sialkot. He also added that apart from Faislabad jail, another 500-odd Sikh youths are being indoctrinated in Kot Lakhpat jail in Lahore.

According to information gathered from the interrogations and other highly-placed intelligence sources, between 1,500 and 2,000 Sikh extremists are currently receiving guerrilla training from Pakistani officers in a dozen scattered military camps across the border, including the ones mentioned by captured terrorists during their interrogation. They are trained in the use of automatic weapons, and in demolition and sabotage. These camps also provide them sanctuary after they perform terrorist hits and flee back into Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has had what are described as six "rough sessions" during personal talks with President Zia-ul-Haq on this issue, and more recently with Pakistan Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yakub Khan during last fortnight's non-aligned meeting in New Delhi. In fact, the main reason behind the cancellation of Rajiv's proposed visit to Pakistan this year is Pakistan's refusal to guarantee that it will close down the camps and put an end to all infiltration. Two months ago, the Government delivered a strong note to Pakistan demanding the return of several Sikh extremists—most of them belonging to the AISSF—who have crossed the border into Pakistan. In addition, the note identified by name and passport numbers other Sikh extremists in the UK, USA, and Canada and requested the Pakistan Government not to permit their entry because of their use, in the past, of Pakistan's territory as a staging ground for terrorist activities in Punjab. The Pakistan Government has not responded, except to stick by their stubborn denial that they are aiding Sikh terrorists.

Most of the information on this subject now with the Indian Government has come from intelligence activities within Pakistan, counter-intelligence within India which consists mostly of surveillance—but not arrest—of known extremists who have crossed the border and have returned, as well as from the interrogation of captured terrorists. In the Pakistani training camps, the extremists are given weapons training, ideological indoctrination on how to fight the menace of the "Hindu Raj" as well as short courses in survival. Before they leave, they are given weapons with no identifiable markings, ammunition, and money. The rate of their infiltration into India, sources said, increases directly in proportion to any increase in political turmoil in Punjab.

In addition, the Pakistan Government has been actively courting and supporting Sikh dissidents and extremists living abroad and has ignored several Indian diplomatic protest notes on this issue. In 1984, according to intelligence sources based in London, a Pakistani-owned printing press near the city printed 20,000 copies of slain Sikh extremist leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's portrait and distributed them within the Sikh community. The charges were paid by the Pakistan Government. Also, the Pakistan mission in London buys thousands of copies of an "independent" newspaper called *Watan*—aimed exclusively at militant Sikh sentiment—and distributes it free to the Sikh immigrant community.

Most of the extremist Sikh activities and propaganda aimed from abroad at Sikhs in India are, according to the Indian Government's intelligence-gathering, based in London. A Pakistani official of cabinet rank—Muazzam Ali—who is an adviser to Zia on overseas Pakistanis, is in charge of coordinating most of these activities. Senior Pakistani officials in the UK are reported to attend almost all functions organised by extremist Sikhs. The man in charge of these liaison activities is believed to be Qutb-ud-din Aziz, former minister for press affairs in London.

Pakistan's interest in Punjab actively started as far back as 1964, a year before the Indo-Pakistan war, when Pakistan Radio began to experiment with propaganda broadcasts aimed at the Sikhs in Punjab. During the 1965 conflict these broadcasts, urging separatism, were beamed directly into Punjab.

Between 1965 and 1971, clandestine contacts between Sikh extremists and Pakistan continued. In 1971, Jagjit Singh Chauhan, the self-styled London-based Khalistan leader, visited Pakistan and reportedly met with senior government officials. But by then Punjab seemed to be coming back to normal after a series of unstable governments. During the Bhutto period and the post-Simla era, Pakistan's Punjab activities were at a lull mostly because Bhutto feared that any activity at that time in this direction would cause India to retaliate by supporting the Baluchistan insurgency on Pakis-

> "Pakistani army officers would come and talk to us every day. They instructed us to ensure that we killed Hindus only as this would lead to communal riots in Punjab. They also said that there must be total havoc, a bloodbath, because that was the only way to get Khalistan."
>
> —**GURVINDER SINGH** *extract from his confession*

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tan's western front.

Zia began reactivating the Sikh cause in the late 1970s. His diplomatic missions began contacting Sikh activists and Khalistan supporters in different parts of the world, particularly in the UK and the US. The politician who ran this operation for Zia was Choudhuri Zahoor Ilahi who, according to diplomatic sources, "was given huge amounts of funds by Zia for the purpose, and reported directly to his chief of staff, Major-General Arif". Ilahi spent time in the UK and in the US contacting people like Chauhan and Ganga Singh Dhillon. And he began issuing them invitations to form organisations and to persuade Sikhs from abroad and also those in India to visit Sikh shrines in Pakistan during Sikh festivals.

Until then the Pakistan Government had been extremely reluctant and restrictive in allowing Sikh pilgrims to visit Pakistan. But, according to diplomats then posted there, Zia had later read and been influenced by the importance of the Anandpur Sahib resolution, which referred to the Sikhs as a "nation", as a tool for appealing to separatist sentiment. The moment he opened up the shrines, large numbers of Sikhs began visiting Pakistan. In striking contrast, Zia did not welcome Hindus at Hindu shrines and very few visas were given to Hindus desiring to visit the Hyat Pitafir shrine in Sind. The most important Hindu shrine—the Sadhu Bela temple—has still not been opened up to Hindu pilgrims.

During the Sikh pilgrimages, according to intelligence sources from Pakistan, extremist Sikhs from abroad intermingled openly with Indian Sikhs to discuss Sikh separatism. And Sikh pilgrims received the red carpet treatment in Pakistan. Zia, according to Indian intelligence reports, would make it a point to meet as many of them as he could.

In addition, Pakistan's intelligence operatives would seek out young, unemployed Sikhs from Punjab and ply them with ideological and political indoctrination. The main theme during these ideological sessions was that the Sikhs in Punjab had been fools to cast their lot with India. They would hammer home the point that Islam and Sikhism are both monotheistic and closer to each other than to Hinduism, and that Guru Nanak had insisted that after his death his feet should be pointed towards Mecca.

According to these sources, the first links between the Pakistan Government and Sikh militants in India were established between the Pakistan Army and the Dal Khalsa in early 1982. It was during this period, reliable sources say, that radical Sikh youth leaders began crossing over for arms assistance and training.

The early recruits were chosen by Pakistani military officers only after very careful screening and scrutiny. If there were any doubts the militants were sent back. Many of those who came back to India during that period were identified—but not arrested—by Indian counter-intelligence officials working near the border. These officials chose, instead, to follow the militants around, and to infiltrate their homes and organisations with informants in order to get as clear a picture as possible of what was going on in the Pakistan training camps.

From the intelligence gathered at the time, one thing was clear: Pakistan's aim, through the use of Sikh militants, was to destabilise Punjab, cause non-Sikhs to flee the area, create a Khalistan through a Bangladesh-type upheaval, and cut off all access to Kashmir. This was the "foreign hand" to which Mrs Indira Gandhi used to refer to.

Following Operation Bluestar, Pakistan intensified its Sikh propaganda war. Long accounts of Sikhs demonstrating across the world were carried on Pakistan TV for as long as four months after Operation Bluestar and beamed to Punjab. And on six separate occasions Pakistan TV beamed shots of Mrs Gandhi's effigy being burned and hacked to pieces in London's Hyde Park by militant Sikhs. Following Mrs Gandhi's assassination, several Sikh militants from India and abroad visited Pakistan and met with senior government officials. Those who visited included Jasbir Singh, Bhindranwale's nephew now on trial in India for sedition, Devinder Singh Parmar, Chauhan's London-based supporter, Ganga Singh Dhillon, and Major-General Jaswant Singh Bhullar.

Propaganda, training, providing sanctuaries for guerrillas—these are all the classical tools used by one nation trying to destabilise a part of another along a contiguous border. Reliable sources say that Pakistan, without hesitation, is in effect engaged in this clandestine, undeclared hostility across the border. The Indian Government, sources say, despite countless notes it has sent to Pakistan, is still hoping that the Zia Government will relent but Rajiv, as one source put it, "is coming to the end of his tether and is thinking of a new, tough, Pakistan policy which could be enunciated within the next few weeks."

> "Sarabjit and Devinder confessed that they returned from Pakistan with about 20 other terrorists with instructions to stop the Punjab elections from taking place. In Amritsar, they were told that their target would be Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the Akali leader."

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CONGRESS(I)

Pre-emptive Strike

PRANAB Mukherjee had written to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in mid-April, expressing his views on the Muslim women's bill. A few days later, Congress(I) Working President Kamalapati Tripathi sent in his own letter, complaining of bogus members being inducted into the party when organisational elections were due. Tripathi's residence on New Delhi's tree-lined Janpath had quickly become the nerve-centre of political activity, with dissidents meeting in a series of conclaves to draft yet more letters and plan their strategy. Affairs in the Congress(I) were finally coming to a boil.

The message was not lost on Rajiv, who struck back with the lightning speed and sharp political instincts that once marked his mother Indira Gandhi's manoeuvres. Sensing that the dissidents in his party were finally making their long-delayed play, Rajiv orchestrated a demand for action within the party, informally consulted senior leaders, and then delivered a blow which no one—least of all his targets—expected.

The crack-down was planned well and executed without fuss. Pranab Mukherjee had once been the most powerful minister in Indira Gandhi's cabinet, but also a man without a firm political base and a questionable reputation as finance minister. Expelling him would have the maximum impact in terms of putting every other dissident in the party on guard, without running the risk of alienating political heavyweights. The others were light-weights too, but recognised personages like Mukherjee. Former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Sripati Mishra was a spent force, former Union minister and governor A.P.Sharma had once been a trade union leader of some consequence but had long since become irrelevant, and Prakash Mehrotra—former governor of Assam and high commissioner in London—had never politically counted for much anyway.

Best of all, none of them had expected the pre-emptive counter strike. Indeed, they may have underestimated Rajiv, whose government Pranab had termed weak and blundering in a provocative interview to *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. These remarks hardly called for such a harsh action against Mukherjee. After his unceremonious ouster, all he could say was: "I am shocked" (*see box*). The octogenarian Tripathi was similarly immobilised, pleading for time till he read the next day's newspapers before he reacted. He could hardly have been happy with the fact that the news of the action was brought to him by daughter-in-law Chandra even as he discussed strategy with Rajiv's targets.

BHAWAN SINGH

Rajiv Gandhi: decisive move

If surprise was the key element of the expulsion and suspensions, Rajiv himself may have lulled the dissidents into complacency. On receiving Tripathi's angry four-page letter, he had first telephoned him from Rajasthan, then sent Human Resources Development Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao to listen to his complaints, and finally cut short his Rajasthan visit and returned to New Delhi for a two-hour meeting with him.

If that suggested to the dissidents that Rajiv was susceptible to pressure, they completely misread his mind. For Rajiv clearly decided that if the plotting at Tripathi's residence was not stopping despite his efforts to meet them halfway (as he had successfully done in earlier months with former chief ministers Madhavsinh Solanki and Gundu Rao), then it was time to get tough.

Said Congress(I) Vice-President Arjun Singh: "Indiscipline had to be curbed. Disciplinary action was absolutely necessary because their activities were distracting our leader's attention away from domestic and international issues." Similar statements of support came in from several centres, most gleefully from Pranab Mukherjee's arch rival, Programme Implementation Minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury. Even Tripathi seemed to be reweighing his options, suggesting that he was not about to turn his back on six decades of loyalty to the Nehru family. He told INDIA TODAY: "As a Congressman I don't want my party to be finished. My job is to forewarn my leader about the true nature of events, to save him from future predicaments and inconveniences of the kind that Mrs Gandhi had to suffer."

The key question was whether the message had gone home to everyone in the party, or whether the dissident leaders—including Solanki, Gundu Rao and Jagannath Mishra, apart from others like V.C. Shukla, would rally together. In the immediate aftermath of Rajiv's action, however, there was hardly a murmur of protest, except for the resignation of one Mukherjee sympathiser in West Bengal. Jagannath Mishra said in Patna: "I am too small a person to make any comment." But it remained unclear if the storm had blown over.

There was no doubt, however, that the immediate initiative lay with Rajiv. Soon after his meeting with Tripathi, numerous phone calls from the prime minister's residence were made to young MP's and other Congress leaders to gather

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information about the response that Tripathi's letter was receiving. A day before Rajiv acted, Youth Congress(I) President Anand Sharma convened a meeting of over 40 young MP's attended by Congress Parliamentary Party General Secretary K.K. Tiwari, former Youth Congress(I) president Tariq Anwar, and AICC(I) Secretary V.M. Pannicker.

It was resolved at this meeting to request the party high command to take strong action against all the disgruntled elements who were using Tripathi for their own ends. Said Sharma: "Dissidence has grown only after Rajivji gave a call for the purge of power-brokers from the party. It is good that action has now been taken."

Even as Arjun Singh and others planned the pre-emptive strike, there began an orchestrated campaign in support of Rajiv. Following Indira Gandhi's style of functioning, Union ministers, chief ministers as well as other prominent Congress(I) leaders were asked to support Rajiv Gandhi in his attempt to fulfill his Bombay Congress(I) centenary session promise of purging the party of power-brokers. Said party General Secretary K. Moopanar: "The time has come when we have to present a united and cohesive look, and not seem like a bunch of fighting and greedy politicians out to capture everything."

Meanwhile, the big question remained: why had an octogenarian like Tripathi and a discarded politician like Mukherjee decided at this moment to take a stand? The answer lay in the coming organisational elections and the preparatory membership drive that ended on March 31, 1986. Since Rajiv had chosen Arjun Singh with the sole objective of carrying out the party's election schedule, various factions had launched membership drives to outmanoeuvre each other. With Rajiv welcoming several politicians who had broken with Indira Gandhi, many of these new entrants were able to not only join the party but also to become PCC(I) and DCC(I) office-bearers in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. During the last six months, over 70 DCC(I) office bearers in various states had been replaced by those who had either been in the Opposition or who had fought against the Congress(I). With official connivance, these politicians were able to enrol more members than the 'Indira loyalists', posing a clear threat to them. Even in Varanasi, Tripathi's daughter-in-law was outmanoeuvred in the membership drive by newcomers from the Congress(S) and the Lok Dal. The targets of the

PRANAB MUKHERJEE

"I am shocked"

BARELY 12 hours after he had heard the news of his expulsion from the Congress(I), the once-ranking minister in Mrs Gandhi's cabinet sat relaxed and unruffled in the basement office of his south Delhi residence. Puffing away at his pipe between sips of orange squash, Mukherjee, 51, spoke to Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *about his precipitous dismissal. Excerpts:*

Q. How do you feel about being expelled?

A. I am shocked. It is shocking. I did not even hear directly from the prime minister's office or the leadership. The first I got to know about it was when I heard from reporters that there had been a news flash about this.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Mukherjee: unceremonious ouster

I have been a proud Congressman. I helped merge the Bangla Congress with the main Congress Party, and now I have been deprived of my membership. But nobody can take my contribution away.

Q. It seems you and some others were engaged in a surreptitious attempt to draft a paper challenging the party leadership on the Muslim women's bill and other issues.

A. That is just not correct. I never hid my views from the prime minister. In fact, I wrote a personal letter to Mr Gandhi on April 22, in which I clearly spelt out my views on the Muslim women's bill. As a party man, I have every right to communicate with the leader of the party.

Q. You have been speaking out on behalf of the old guard.

A. I have to admit there has been a feeling of worry, of great anxiety over the party's performance. In a parliamentary democracy a party must win elections. But the party has been losing successively. We have been going down since the 1984 general elections. In 11 assembly elections we lost three states and barely kept our seats in Rajasthan and Maharashtra. We have fared poorly in by-elections. And we lost in three metropolitan cities: Bombay, Calcutta and Hyderabad. This decline is a matter of concern.

Q. What were your other concerns?

A. They also relate to the performance of the Government. There should be more initiatives, and policy should be action-oriented in places like Punjab and also in Assam, where the language issue is going to be a serious problem. The issue of growing religious fundamentalism has to be dealt with. Members of the party and I have discussed these things among ourselves, but I do not know what I have done to be classified as a dissident.

Q. Is there a feeling that the Old Guard was being sidelined?

A. I don't know what is the Old Guard. The Congress is a big organisation. There is nothing wrong in bringing in the new. But efficient management consists of getting the services of a broad base of party people, and not responding only to a particular group of people.

Q. What about your own future?

A. I was dropped from the Government. I was dropped from the parliamentary board and the working committee. Now I have been dropped from the party. To those who think I have no power base I can only say that I will remain an activist. I believe in the Congress ideology, and in whatever way I can I will propagate that.

Q. Kamalapati Tripathi also wrote to the prime minister. But he has been treated differently. Why is this so?

A. That is for you to find out and ask them for their reactions. All I can say is I am shocked.

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loyalists are people like Union Ministers K.C.Pant, Bali Ram Bhagat, Abdul Ghafoor, Margaret Alva and PCC(I) chief Priya Ranjan Das Munshi. In fact, among those unhappy with the return of the prodigals (but not party to the dissidents' activities) were even some of Rajiv Gandhi's closest aides: N.D. Tiwari, Arun Nehru, Arjun Singh and Narasimha Rao.

With ministerial berths already beyond their reach, the dissidents facing total extinction found Tripathi willing to take up their cause. But protest against the bogus membership was clearly conceived as only the start of a major revolt. Said a Congress(I) leader from Bihar: "This noise about bogus membership is just a cover-up for an attempted coup in the party. They have been running down the leadership in public and were trying to find a leader in Tripathi."

For the moment, Rajiv's swift counter-attack has made this grand plan come unstuck. But this is only the first battle in what is certain to be a war of attrition caused by Rajiv Gandhi's effort to re-mould the Congress(I) into his own vehicle.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

KAMALAPATI TRIPATHI

"Congress has been derailed"

LETTER-bombs are not associated with octogenarian politicians. But Kamalapati Tripathi's four-page letter to Congress(I) President Rajiv Gandhi last fortnight was nothing if not a minor bombshell that sent shock waves through the party. Inevitably, there was a strong reaction from the party president.

Tripathi spoke to Assistant Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *last fortnight shortly after sending his letter to Rajiv, and before the action against those who had been confabulating with the Congress(I) working president. Excerpts:*

Q. *Why did you write to the prime minister?*

A. For the last few months I have been receiving complaints from Congress workers that bogus members were being enrolled in the states, and that people from the Lok Dal, Bharatiya Janata Party and other opposition parties have been enrolled as Congress members in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar.

Q. *What can be the motives for enrolling bogus members?*

A. Some people in the party are conspiring to grab control of the organisation through devious methods. They are not only encouraging bogus membership, they are also depositing huge amounts of money as membership fees. In Uttar Pradesh alone, over a crore of rupees have been deposited in this fashion.

Q. *Have you given all these details to the prime minister?*

A. Yes, I have. I also requested him to order a CID inquiry into this massive inflow of money and to find out the real forces behind this move to capture the organisation. We are receiving a lot of money but we don't know who are the people depositing it.

Q. *Who are these people?*

A. It is difficult to name any individual, but there is a pattern behind this move. I have an apprehension that all those who left the party and lost their credibility as Congressmen are now active in this game. They are the same people who fought against the party in the elections in the recent past and they have been able to re-enter the party somehow. The sad part of the story is that some of them are now the office-bearers of the party, appointed by the PCC(I) chiefs who themselves are nominated and not elected in the various states.

BHAWAN SINGH

Tripathi: re-weighing options

All those Congressmen who stood firm on January 1, 1978, to elect Indira Gandhi as the AICC(I) president are being purged systematically and those who humiliated her at the Shah Commission hearings are being given positions of prominence.

Q. *The prime minister made a statement that the party will be supreme and get all due importance. Are you satisfied with this?*

A. I don't think the party is receiving the attention and the importance it deserves even now. Earlier we used to say this is the Congress Government, now it is the Government's Congress.

Q. *What difference do you find between Indira Gandhi and Rajiv?*

A. Indira Gandhi was an effective link between the old guard and the new Congress workers. She was a freedom fighter and knew everything about the party and its individuals, and about the party's culture. The present prime minister is a newcomer to politics. To that extent the difference is there for everybody to see. He has no link with the old guard.

Q. *Do you think that there is a communication gap between Rajiv and the ordinary Congress worker?*

A. Yes. There is a lack of proper communication between him and others. But I don't blame him. As prime minister he has to perform so many other duties and has so many other responsibilites.

Q. *Some people feel that you are unhappy at the appointment of Arjun Singh as vice-president.*

A. That is not true. In our party's constitution there are no posts of working president and vice-president, but the party president thought he should work through a working president and later on with a vice-president.

Q. *Were you consulted when the post of vice-president was created?*

A. Why should I tell you? It is our internal party affair.

Q. *Rajiv promised a clean party and an efficient government. Has he fulfilled his promise?*

A. Both the Congress Party and Rajiv's Government are the cleanest the country ever had.

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* (Aristotle. Philosopher and Guide.)

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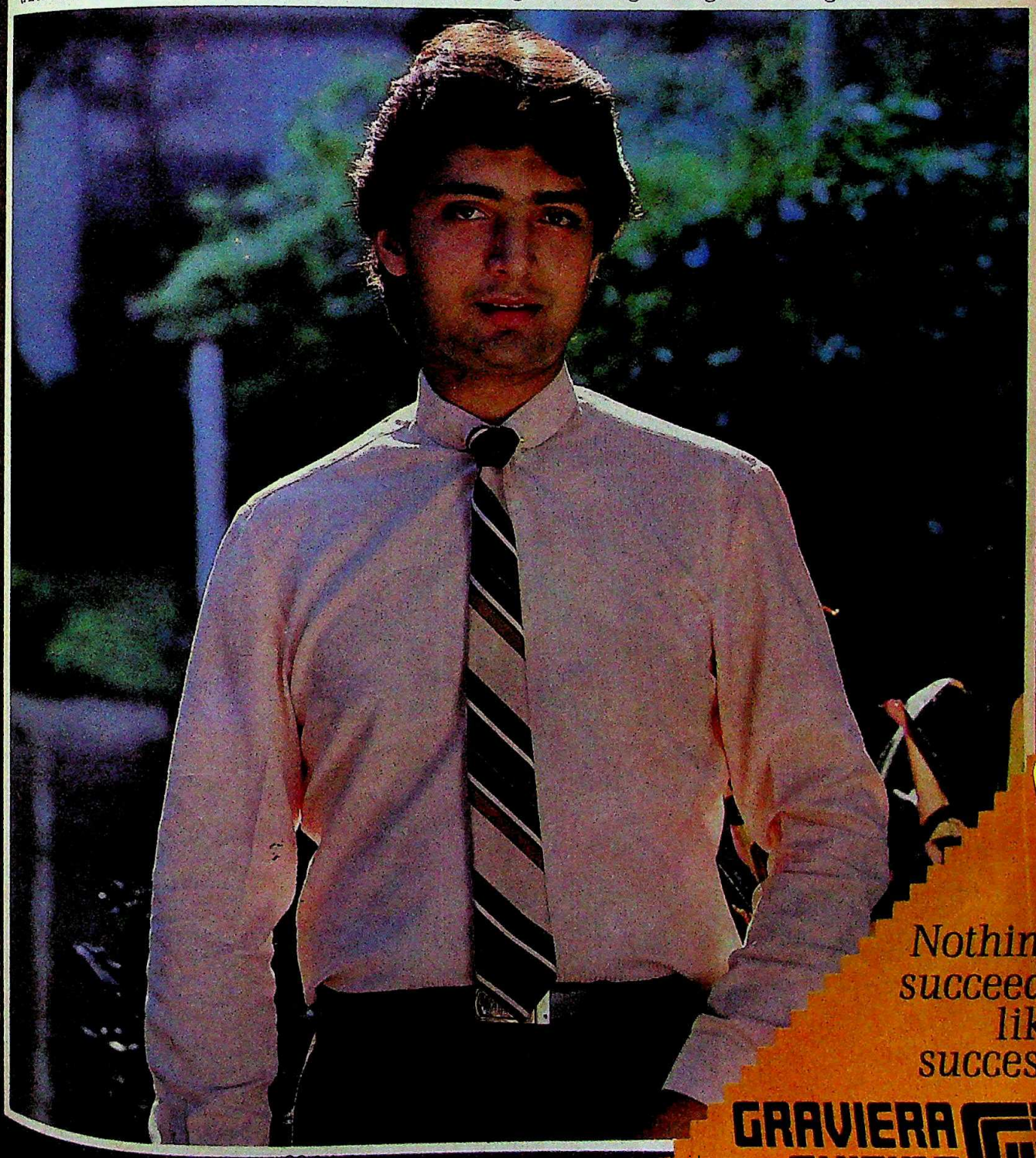

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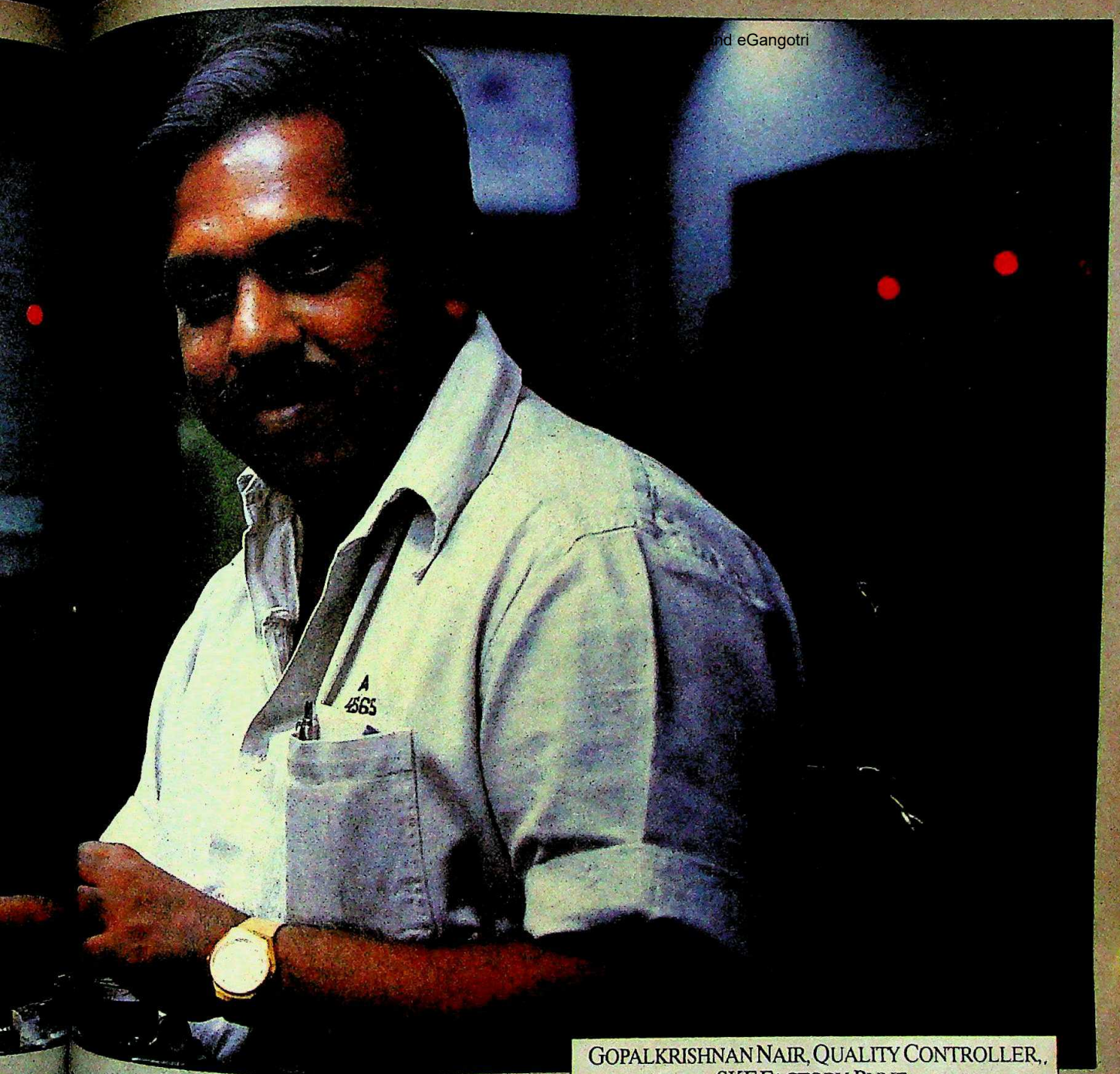

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RAJKOT

Dealing in Drought

THE MEANDERING rows of empty pots and pans have become Rajkot's most familiar sight. For the city's housewives, life revolves around getting water for the family. Every conversation in the city invariably turns to the shortage of water. The area's largest newspaper devotes a quarter of its news space to reporting on the crisis. Residents get up at dawn to be the first at the community tap. With tempers running high, quarrels break out often. But the gross tragedy of this inhuman situation escapes them as they push and jostle to reach the tap, which often doesn't oblige. Even when it does, the trickle is often contaminated and unfit to drink.

For the past few months, Rajkot (pop: 5.5 lakh) in Saurashtra, Gujarat, has been reeling under an unprecedented water shortage. Water comes only on alternative days and then too in a thin trickle for 20 minutes. The city was getting 110 lakh gallons before the crisis began, but today the supply is down to 70 lakh gallons every alternative day: less than a third of the normal. That is barely 6 gallons per head daily—once again, less than a third of the minimum prescribed by the World Health Organisation. The pressure is so low that the water doesn't even reach houses on the ground floor. To trap all the water they can get, people have dug thousands of small pits at the points where the corporation pipes connect with the house connections.

The problem began with the failure of the monsoon last year, when Rajkot recorded the lowest rainfall in a decade. As the rest of Saurashtra also reeled under an unprecedented drought, the sources of supply to Rajkot started drying up. The Aji dam—Rajkot's principal source—now has only enough water to last till the end of April. The state Government is rushing in with investments for augmenting water supply, earmarking Rs 11.6 crore for Rajkot out of a water supply budget of Rs 86 crore this year. But the additional water may not be available quickly enough.

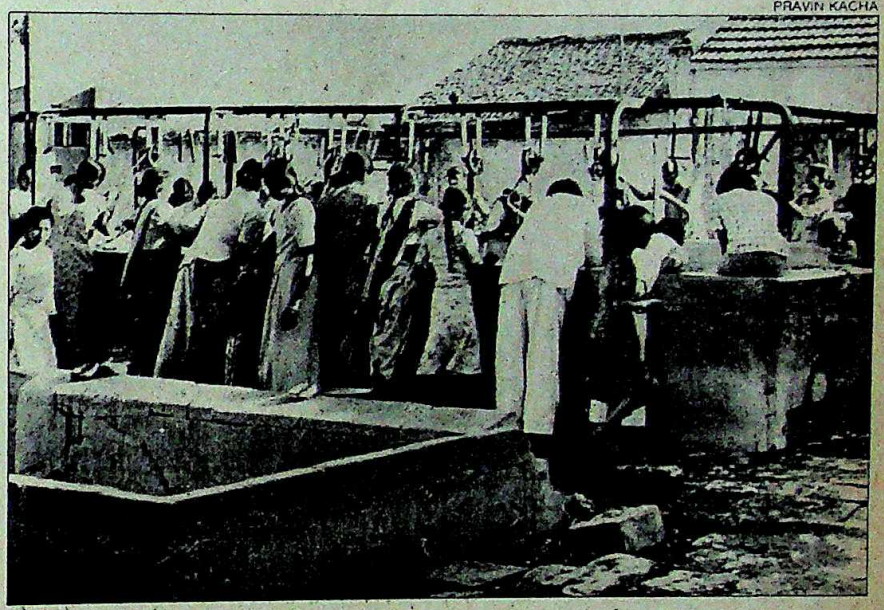
Inevitably, fortune hunters have turned the tragedy into an opportunity to make a fast buck. All over Rajkot, one can see all manner of vehicles—from bullock-carts to Toyota trucks—fitted with tanks, making the rounds and selling water. Many vehicles are even equipped with diesel pumps so that water can be lifted to the upper storeys. Advertisements appear in local dailies announcing that "good quality water can be home-delivered"—provided, of course, you have the money to pay: somewhere in the region of Rs 25 for a barrel of 600 litres. Says a resident sarcastically: "One cannot beat Gujarati enterprise." Bhimjibhai Muljibhai is one of those who has struck paydirt in water. Jobless before the drought began, Muljibhai saw the water crisis grow and bought a tanker for Rs 1,200 with a capacity of 600 litres, fitted it to a three-wheeler and started fetching water from Nana Mouva, a village 15 km from Rajkot. He makes eight trips a day and takes home Rs 3,500 every month. "What's wrong with selling water?" he reasons. "Everyone is doing it." "Everyone" also includes the relative of a cabinet minister and four sitting corporators.

Private truckers—who fetch water from villages 40 to 50 km away—make up to Rs 300 per trip. Hotels, restaurants and major institutions are their clients. Durgesh restaurant buys Rs 4,500 worth of water every month. The Bank of India spends over Rs 600 a day to provide water for its 400-odd employees. The municipal corporation maintains that water sharks bring in only about 2.5 lakh gallons to the city. But unofficial estimates say the figure is much higher. As the days hot up, both the quantity of the water and its rates will rise.

As always, the disadvantaged suffer the most. Says Dharamsinh Nanji, a fitter in an air compressor unit who earns Rs 750 a month and has 11 dependants: "I have been spending Rs 10 every day for the last three months. How long can I pull on like this?" Migrating is no solution either since, as he says, "living without a salary would be much worse". Says housewife Jyoti Bhatnagar: "The least that can be done is to grant a water allowance for the people of the city."

Residents around a public well; and (below) water pits alongside an open drain

PRAVIN KACHA



JAVESH CHAUHAN

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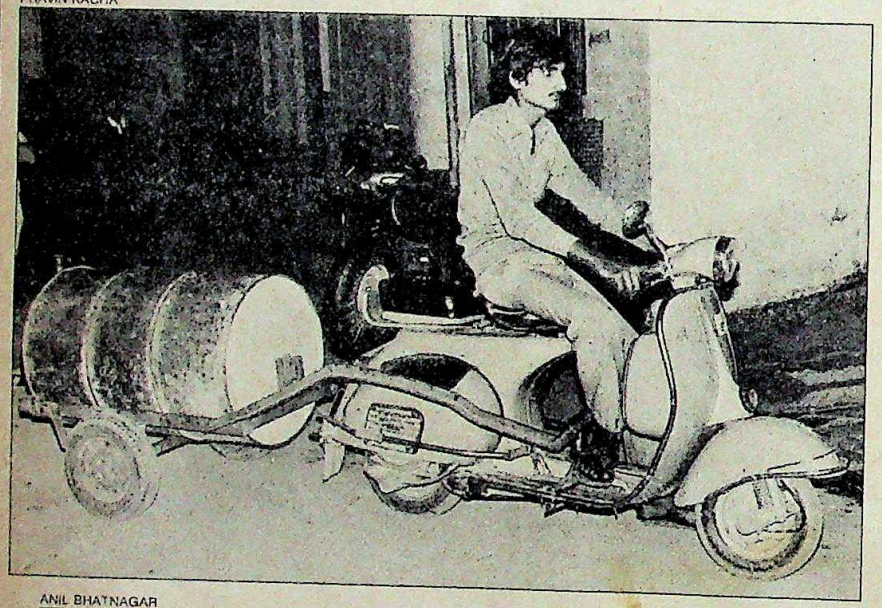
Inevitably, those who cannot afford to pay, or many who are just greedy, resort to illegal means to get water, like digging up the mains at cross-connections, breaking open roads and pipelines, fitting bigger pipes to their water connections or installing pumps fitted directly to the mains so that they can draw more water in the crucial 20 minutes.

IN A drive to check these malpractices, the municipal corporation arrested 72 people last month, all of whom had tampered with their water connections. One of them is Vrajlal Jani, who with a concealed pump, was drawing about 10,000 litres of water for his restaurant. Madhu Gosaria was another person with a hidden pump, who was drawing more water than many of her neighbours.

A conservative estimate by the municipal corporation puts the number of pits dug in the city's roads at around 30,000. "Plumbing has become big business," says Bashir Ahmed, a plumber who now keeps busy fitting pits with taps or with bigger pipes. Citizens know fully well that digging pits on roadsides is illegal but, as Kishan Dave, a foundry worker, says: "When not even a drop of water comes into the house, what alternative do we have but to dig pits?"

PRAVIN KACHA

Private water carrier: trading in misery



ANIL BHATNAGAR

"What's wrong with selling water? Everyone is doing it."

BHIMJIBHAI MULJIBHAI
water carrier

This, however, has thrown up a new fear for citizens and corporation and health officials. Since a large part of the city has open drains and since the pits more often than not happen to be right next to these drains, the hazard of contamination through seepage is ever-present. In some areas, gutter water has seeped into drinking water mains, while in some others, labourers have been seen drawing water out of gutters, ostensibly for construction purposes. As a result, even potable water is not quite harmless. Says Lalita Vashram, a housewife living in Manhar Plot: "The first few buckets we get are muddy and stink of sewage."

A sample of water collected from a main pipe and analysed by the public health engineering department showed the presence of 2,400 organisms in 100 ml, and an equal amount of fecal coliforms. The department's scientific officer, M.S. Marfani, said that the water supplied by the corporation was potable but since pits had been dug all over the city, chances of pollution were high. P.K. Laheri, joint secretary, water supply, called upon people to use chlorine tablets to prevent an epidemic but as Khimji Pipalia, a corporation wireman pointed out, "We do not have enough money to buy water: Where can we buy tablets from?"

Fearing an outbreak of water-borne diseases in the city, state Health Minister Vallabhai Patel recently asked Municipal Commissioner S. Jagadishan to cover the pits. But when he set about the task last fortnight, there was a public outcry and tempers in Rajkot touched a new high. Within hours, Social Welfare Minister Sushila Seth, who is from Rajkot, requested him to stop the operation. Mayor Vajubhai Vala, who heads the BJP-controlled corporation, bluntly said: "First give us water, then close the pits."

Corporators have hardly helped matters. Anxious to appease their constituents, they pressurised Jagadishan into digging 264 tubewells at a cost of Rs 13 lakh. Only 116 found water, but 56 of these ran dry in a few days. Says Jagadishan: "All the money has gone down the drain."

Desperate to save water, the corporation has begun daily spraying of cetyl alcohol over the little water left in the Aji dam, to cut evaporation by 15 to 18 per cent. The state Government is also gearing up its efforts. From the first week of May, eight water trains carrying 6.5 lakh gallons will ferry the precious liquid from Gandhinagar, 225 km away, and Dhantharwadi in Amreli district, 200 km away. The exercise will cost the Government a mind-boggling Rs 7.5 crore over a month.

But these are mere palliatives. As officials point out, the concept of water management is completely absent. Says former health minister Manoharsinh Jadeja: "The Government has bungled on the water crisis in Rajkot." The aim should be to learn and build from the Rajkot experience. The real challenge will come when government tankers will have to go to far-off places in search of potable water.

Whatever the Government's lapses, the ultimate tragedy is that the crisis has brought out the worst in human behaviour. A housing society in Rajkot, which has a huge well full of water, is selling water and using the profits to build a compound wall and a road for its members. When it comes to trading in human misery, there are obviously no limits.

—RAMESH MENON in Rajkot

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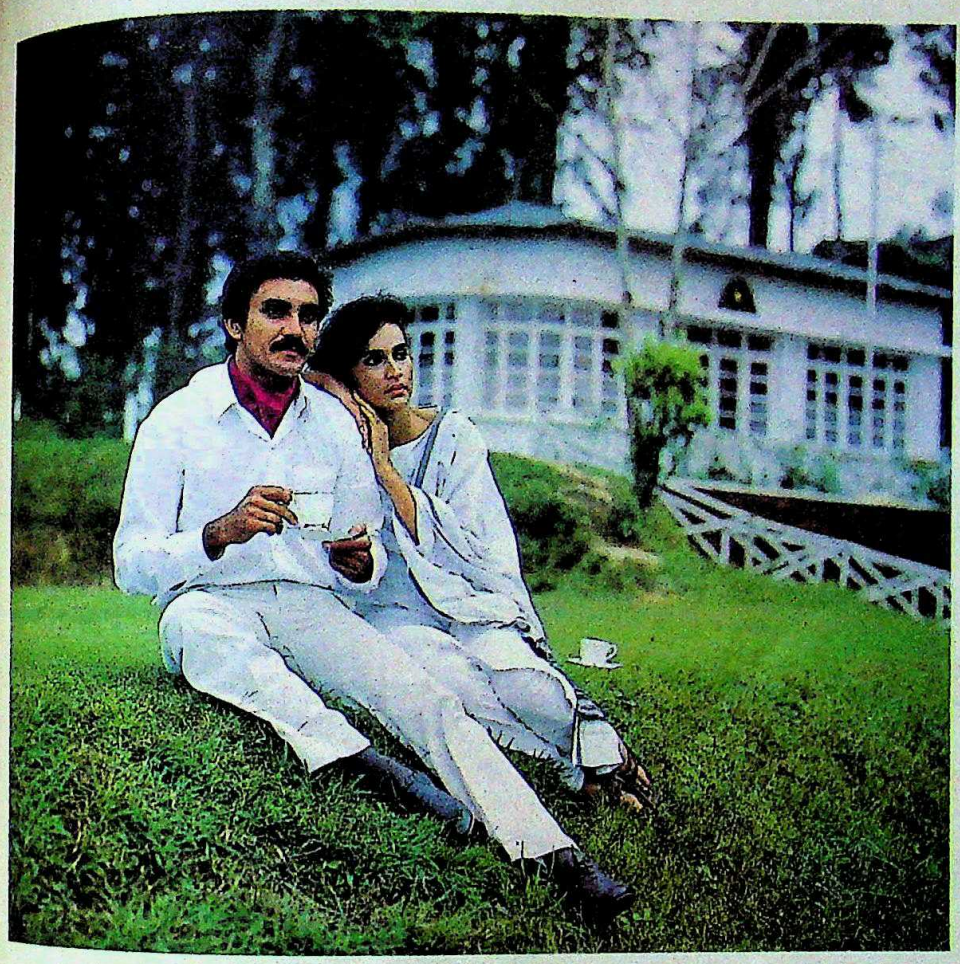

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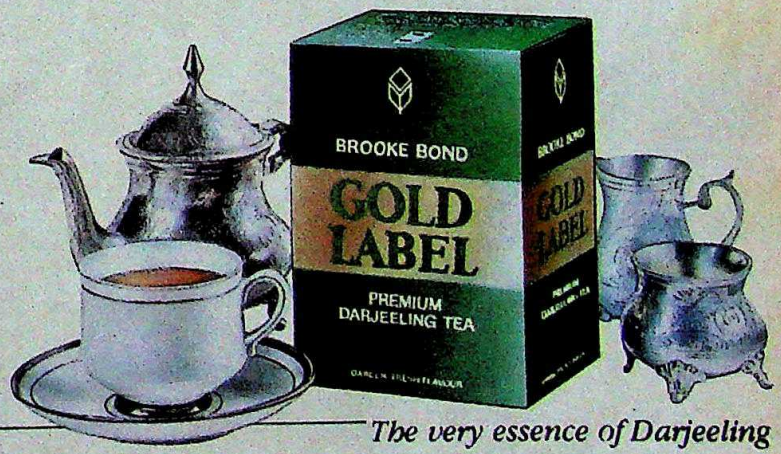

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BIHAR

Declaring War

IN BIHAR, notorious for its 'ordinance raj', the promulgation of one more ordinance is not necessarily an event of any importance. But last fortnight's ordinance taking over the L.N. Mishra Institute of Economic Development and Social Changes—called 'The Private Educational Institutions (Taking Over) Ordinance 1986'—predictably raised a political storm. The institute, hitherto under the control of the redoubtable Jagannath Mishra, was the ex-chief minister's base for carrying on covert and not so covert dissident activities. By summarily ordering its take-over, the beleaguered Chief Minister, Bindeshwari Dubey, has made it clear that he intends to take the fight into the rival camp.

Operation take-over was a remarkable show of strength by Dubey. After the ordinance was decided upon at a cabinet meeting, Governor P. Venkatasubbiah's signature was promptly obtained, and within hours of the decision, armed police moved into the sprawling campus of the institute on Bailey Road. Patna's Divisional Commissioner Krishna Singh went straight to the air-conditioned chamber of the institute's chairman-cum-director-general, Jagannath Mishra, to hand over the transfer document and take personal charge. A dumb-founded Mishra resignedly complied and left in a huff. The drama came to the press' notice only later when aides of the state Education Minister L.N. Jha went around to newspapers' offices with a brief press note, even as journalists were still working on their copy on the cabinet meeting.

"It is a case of political vendetta and I will fight this out politically," said an angry Mishra. "The whole game is aimed at provoking me to leave the party but I am not going to oblige them." Predictably, the take-over also gave a fresh fillip to dissident activities against Dubey. Fifty legislators signed a statement demanding immediate recall of the "retrograde step". Dissidents announced plans to stage a show of strength before the governor and demanded that Dubey call a meeting of the Congress(I) Legislature Party to seek a vote of confidence. Kamalnath Singh Thakur, MLC, recalling that Dubey would never have become the chief minister had Mishra not thrown his weight behind him said: "This is an act of cowardice, political immorality as well as ungratefulness. How can we tolerate it?"

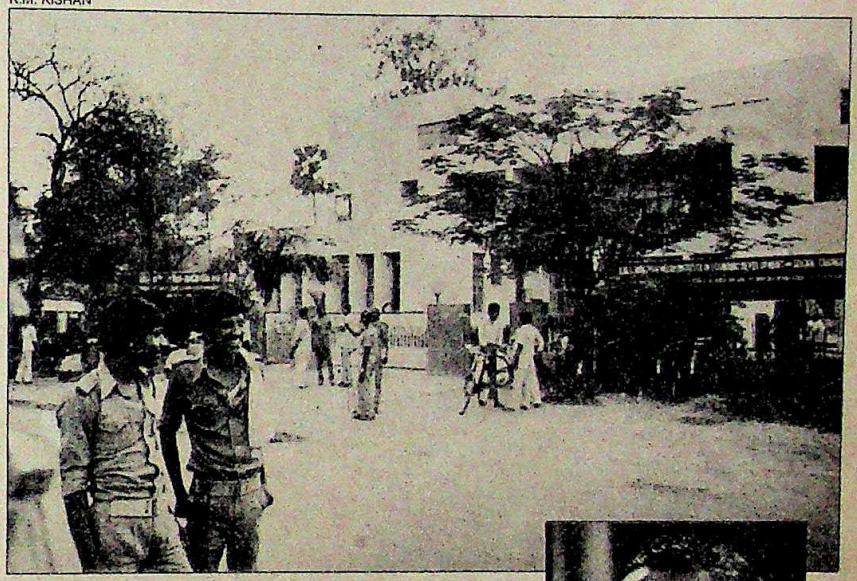
Mishra's supporters say Dubey took over the institute in a last-ditch attempt to stay on in power. They explained that since the high command was known to be considering the dissidents' demand for a change in the state leadership after the termination of the Lok Sabha session early next month, Dubey decided to show that he was strong enough to take on the dissidents. But in the heat of the moment the dissidents overlooked one crucial fact: that Dubey could not have taken this precipitate step without the backing of the party high command. Though firm evidence was lacking—and neither Mishra nor Dubey's supporters would comment on it—it is believed that Dubey got the green signal from Delhi when he was in the capital earlier in the month.

The education minister dismissed the dissidents' allegations and asserted that the take-over was part of the Government's attempt to streamline management education. The ordinance, he pointed out, also empowered the Government to take over more such institutions. Said Jha with a smile: "The Government has every right to take over professional institutions in private hands and improve and diversify its activities." But then Jha gave the game away by adding: "Moreover, there was strong suspicion that the institute was being misused for political reasons."

Whatever the protestations of Mishra's followers, the take-over should have been expected. Mishra and Dubey have been on a collision course ever since Mishra started using the institute for his *jan jagran abhiyan* (campaign to raise public awareness) and his Hindi daily *Pataliputra Times* started exposing the "inefficiency and corruption" of the Dubey Government. Even as Mishra would publicly, albeit indirectly, criticise the Dubey Government, the institute would release analytical studies about various poverty-removal schemes launched by the state Government showing large-scale misuse of public funds even as achievements lagged behind the targets. Matters came to a head when the Dubey Government stopped the annual grant of Rs 10.70 lakh to the institute, despite a no-objection certifi-

The L.N. Mishra Institute: take-over

K.M. KISHAN



"The whole game is aimed at provoking me to leave the party but I am not going to oblige."

JAGANNATH MISHRA

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cate from the education and finance departments. Simultaneously, the *Pataliputra Times* was starved of government advertisements. Angered by this, Mishra, who had taken care to hide his hand behind the rising dissidence, openly lashed out at the Government in the budget session for its inefficiency.

Set up by Mishra as the Bihar Institute of Economic Development and renamed after Mishra's elder brother L.N. Mishra after the latter's death, the institute grew in size and stature after Mishra became the chief minister in 1975. Today, it enjoys the status of an autonomous institute affiliated to the University Grants Commission, and is recognised and aided by the Union Ministry of Human Resources Development. A despondent Mishra listed the institute's achievements: it has been shortlisted by the Central Government for training of IAS officers, selected by the Union Ministry of Agriculture for evaluation of the implementation of the IRDP and NREP, is the recipient of a grant from the Union Education Ministry to start a training scheme in computers, and the first to start a course in rural management. Says Mishra: "I had introduced the management education course in Bihar but now many substandard institutes have cropped up. Instead of curbing their activities, the Government is trying to demolish an institute that has gained wide recognition."

Mishra's apprehension that the take-over would abridge the institute's academic growth is not without basis. Most institutes doing specialised work which have been taken over by the Government for similarly laudable objectives—like the Mithila Sanskrit Research Institute at Darbhanga, the K.P. Jaiswal Institute at Patna, the Nav Nalanda Mahavir at Nalanda and the prestigious A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies at Patna—have become a graveyard for scholars caught in the crossfire between bureaucrats and academicians.

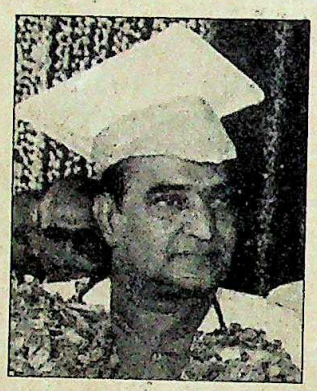
Whether the Mishra institute also goes the same way is a matter that may, in the normal course of things, have interested only academics. But because the take-over was essentially a political decision, the issue has taken on wider ramifications. With Mishra's supporters breathing fire and brimstone and Dubey refusing to give in to their pressure, the stage has been set for a fight to the finish between Bihar's two-best known Brahmins.

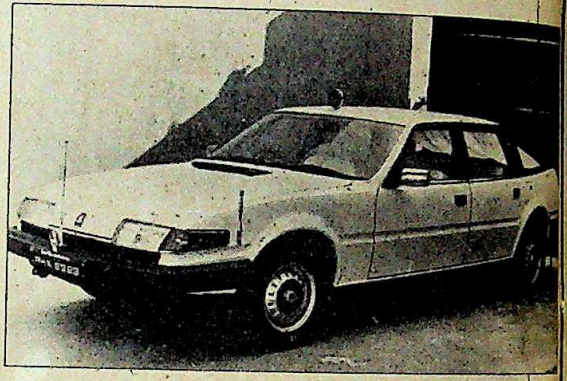
—FARZAND AHMED

ANDHRA PRADESH

Idle Worship

FOR THE 62 million Telugu-speaking people, New Year's Day on April 10 marked the start of *Aakshya Ugadi*—the year which does not wither away. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, whose public image has noticeably withered in recent months, chose the auspicious day to kick off yet another attempt to bolster his image. Having usurped the state governor's usual role of university chancellor, NTR had already appointed himself the chancellor of the newly created University of Health Sciences and, on New Year's Day, appeared at Vijayawada in saffron dhoti and kurta to formally inaugurate the new university.





NTR at inauguration ceremonies (left); and his Standard car: self indulgence

The next step aimed at giving his image a lift was a new shell-white air-conditioned Standard 2000. Unveiled on what was now becoming an eventful New Year's Day, NTR made a dramatic entry at various venues in the most expensive of all cars manufactured in the country. And as eyebrows were raised—NTR had after all promised an austere government—the wily actor-turned-politician announced a Rs 10-crore raffle with the Standard as the first prize.

But it was soon obvious that this was nothing more than a publicity gimmick. For even as advertisements began appearing in newspapers announcing the raffle, officials were still to work out whether the tickets were going to be priced at Re 1 or Rs 1,000.

There was more to come. Rama Rao followed this with the announcement of a colour television set as a prize to the person who came up with the best suggestion on how to spend the money raised through the raffle! Commented the former state Congress(I) president, Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy, tongue firmly in cheek: "The chief minister's raffle should be a regular monthly feature and he must use his extraordinary persuasive capacities to collect Rs 120 crore a year. With equal amounts from the state and Central governments, the total of Rs 340 crore can be used for drought relief."

Unfazed, NTR continued to cut ribbons and launch projects and programmes named after him. On April 11 he declared open the Taraka Rama Udyanavam—a 69-acre park developed at a cost of Rs 38 lakh by the Visakhapatnam Urban Development Authority. And on April 17 he inaugurated the Rs 105 lakh Taraka Rama Bahulartha Pranganam at Velamkothur in East Godavari district. This is a multi-purpose project offering rural development, education and housing in one complex.

Later, in a speech at a meeting of the Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, he called for a freeze on imports and an end to all foreign collaborations since these affected India's self-respect and international prestige. His image-building programmes and his empty rhetoric have begun to embarrass his partymen and supporters. Influential members of the Telugu Desam have begun to say openly that their leader has more than a touch of megalomania. And commenting on his chambers of commerce speech, the leading Telugu daily, *Eenadu*, which in the past has unabashedly supported NTR and his Telugu Desam, said in a hard-hitting editorial: "The chief minister seems to talk without restraint and reveals his mental confusion. Progress is not possible by mere emotional outbursts." But was Rama Rao listening?

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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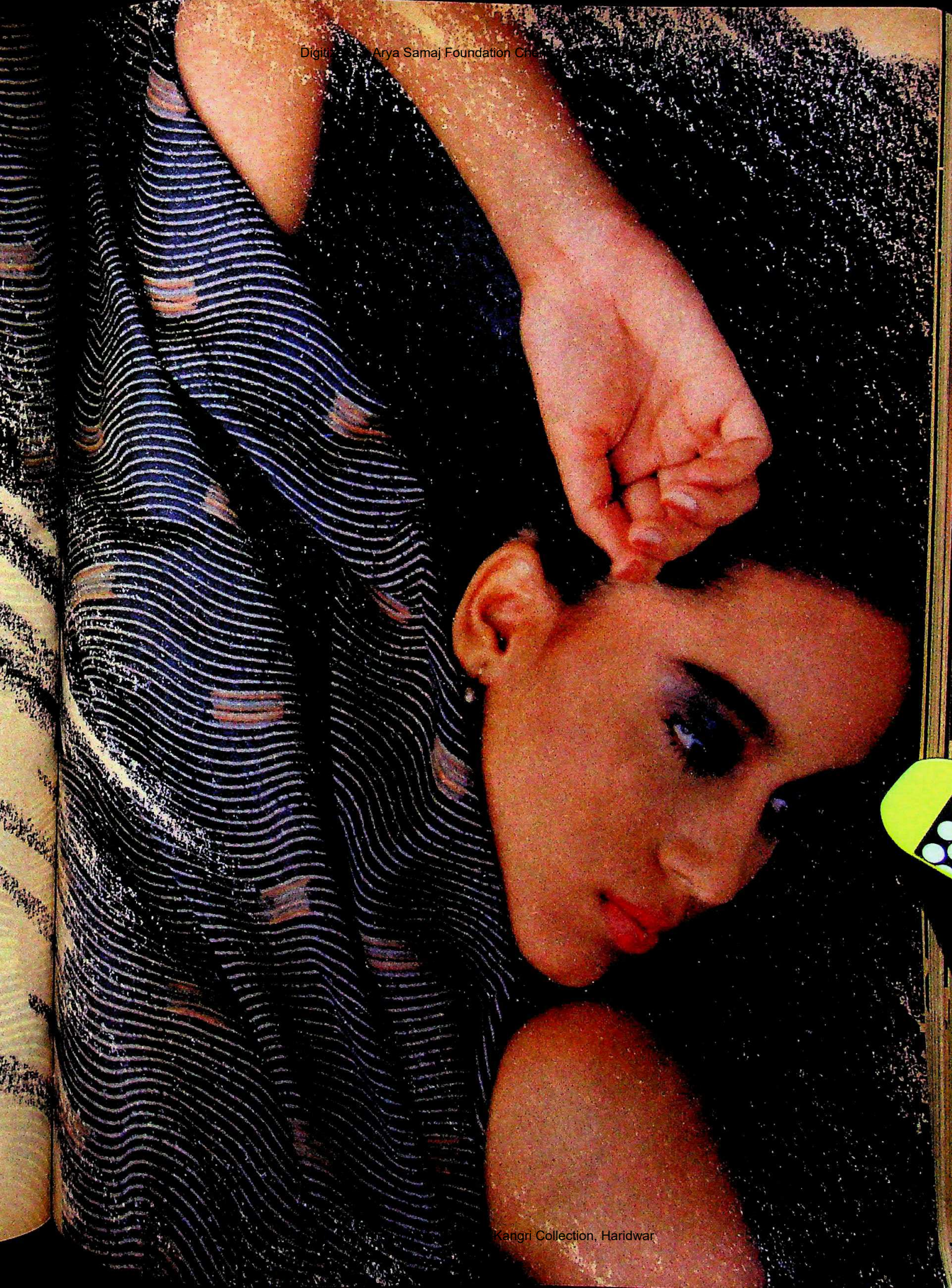

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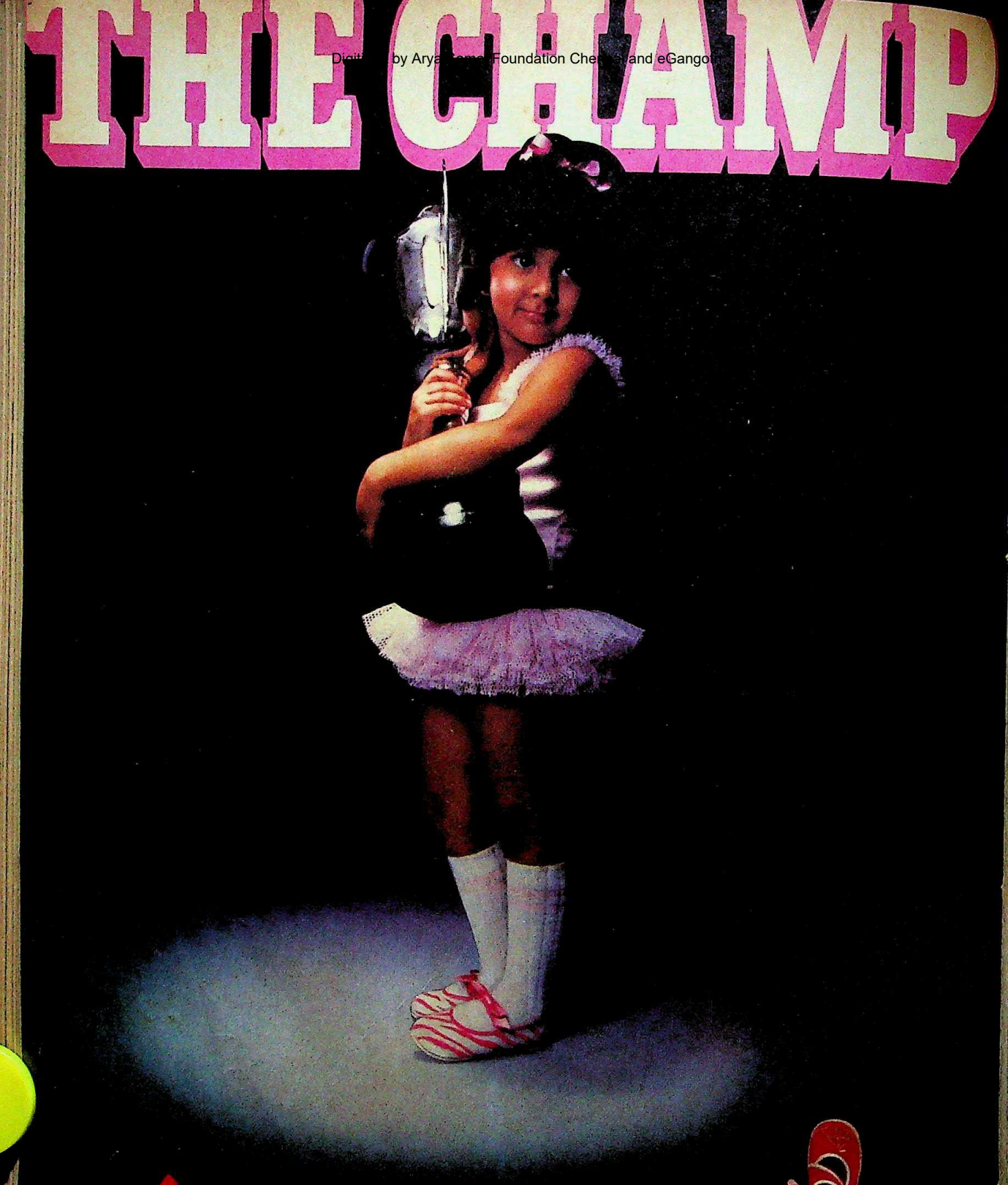
THE CHAMP



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HARYANA

Clever Coup

THE MOST tenacious survivor in Indian politics, Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal, scored yet another political victory last fortnight when Birender Singh submitted his resignation as the state party chief after an increasingly stormy seven-month relationship with Lal. The final break came when Lal successfully prevailed upon the party high command to agree to a postponement of a party workers' convention called by Singh.

But the postponement was only the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Lal and Singh held diametrically opposite views on the Punjab accord, with Lal trying to match Lok Dal leader Devi Lal's fiery opposition to the accord with similarly hawkish postures and Singh trying to take a more reasonable stand. Singh had also offended Lal by sincerely trying to give the party a watchdog image. His resignation was given after he unsuccessfully tried to persuade Rajiv Gandhi to sort out the discord.

Lal managed to persuade the high command that Singh was immature and, more important, that his dovish stand on the Punjab accord was no answer to the political challenge posed by Devi Lal's Haryana Sangharsh Samiti, which has been getting increasing support among the people on a blatantly anti-accord stand. Bansi Lal, the other strongman of Haryana politics, also threw his weight behind the wily chief minister's effort to run down Singh. Bansi Lal, who does not want any Jat leader other than his son Surinder Singh to come up, has always viewed Singh—grandson of the legendary Sir Chhotu Ram—with suspicion.

Singh's resignation will not merely subdue the voice of reason in Haryana, it is also a setback to Rajiv's plan to revamp the party at the state level. Singh, 38, was one of four party chiefs in and around their forties appointed last year with the express objective of making the party "superior" to the Government.

Mincing no words, Singh had declared at his installation ceremony: "We are not going to depend upon the Government. We shall organise our rallies through mass efforts. We shall be the watchdog of the interests of the people of the state and offer constructive criticism. The party will not be ignored now." Lal's prompt retort was: "My brother is young, energetic, but shall surely need our help and support."

But Singh kept his word. Numerous district level conferences were organised without much government help. With no contribution from Lal, the enthusiastic Singh collected a hefty Rs 10 lakh and cleared old debts of the party worth Rs 2 lakh. Not only this, he shot off letters to Lal asking him to improve the Government's image and drawing his attention to allegations of corruption and nepotism against his ministers and officials. When a minister of state, Kartar Devi, openly challenged the party high command by terming the Punjab accord as anti-Haryana, Singh wrote to the chief minister asking him to seek her explanation and take suitable disciplinary action. But she was only voicing Lal's viewpoint.

Birender Singh

Birender Singh is only the latest to learn that it never pays to underestimate Bhajan Lal, the longest-serving of all Congress(I) chief ministers.

Bhajan Lal

Lal has been blowing hot and cold on the implementation of the accord. At one stage he said he would not agree to the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab unless Abohar and Fazilka were conceded to Haryana. At another time he declared that the Sutlej-Yamuna link canal must be constructed before Chandigarh could be handed over. Then he confounded everybody by saying that Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh should merge. Most recently, he said that Haryana would only be satisfied with 1,200 villages from Punjab as part of the package deal.

As opposed to this, Singh maintained that Haryana should take a realistic approach, accept the verdict of the commission on Chandigarh and areas in lieu of it and strive to get the maximum share of the Ravi-Beas waters. Haryana, he felt, should agree to make some sacrifices in the national interest. Says he: "My friend Lal does not see the Punjab problem from a national point of view. There is no need to make tall claims."

Singh was hoping to align the party behind his point of view on the Punjab accord at the Jind convention scheduled for April 22 and 23. His plan was to indoctrinate the 12,000-odd party workers who were expected to come—at least one from every village—to his stand so that they could take the message to the people. Encouraged by the response he had got at numerous public meetings, he was going to argue that the real battle that Haryana should wage was for the retention of its share in the Ravi-Beas waters.

The Jind convention was also going to pass a resolution asking the Government to call the municipal elections which have not been held for 11 years. Another proposed resolution would have asked the Government to revamp the administration and speed up development. But Bhajan Lal persuaded the high command to postpone the conference on the pretext that it would clash with the harvesting time. Surprisingly, this argument was bought by the high command even though the convention was one of party workers.

Bhajan Lal knows that his political survival depends on Punjab staying in a state of turmoil. "If the Punjab problem is sorted out and peace returns, we shall see Bhajan Lal out immediately," said a state Congressman. "He is more of a liability for Rajiv." That might be so in the long run, but Singh is only the latest to learn that it never pays to underestimate Lal, the longest-serving of all Congress(I) chief ministers.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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SOBHRAJ CASE

The Sethia Twist

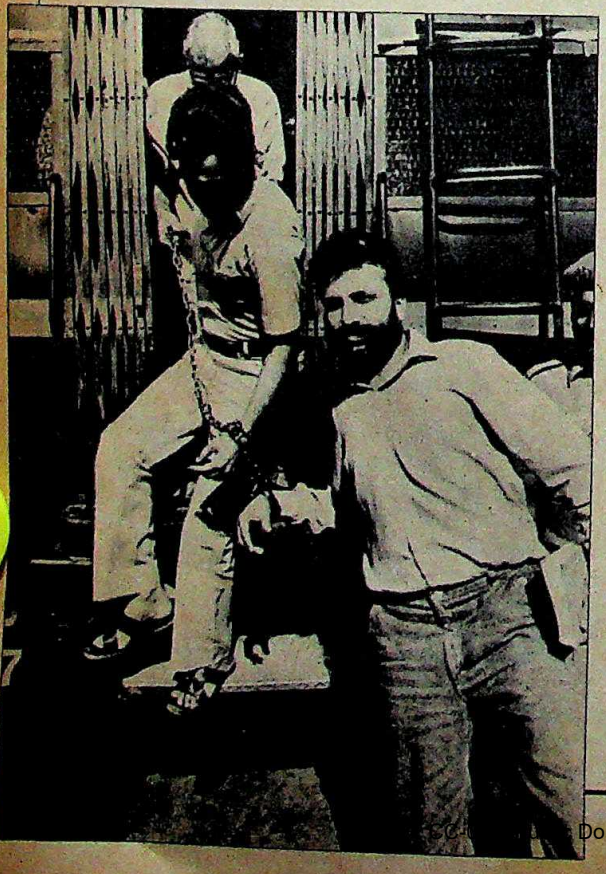
HE SITS like a malevolent spider in his solitary cell, eyes gleaming above a freshly-cultivated French beard, spinning out his frustrating web of fact and fantasy. For the team of police officials engaged in the interrogation of Charles Gurmukh Hotchand Sobhraj ever since his recapture last month, the predominant part of their time has been spent in trying to separate the two. It is no easy task. The calculatingly complex tapestry of truth and half-truth has, for one, successfully shifted the focus of attention from Sobhraj to his fellow inmate in Tihar jail, Rajinder Sethia, the London-based businessman facing trial for alleged bank fraud.

No two people could be so unalike or have such different backgrounds. Sobhraj clawed his way out of the gutters of Saigon to murder and rob his way across 12 countries. His associates, and his many victims, were drop-outs and delinquents trudging their futile way along the hippy trail. Sethia, suave and debonair, is a high-living millionaire accustomed to mansions and Rolls Royces, whose many-tentacled business dealings took him too close to the edge. Yet, the latest twist in the tail of the Sobhraj saga has joined the two as alleged co-conspirators, plotting devious deeds in the dank depths of Tihar jail.

Within days of Sobhraj's anticlimactic capture, Sethia was charged with having aided and partly financed his escape. Then, in a high-voltage courtroom drama in Delhi last fortnight, the senior police official in charge of the case, Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime), Amodh Kanth, burst into the middle of the hearing waving a sheaf of papers. The papers contained vital information from Interpol which, he claimed, he had received 15 minutes earlier and were documents recovered from a raid on the London flat of David Hall, the Briton who had played a major role in the Tihar jail break-out and was arrested along with Sobhraj in Goa.

Sobhraj: fact and fantasy

Sethia in custody: serious charges



As reporters covering the trial furiously scribbled in their notebooks, Kanth dropped his bombshell. Sethia, he alleged, had financed the jail-break with the intention of getting two witnesses against him in the bank fraud case "physically eliminated". The police version, like the stories that Sobhraj sits spinning, is a maddeningly complicated cat's-cradle of supposedly supportive evidence that, in the end, raises more questions than it attempts to answer.

The police, along with sleuths from the the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), claim that Sobhraj and Sethia "pooled their minds and resources" to hatch their macabre plan. Crucial to the alleged plot was a man called Gordon Greenhall, a friend of David Hall.

When Hall was arrested in India for possession of drugs last December, Greenhall arrived in Delhi to see him along with Hall's wife, Maria. In the short time he was in India, police claim he became "unusually friendly" with Sobhraj and Sethia. They also claim that they recovered documents from London which prove that Greenhall was paid $20,000, allegedly by Sethia, to do a survey of nine international airports, including two in India, to ferret out security loopholes. The actual reasons for the effort are unclear and even the police have no logical explanation. Greenhall's report was allegedly handed over to Sobhraj who passed it on to Hall for safe keeping. Hall passed on the Greenhall report to his wife Maria, who took it back to London where it was found during the raid on Hall's flat.

The Sethia connection, police allege, is a note written on a slip of paper which was found in Hall's London flat. The terse note says: "Please pay bearer $20,000. Many thanks. Raj." The handwriting, police allege, matches that of Sethia, who is always referred to by his friends and relatives as 'Raj'. The police also recovered two diaries kept by Hall that have a list of names and addresses. The notings in one indicate, according to the police, that a plot had been hatched to hire a man referred to as 'Mr Smith', an Australian, to "eliminate" two people whose names and addresses have been noted in the diary—S. Satsangi and a man called Tulsi. Police

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claimed in court that both men are key prosecution witnesses in the fraud case against Sethia.

The other shaky pillar on which the new police charges against Sethia rest is their claim that he financed the Sobhraj escape. When Sobhraj was arrested, he was carrying $62,000 on him. Police claim that $32,000 was brought in from London and the equivalent of Rs 9 lakh was transferred from Sethia's account in London by his nephew, Dalbir Singh Bhalla, who has been in India for the last five months. The bulk of the money, police allege, was used to finance the escape.

But the police version is stretched thin enough for Sethia's counsel, celebrated criminal lawyer Ram Jethmalani, to pick innumerable holes in. The crucial question is one of motive. Police now admit that Tulsi is not listed as a prosecution witness, but, is in fact, a close family friend of the Sethias in London and has been for the last 20 years. The other witness, Satsangi, a former employee of the London branch of the Punjab National Bank, is listed as one of the witnesses, but his written statement to the CBI could hardly be construed as crucial in the case against Sethia. Police, however, insist that Satsangi is a key witness.

Even so, it seems surprising that a man of Sethia's background would hire professional assassins to eliminate prosecution witnesses. Or, for that matter, why he would finance Sobhraj's escape, especially when he was on the brink of obtaining bail. Sources close to Sethia say he had once given his case files to Sobhraj, who had promised to help him get bail, and through his nephew, paid Rs 24,000 to Sobhraj's girl-friend Sneh Sengar, an advocate, as fees for her legal work on the case. They say that it is possible that Sobhraj had some devious reason for conveying information in the files to David Hall, who entered it in his diary.

Sethia's nephew, Bhalla, says he can account for every penny of the Rs 9 lakh he transferred—Rs 4.5 lakh was given to Jethmalani as legal fees, for which he has a receipt. He says he has told the police this and showed them receipts accounting for the rest of the money. Yet, the police seem equally convinced that Sethia is guilty of the new charges they have brought against him. When asked if Sethia really seemed a man who would hire professional assassins, Kanth hesitated and said: "Maybe you develop that kind of mentality in jail." But that is hardly going to suffice in the courtroom where the real Rajinder Sethia will stand—or fall.

—DILIP BOBB

KARNATAKA

Wordy Duel

THANKS largely to the intervention of a most unexpected ally, the state Congress(I)'s latest attempt to browbeat Karnataka's wily Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde into resigning his position promptly boomeranged on it. Within days of announcing its "Remove Hegde" campaign, the state unit had to beat a hasty retreat when party President Rajiv Gandhi said that he had not asked for Hegde's resignation.

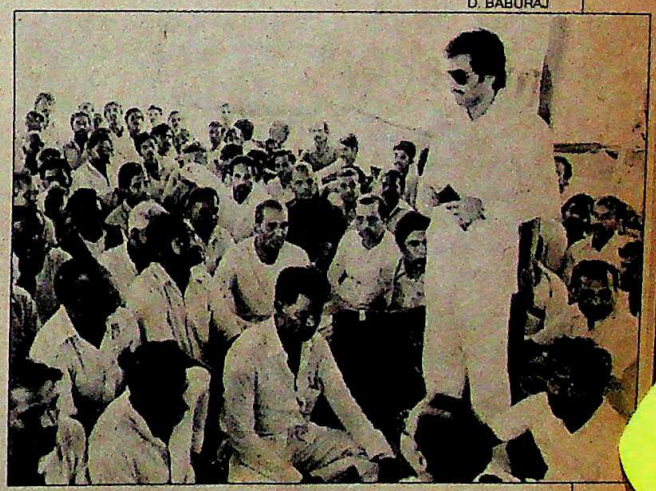
Even as the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee(I) led by its young President Oscar Fernandes began its relay hunger strike in front of the Vidhan Soudha, an emissary of the prime minister delivered a four-page letter to the ailing chief minister in Bangalore's St John's hospital. Rajiv clarified in the letter that he had never asked for Hegde's resignation during his three-day visit to the drought-affected areas of the state last month, setting at rest a raging controversy. Admitted a senior state Congress(I) leader: "The letter from the prime minister to our arch-enemy could not have been timed better, for the chief minister's credibility as a clean politician was eroding very fast."

The state Congressmen's plan for a massive agitation for the dismissal of the "most corrupt government the state has ever had" had, in fact, been chalked out after the prime minister had openly criticised the state Government. Accompanied by local Congressmen, Rajiv had taken the state Government to task for ignoring the interests of the poor. And in the course of one of his acerbic digs at Hegde's "value-based" politics, Rajiv was reported as having questioned Hegde's moral right to continue in office. Newspaper accounts of his speeches had him asking how Hegde could remain in office even after the Supreme Court decision upheld the Karnataka High Court's judgement in the arrack case which had severely castigated the Government.

In a hard-hitting rejoinder to Rajiv's broadside, Hegde asked him to set his own house in order before asking him to quit. Choosing to ignore Hegde's retort, Fernandes and S. Bangarappa, decided to take the political battle to the streets and announced an ambitious agitation plan to unseat Hegde. Said Oscar: "The focus of our agitation is to expose the maladministration and the anti-people policies of the Government and finally seek its dismissal through democratic methods." Added Veerappa Moily, former finance minister: "Hegde has lost the mandate to govern because his image is tarnished. He is a captive chief minister. We will take the people into confidence about this government's betrayal."

Undeniably, Hegde's Government is not as popular as it used to be. It is faulted for its inadequate response to the worst-ever drought. Charged Nasir Ahmed, state Youth Congress (I) vice-president: "Neither Hegde nor his ministers like to visit the dusty and dirty villages because they have a luxurious life-style." But with dissatisfaction against the Government yet to crystallise, the people's response to the agitation was predictably poor.

D. BABURAJ



Bangarappa with party supporters

Even a section of Congressmen stayed away. All PCC(I) office-bearers and MLA's were expected to join the hunger strike but barely half their number turned up. And the agitation finally died out when Fernandes, as well as his senior colleagues were urgently summoned to Delhi even as senior party leaders had announced their plans to tour upcountry areas. Said an exuberant Hegde: "They (the Congressmen) realised that this was neither the time nor a good issue with a reasonable cause to launch a state-wide agitation." The chief minister may be still in hospital, but clearly his is not a lame-duck administration.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Bangalore

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PUNJAB

Militant Divisions

FOR A change, the focus in Punjab last fortnight was not on terrorist violence. The killings continued, but with the death count falling off, there was a comparative lull in the violence. Compared to 115 people dying in terrorist and police action in March, only 45 died in the first three weeks of April. But the action shifted quickly to the growing infighting among the militant sections of the Sikhs. The faction led by Harinder Singh Kahlon, the convenor of the All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF) who is backed by the Damdami Taksal, emerged as the clear winner at the end of the first round. Upstaged for the moment was the rival faction, led by Baba Joginder Singh's United Akali Dal (UAD) with the backing of the president of the AISSF, Manjit Singh, who is ensconced in the Jodhpur jail.

Kahlon lost no opportunity last fortnight to decry the UAD as a party of "government agents". He also openly accused Gurdev Singh, the acting jathedar of the Akal Takht, of siding with the UAD instead of "punishing" the Baba, and of colluding with him in trying to limit the role of the five-member panthic committee, which is packed with men owing loyalty to him and the Taksal.

After Kahlon made these accusations at a press conference on April 11, the *panj piaras* (five head priests, including Gurdev Singh) summoned him before the Akal Takht last fortnight for an explanation. But Kahlon swore allegiance to the Akal Takht and blamed the critical remarks on the "mischief" of newspapermen. Gurdev Singh, who was expected to take a tough line, accepted Kahlon's explanation.

Kahlon, in the last year, has consolidated his hold over the AISSF and has now emerged as a big challenge, not just to the jailed AISSF leaders in Jodhpur, but also to the Akali Dal and the UAD. Even intelligence agencies concede that he has a major following among Sikh youth in Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Kapurthala.

The fight between the two groups is now being waged at several levels. At a superficial level, there is the struggle for the physical control of the one-room UAD office, which had been bequeathed to the Baba by Jagdev Singh Talwandi of the breakaway Akali Dal faction. But the infighting has deeper roots.

Kahlon derives his strength from the backing of Baba Thakar Singh, the acting jathedar of the Damdami Taksal. Ever since the rise of Bhindranwale, the last jathedar of the Taksal, the leadership of the Taksal has been crucial for getting support among the militant sections of

SATPAL DANISH

EXTREMISTS

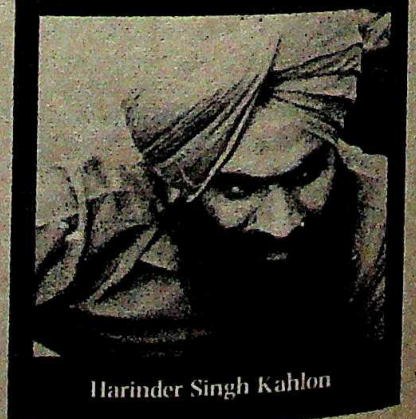
Temple Ties

EXTREMISTS and leaders of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), wanted for various criminal offences, have once again begun to use the Golden Temple as an occasional hideout. The temple is not yet the kind of terrorist sanctuary that it once was in the past, nor are as many arms stored in its premises. This is mainly because the extremists think the temple is vulnerable: in the seven months that the Akalis have been in power, the police has entered the temple no fewer than four times. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that terrorists are increasingly take refuge in the temple.

Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala says he has "clearly told the police to arrest all those who are either proclaimed offenders or wanted in criminal cases". But whenever Barnala telephones police officers in the districts to find out why wanted men were not arrested when they addressed public rallies, he is given the stock reply that "our people got the information late", or "we could not recognise them".

The Amritsar police has a wanted list of 110 absconding militants but has arrested only 10, the most important among them being Bhai Mohkam Singh. Amritsar police chief Surjit Singh Virk, who admits that even the arrest of Mohkam Singh was a fluke, says: "The police officials who recognise these persons are scared to lay their hands on them, and those who have the guts to nab them often fail to recognise them at the right time." Jalandhar Range DIG P.C. Dogra finds police officers at the ground level a frightened lot: "When the terrorists are calling the shots, fear naturally grips the force." But, he adds: "Our morale is rising, our intelligence is becoming more accurate and we shall surely get them."

Till such time, however, the wanted men continue to frequent the temple with virtual impunity. The most important among them are:



Harinder Singh Kahlon

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Sikh youth. In order to gain time and to scuttle any move to appoint another jathedar, Joginder Singh has continued to maintain that Bhindranwale is not dead. A section of the Taksal, in the militant-sponsored Sarbat Khalsa of January 26, wanted to honour Bhindranwale for his supreme sacrifice in defending the Sikh panth but the Baba opposed the move.

It was around then that the Kahlon group got hold of a letter written by Manjit Singh exhorting his uncle, Didar Singh, to work with the Baba and wrest control of the Taksal leadership. Against this background, the two sides tried to outwit each other in the January 26 Sarbat Khalsa. Joginder Singh eventually succeeded in getting his grandson Jasbir Singh, now in Bharatpur jail, nominated as the Akal Takht chief and his associate Gurdev Singh as acting jathedar.

The Taksal leadership accepted this in the knowledge that the Akal Takht chief could be removed during any Sarbat Khalsa, of which two are to be held every year, at Baisakhi and Diwali. But the Taksal faction scored a major victory when it succeeded in bringing in a five-member panthic committee with Wasan Singh, Dhanna Singh, Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, Gurnam Singh and Raur Singh to, guide the political and religious affairs of the Sikhs.

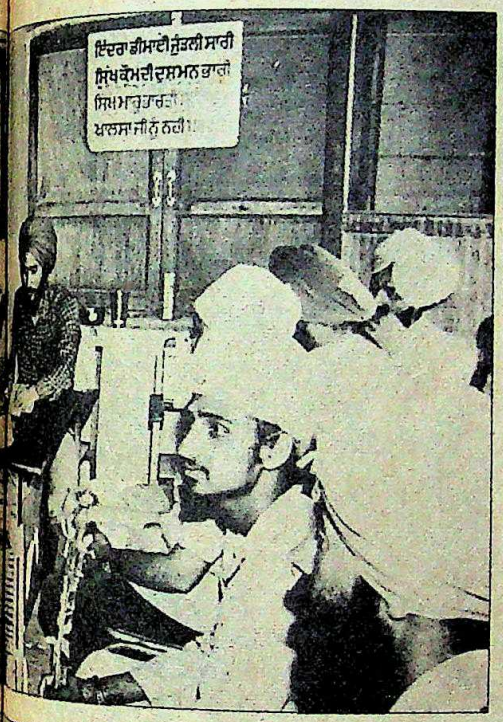
Between January and April, Kahlon and the Taksal openly attacked the UAD as a party of government agents. The Baba, in order to establish his hold, led a gherao of the Assembly (INDIA TODAY, April 15). The infighting reached a new high after the second Sarbat Khalsa on April 13, with Gurdev Singh summoning Kahlon and Wasan Singh to the Akal Takht for an explanation.

The huge collection of money for the Akal Takht's kar seva is another bone of contention. Both factions have been collecting money, but the Taksal faction charges that there is no account of the Rs 40-50 lakh collected by Joginder Singh's group. On the other hand, the Taksal's collection, done only through the *golak* (cash box lying in front of the Akal Takht) is open to scrutiny. The *golak* is opened every second or third day by the *panj piaras* or their representatives. Charged Kahlon: "Baba is using the money he has collected to finance factional infighting. He should retire or face another Sarbat Khalsa."

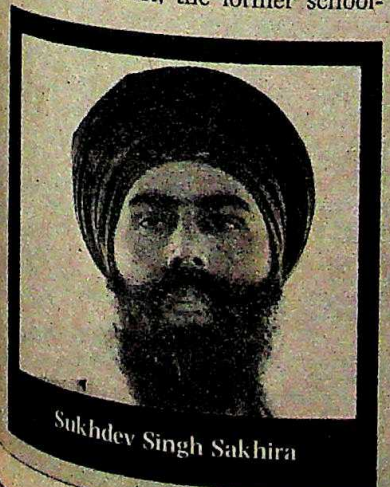
Though the Akali Dal and the Centre are happy at the infighting, efforts for a dialogue with the militants, which the Centre proposes to open, can hardly materialise till a clear line of leadership emerges. And there is also the danger that in an attempt to bolster their support among the Sikh youth, the rival factions could be tempted to take increasingly militant postures. Late last fortnight, it remained unclear whether the strife-torn politics of Punjab would calm down or heat up yet again. But to the extent that events were influenced in any major way by the moves and counter-moves of the various extremist factions, the future was not very rosy.

—GOBIND THUKRAL in Amritsar

Kahlon group leaders in the AISSF office: staking claim



Harinder Singh Kahlon, 32, convenor of the AISSF and the most important leader among the militants. He has been charged with making a seditious speech at the January 26 Sarbat Khalsa. Born into a modestly-placed farmer's family of Jalandhar district, the former school-teacher is totally committed to the AISSF, which he has knit into a formidable organisation.



Sukhdev Singh Sakhira

Wasan Singh, in his 30s, is the main spokesman of the five-member panthic committee. Tall and thin, the soft-spoken Wasan Singh is a proclaimed offender in four cases of murders and shoot outs. However, he denies the charges. "In the eyes of the police every young Sikh is a terrorist and a proclaimed offender. I take no notice of that," he declares. For many young Sikhs, he is a legendary hero.

Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, 30, a member of the panthic committee. He has seven cases of murder and dacoity against him and is believed to have been to Pakistan. He was involved in a major encounter with the CRPF in Nausher Panuwan three months ago in which one jawan was killed. He narrates the details of the encounter with great gusto. "Those whom God protects have no fear," he pronounces.

Sukhdev Singh Sakhira, 25, known to be close to some Akali ministers, is wanted in six cases of murder. He also faces charges of sedition for a speech he made in Tarn Taran last month.

Tarsem Singh Kohar, 27, is the self-proclaimed head of the 'Khalistan Liberation Army'. He often comes to the temple but operates from his home district, Gurdaspur. Sturdily built, Kohar has nine murder cases against him, including one for master-minding the attack on a train last month at village Kotla Gajran near Amritsar in which three people were killed. He does not deny his involvement in the cases. "We are only defending our honour and faith. In the process, if some people are killed, what can we do? For every Sikh killed, we shall kill 10. Khalistan is our objective and we shall have it," he told INDIA TODAY in one of his hide-outs.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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MANIPUR

Death Row

NEARLY two months after fourteen-year-old Neelam Panchbhaiya died in mysterious circumstances in Imphal, her death continues to haunt Chief Minister Rishang Keishing. The state's main opposition parties—the CPI, CPI(M) and the Manipur People's Party (MPP)—charge that Keishing's son Simrey is involved in Neelam's 'murder' and demand a judicial inquiry. But Keishing has refused to comply and the issue has snowballed into a major political row. Students, women's groups and political activists took to the streets last fortnight to condemn Keishing's intransigence.

Even dissidents within the Congress(I) openly demand a judicial inquiry. Says Lalit Singh, state finance minister and Keishing's arch rival: "It is unfortunate that the chief minister feels the issue is politically motivated. We only feel that a proper and impartial enquiry should be instituted to remove misgivings among the common people." Obviously shaken by the developments, Keishing and his family have shut themselves up in their fortress-like residence in Imphal and made themselves unavailable to the press.

Initially, Keishing tried to dismiss Neelam's death as "suicide by drowning". Subsequently, outvoted in the nine-member cabinet on March 17, he agreed to a magisterial enquiry. The failure of the enquiry to come out with its conclusion a month later has only served to strengthen the widespread belief that the chief minister is trying to organise a cover up.

Neelam, the youngest of six children of Professor Y.P. Panchbhaiya, a Garhwali settled in Imphal for the last 24 years, disappeared en route to her tutor's house on the evening of March 6 and it was not until March 8, two days later, that her body was discovered floating in a river. The police, after investigations and a post-mortem, concluded that Neelam had committed suicide by drowning because she had got two out of 60 in a Maths test. They even produced a notebook allegedly belonging to her as evidence. But Neelam's family members say she was kidnapped and murdered.

Students protest in Imphal: gathering storm

Neelam (left) and Keishing

The official conclusion undeniably suffers from several major drawbacks. There was only three feet of water at the spot where the body of the five feet two inches tall Neelam was found. Moreover, the notebook produced by the police is not Neelam's. And enquiries at the school have established that she did not get such low marks in the Maths test. Says Anil, Neelam's brother: "We were fools to have trusted the police." Adds Poonam, her elder sister: "She certainly did not commit suicide."

Local experts maintain that even the post-mortem was improperly conducted. Says H.Nabachandra, a forensic expert at the Regional Medical College, Imphal, who unofficially witnessed part of the autopsy: "From the little that I saw, it was definitely not a case of drowning." His primary reasons:

► When the lungs were dissected there was no sign of water, nor was there any froth in the respiratory tract.

► The body was not bloated and the skin of the hands was not wrinkled as it should have been had the body been in water for more than a day.

► No forensic expert was consulted and the post-mortem was written out by the district medical officer who is essentially an administration man.

However, Neelam's family has no inkling of who could have murdered her. "She had grown up here and we had always felt safe in Imphal even with all the terrorist activities," says the girl's mother. But Keishing's detractors have little doubt that Simrey, educated at Delhi's St Stephen's College, had a hand in Neelam's death.

"Our suspicion that the chief minister's son was involved is based on eye witness reports that a government car (MNG 1064) under the chief minister, was found parked near the river not far from the residential colony where the Panchbhaiyas live," says Joykumar Sharma, MPP general secretary. But these remain rumours and MPP leaders—and Congress(I) dissidents—maintain that no one is prepared to come out openly before the magisterial enquiry as long as Keishing is in power.

Thus, even though the involvement of the chief minister's son in the entire affair is currently no better than wild conjecture, public opinion is solidly against Keishing. And the the dissidents feel it is the right time to strike. Three cabinet ministers even offered to resign. And the tragic death of Neelam Panchabhaiya recedes into the background as an incidental cause of the gathering political storm over Manipur.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Imphal

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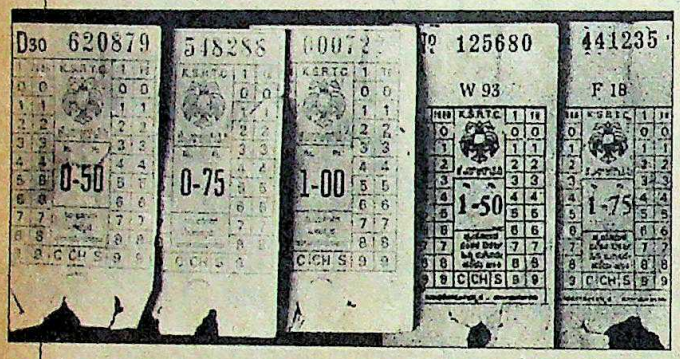
Lucky Ride

A TICKET to ride on the Bangalore Transport Service (BTS) can, if you are lucky, bring in a lot more than aches and pains. Innovative Karnataka Transport Minister P.G.R. Scindia dreamt up a new scheme last fortnight to make BTS' 15 lakh daily passengers pay their fare more willingly, and to improve the service: through a lottery! Thus, every BTS ticket sold became a lottery ticket with prizes of Rs 1,000, Rs 500 and Rs 250, and 12 consolation prizes of Rs 100 each. Incentive to the conductors came in the form of a bonus of Rs 25 for the one who sold the winning ticket. The results were not long in coming. Revenue went up by Rs 50,000 on a daily turnover of Rs 11 lakh and Scindia pronounced the scheme a success, presaging plans to extend the scheme to the entire state. There



An assortment of bus tickets

is an additional bonus: buses are no longer littered with used tickets, now safely tucked into passenger's pockets. What Scindia does not know is that the Delhi Transport Corporation tried a similar gimmick but eventually had to give it up.

Unusual Crusade

DHARAM SINGH Rawat, 56, is not your dyed-in-the-wool bureaucrat even though he is a member of the IAS. Posted as the director of Urban Land Ceiling in Uttar Pradesh, he feels that just about everything is wrong with the bureaucracy in general and the Urban Land Ceiling Directorate in particular. Last month, after his countless letters to Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh and others on the subject had elicited little response, Rawat decided to do something few IAS officers would dare to do: he went on a seven-night dharna outside his office in Lucknow, demanding that the department be either overhauled or wound up. He would work the whole day, and then proceed to the protest site outside. While his superiors dismissed him as a crank, Rawat succeeded in attracting both attention and sympathy. Though the director called off his dharna, his cause has already become public. Now, only time will tell whether Rawat is a crank or a crusader.

Smuggler's Cell

ANO HOLDS barred fight between the moderate and hardline factions among the 300-odd Punjab extremists at Jodhpur Central Jail is costing the authorities money and raising some uncomfortable questions. Rs 10 lakh are to be spent on beefing up security, with new watch towers and higher walls and railings, but red-faced jail officials are yet to figure out how bottles, knives, stones, and nails found their

Array of implements confiscated from jail

way into the prison. The obvious questions: Were no searches carried out? How and who managed to turn scraps of iron, empty tins, wires and even transistors, into such effective weapons? While the search for answers goes on, the authorities are getting their own back at the prisoners—visits by friends and relatives have come to a full stop and even a committee sent by the Akalis to inquire into the quarrel has been politely told that its services are not required.

Child Crime

IT WAS child's play, inspired by the TV film *Hum Kisise Kam Nahin*. Twelve-year-old Amit Jaiswal of Nishatganj colony in Lucknow planned a heist of all the household riches, inspired by actor Rishi Kapoor's search for lost diamonds in the film. The plan was perfect, save for the ending. With the parents away and only elder sister Rachna to tackle, young Amit got his two teenaged friends to knock on the door when the Sunday evening bulletin appeared on the screen. Like well-oiled dacoits who had done this a countless number of times, they waved an imitation pistol under the frightened Rachna's nose, tied up brother and sister and within minutes, left the house with over one kilogramme of gold, jewellery, diamonds and Rs 52,000 in cash.

S. PREMI

Amit: aborted fortunes

In a scene straight out of a Hindi pot-boiler, Amit dramatically freed himself and his sister and summoned help. The cops arrived, a report was lodged, but they smelt a rat. "One slap," says Lucknow SSP Tilak Kak, "was enough for Amit to come out with everything." The car was quickly traced to the house of a government employee in Indiranagar, the valuables recovered and the winsome dacoits were left kicking their heels in the cooler. Father Jaiswal, an ayurvedic doctor, refused to bail out his son; but his most pressing problem was not the heir, but the questions being asked about the fortunes and how he, as a government official, came by them!

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PUBLIC FEARS

THE GOVERNMENT has shelved its proposal to part-privatise some leading public sector companies by selling some of their shares to the public. Industry Minister N.D. Tiwari had said last November that firms like BHEL and HMT might raise share capital from the public in view of the resources crunch in the seventh plan. And Maruti Udyog has been pressing the Government for permission to hawk 35 per cent of its Rs 80 crore plus equity to the public and allow its Japanese collaborator Suzuki to jack up its stake in the company from 26 per cent to 35 per cent so as to raise much needed cash for expansion. To allay official fears that the Government might lose control of the firm, Maruti even obtained an informal assurance from Suzuki that its joint venture agreement could be modified to include a clause stipulating that Suzuki would vote with the Government at board meetings. An official decision on the whole matter was expected by December, but Industry Ministry bureaucrats have argued that firms can raise cash by floating bonds instead of unloading equity. Also, the public sector Scooters India Ltd sold some shares to the public years ago, but this has not helped improve managerial efficiency.

BRANCHING OUT

IN A radical departure from its traditional automotive business, the Tamil Nadu-based TVS group is branching out into a host of consumer durable products and into computer peripherals. Sundaram Clayton, one of the companies in the flourishing TVS stable, has plans to invest around Rs 50 crore in manufacturing refrigerators, washing and drying machines, microwave ovens, toasters, grinders and mixis in Andhra Pradesh and Pondicherry. While the production of these items will begin in about two years' time, the Rs 50-crore computer peripheral venture will take shape in Bangalore by September next year. The diversification is expected to take the company's current turnover of Rs 160 crore (including that of Ind-Suzuki) to nearly Rs 700 crore in the next five years.

POOR BONDS

THE EUPHORIA over public sector companies entering the capital market has quickly evaporated after the poor response to the bonds issued by companies like the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) and the National Thermal Power Corporation. The railways have postponed their plans to go to the public for money, and the National Hydel Power Corporation (NHPC) does not expect any substantial over-subscription on its forthcoming issue of Rs 150 crore. Indeed, NHPC intends relying on financial institutions for the success of its issue. And REC now finds that its profits will be squeezed because of the cost of servicing more expensive capital, and the Government has agreed to giving it a subsidy.

FUND OF INTENT

A NEW government agency to finance municipalities and local development bodies that wish to build roads, sewage lines and so on is in the works. To be called the Development Corporation for Urban Infrastructure, the new institution will have an initial seed capital of Rs 100 crore, with the financial institutions contributing to this. But Urban Development Minister Abdul Ghafoor has already announced in Parliament that a new apex house financing body is in the offing, and there is some opposition in the Government itself to the establishment of yet another organisation.

DRUG COMPROMISE

THE LARGE Indian drug companies have managed to stall the new drug policy after it had come very close to getting the Government's final approval. The new policy will now take several more weeks to finalise and some compromises on the major issues are inevitable. The production of some bulk drugs is now likely to be reserved for the Indian sector. But the prices of essential drugs manufactured by fewer than three producers will still be controlled and the Government will monitor the prices of others. However, the most contentious issue—whether companies that have diluted their foreign shareholding to 40 per cent or less should be treated as Indian or foreign firms—remains unsolved. The whole package, will go to the Cabinet for a final decision in the next few weeks.

PRICELESS CONTROL

THE GOVERNMENT seems to have had some success with controlling wholesale prices in recent years. Last year closed with a price increase of no more than 4.15 per cent, and there hasn't been double-digit inflation in any of the last five years. In contrast, three of the previous five years saw

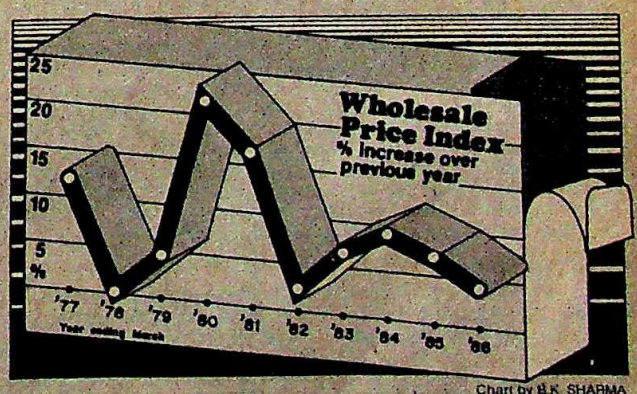

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

double-digit inflation. Indeed, wholesale prices have risen only 33 per cent in the last quinquennium, compared to 50 per cent in the previous five-year period and around 75 per cent in the quinquennium before that. Though consumer prices have been rising at a faster rate throughout this period, wholesale prices at least seem to be coming under greater control.

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Chairman's Speech

Statement of Mr. Charanjit Grover, Chairman & Managing Director, GROVER LEASING LIMITED at the 2nd Annual General Meeting held on 7th April, 1986, at New Delhi.

Mr. Charanjit Grover
Chairman & Managing Director

Ladies & Gentlemen,

On behalf of my colleagues on the Board and on my own behalf, it gives me great pleasure to extend a cordial welcome to you all to the 2nd Annual General Meeting of the Company. The Annual Report, with the Statement of Accounts of the Company for the Financial Year ended 31st December, 1985 has been with you for some time and with your permission I take them as read.

Operating Results

During the year under review your Company has made significant progress and its Gross Assets have increased to Rs.410 lacs from Rs.145 lacs during previous year registering a growth of 182%. The Net Profit has also increased four fold i.e. Rs.22.92 lacs, as against Rs.6.64 lacs in 1984. During the year we have gone for Public Issue to augment long term resources and the same has been well received in the market with 20 times oversubscription.

With the enlarged capital base the Company has been in a position to consolidate its operation and substantial Leasing/ Hire Purchase contracts have been entered into at competitive rates. But the profit of the Company has had to bear with certain expenses incurred by the company to secure better results in near future. However it is expected that the profitability will be higher in1986 as Capital funds raised were deployed in business in the last quarter of the year. In the year under review your Company has opened a branch at Madras, which is fully operative and its working has been satisfactory.

Dividend

The Directors have recommended a stepped up dividend of 18% (Pro-rata) per Equity Share as against 10% declared last year subject to tax and I hope you all will appreciate this.

Economic Scene

On assuming office, our Prime Minister Sh. Rajiv Gandhi has been the moral dimension of liberlisation and has created new Socio-economic order aimed at increasing production base and higher standard of living. The Government policies of liberalisation with reduction of taxation has boosted investment opportunities and expanded the capital market. The long term fiscal policy announced by the Finance Minister recently will enable the industrial sector to plan the operations with much greater certainty and stability.

The Central Budget for the year 1986-87 has given major thrust to implement the various elements of long-term fiscal policy. From the angle of simplicity and neutrality the investment allowance has been withdrawn and new funding scheme has been introduced, which will be neutral as between large and small companies. The depreciation rate has been rationalised and accelarated to render replacement easier for modernisation, however it could affect the distributable profits to a large extent. Further more the application of Sales Tax on the right to use of goods has created anamoly in the inter-state lease transactions and to my mind, this may act as hinderance to the industry in the inter-state transactions and rationalisation is required without any further delay.

Future Out-look

I am pleased to inform you, that the results for the current year are encouraging and your Company has finalised lease and hire purchase transactions to the tune of Rs. 200 lacs in the first quarter. The company has evolved a growth plan target of Leased Assets & Hire Purchase stock aggregating to the tune of Rs. 10 Crores for the year 1986. With good market standing the Company is confident of achieving the target and your company is getting continuous demand from the Blue-chip companies for finance and additional demand from the existing clients.

Expansions and Diversifications

Your Company is planning to expand the areas of operations and diversify into new areas. Various innovative measures are being considered to broad-base the Company's operations. To finance the long-term operations, your Company is considering to come out with convertible debentures scheme in this year on rights basis to shareholders and deposit holders.

Your Company is planning to diversity into manufacturing; particularly Chemicals & Fertilizers. The licences for these activities have already been sought from the respective authorities of Government and I am confident, your company will be able to secure the same shortly.

To cater to the needs of wide market and to expand the operations at other important places your Company is planning to open new branches at Bombay and Ahmedabad this year

Acknowledgements

I would like to conclude by expressing our gratitude to the Punjab National Bank and Grindlays Bank for their whole hearted Co-operation and timely support. Thanks are also due to the State and Central Govt. Agencies, customers and other well wishers of the Company. I would like to record my appreciation of the services rendered by the officers and the staff of the Company for successful operations and I hope they will continue to do so. Finally I wish to thank the shareholders of the company and the Depositors for the confidence they have reposed in us. The Company on its part will do its best to fulfil their expectations.

N.B. : This does not purport to be the part of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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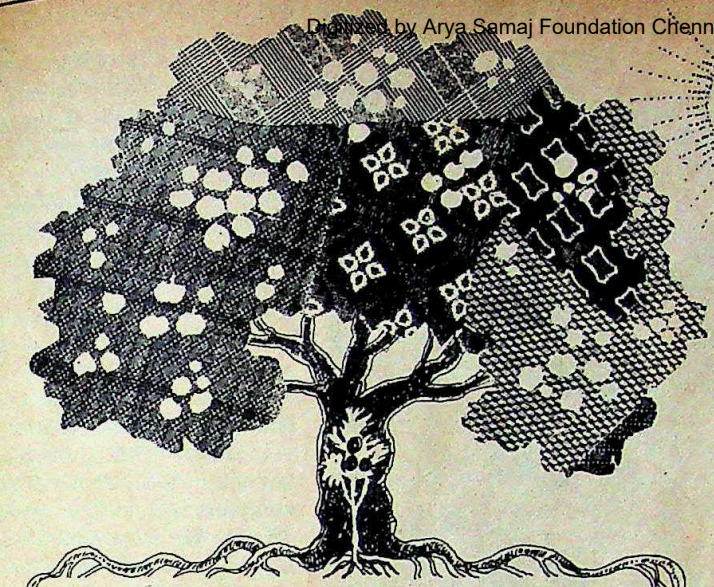


Profitable since inception... Growing ever since.

ARIHANT FABRICS LTD.

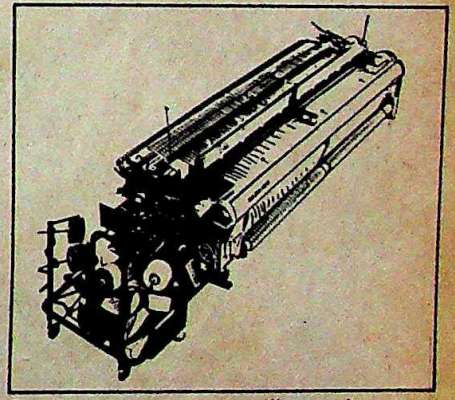
Arihant Fabrics . . . a company on the move right from day one. Commercial production started in 1978-79 with a complement of 12 power looms to manufacture both synthetic and woollen fabrics under the popular trade name "OSWAL".

Gradually, the Company expanded/modernised its operations: initially by adding more looms and then by installing a Texturising plant with a capacity of 96 spindles and a Process House with a capacity of processing 36 lac metres of cloth per annum.

NOW GROWING FURTHER . . .

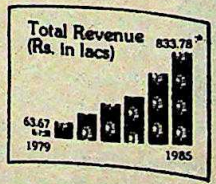
The Company has now undertaken further modernisation and expansion schemes:

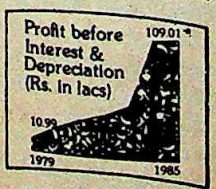
- replacing 12 Nos. looms with an equivalent number of imported "Sulzer Ruti" Projectile Weaving Machines.
- installing a Rieter Scragg Texturising Plant with a capacity of 216 spindles.

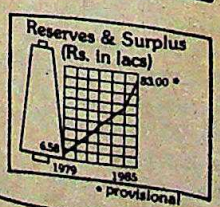


The Company, once again, offers to share its prosperity with the public . . . with an issue of 71,550 15% Secured Redeemable Convertible Debentures of Rs. 150/- each for cash at par (convertible portion Rs. 50/-; non convertible portion Rs. 100/-).

Issue Opens for
Non Resident Indians
MAY 12, 1986
Indian Public
MAY 19, 1986







Issue Highlights

- **Rapidly growing company-with excellent track record.**
- **Popular range of fabrics—"OSWAL" Suitings, Shirtings and Dress Materials; now introducing a range of elegant Sarees.**
- **An opportunity to invest in a 20% dividend paying company.**
- **Now installing SULZER Ruti Projectile Weaving Machines and an additional Texturising plant.**
- **Dynamic management, highly competent Board.**
- **15% Interest on Debentures.**
- **⅓ of Debentures to be converted into Equity Shares on 31st Dec., 1986.**
- **Easy Liquidity—Listing at Ahmedabad, Bombay, Delhi and Ludhiana.**

Managers to the Issue

STATE BANK OF INDIA
Merchant Banking Division

AN INVESTMENT WITH OVER 100% RETURN

Here's How	
Investment in 1 Debenture	Rs. 150.00
Sale Value of 5 Equity Shares at Rs. 40/- per share*	Rs. 200.00
Interest @ 15% for 6 months	Rs. 11.25
Sale value of Non-Convertible portion of Debentures on expiry of 6 months at 16% yield	Rs. 93.75
	Rs. 305.00
Less Investment	Rs. 150.00
Return on Investment	**Rs. 155.00 or 103.33%**

(Market Value of Equity Shares: Rs. 44.00 as on 28.2.1986, Ludhiana Stock Exchange).

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TAX RAIDS

Vindicated Efforts

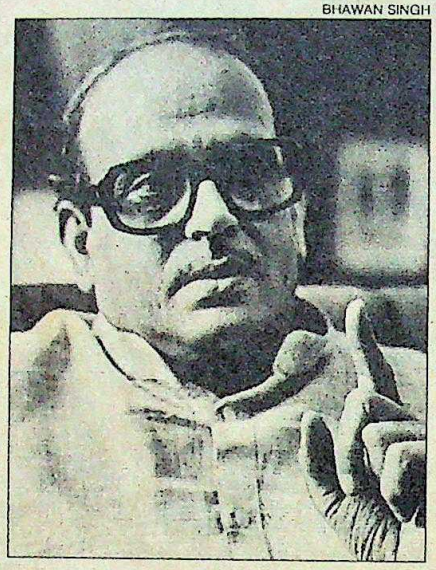
GIVEN THE public furore over the manner in which tax officials had conducted highly publicised raids against companies with as impeccable credentials as Bata India, respected groups like the Kirloskars and blue chip giants like Voltas, the denouement last fortnight was sweet revenge for the once embattled Finance Minister, Vishwanath Pratap Singh. In Delhi, Bata India Chairman M.M. Sabharwal switched from an earlier tone of injured innocence and wrote a contrite letter to the Government that a delighted and vindicated Singh promptly released to the press. Wrote Sabharwal: "We acknowledge our mistake in having raised incorrect drawback claims and we request you to forgive us for the lapses." The letter said Bata was sending in cheques totalling Rs 98.57 lakh to the taxman.

If that marked payday for tax officials, there were equally rich pickings in the more celebrated case concerning the Kirloskars, who were charged (among other things) with increasing their shareholdings in a German company without Reserve Bank permission. Answering questions on the subject, S.L. Kirloskar, the octogenarian head of the group, admitted last fortnight that "We did not obtain the general or special permission of the Reserve Bank of India for increase in the percentage of non-resident holdings to 52.05 per cent in M/s F.H.Schule so far."

That was not all. In-house company notings recovered during the raids confirmed what the tax officials had been saying all along, and gave the lie to the kind of injured protestations that companies and businessmen had been indulging in for several weeks. In Bata's case, for instance, an internal memo virtually echoed the charge by tax officials when it said that duty drawback claims were computed "taking into consideration duty paid synthetic rubber as the main ingredient, although we were using duty-free natural rubber as the main ingredient". The note went on to say that "in reality we were able to get a higher rate than what it could have been".

If that punctured the opposition to the raids and stopped the tarring of the Government's actions with a very black brush, the Finance Ministry gave every indication that it was now on the warpath and that it would drive home its newfound advantage. Officials in the ministry said they would soon initiate action to debar anyone convicted by a court for an economic offence from becoming either the managing director or the director of any company. Said one of the secretaries in the ministry: "When a government official is arrested for criminal activity, he is immediately suspended. But in the case of companies, no one thinks it fit to remove the managing director if he is charged with an offence. Instead, they use their position and spend shareholders' money to hire the most expensive lawyers to fight their case."

BHAWAN SINGH



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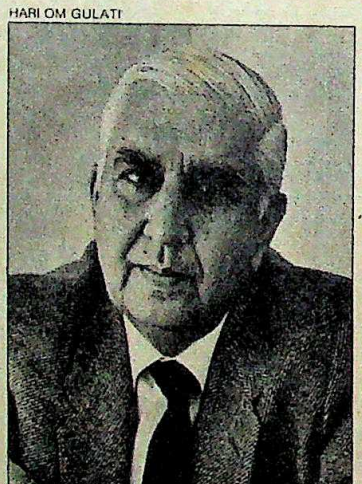

Singh (top); Sabharwal (left); and Kirloskar: denouement

If the Government has its way, this state of affairs will soon change. The Finance Ministry is now working on a scheme under which the financial institutions' nominees on the boards of companies will be directed to ask for the immediate removal of managing directors and chairmen once they are charged with an economic offence. Said V.P. Singh: "There cannot be two sets of laws for illegal activities, one for government servants and the other for company officials. We cannot condone crimes committed by civil servants, and there is no question of doing this for others merely because their position enables them to defend themselves using public money."

Whether this scheme will work, whether direct parallels can be drawn between government and company officials in all cases, and how much of a storm it will create remain to be seen. But V.P. Singh has been riding the crest of a new wave now for several weeks, especially after he went on the counter-offensive in Parliament in March by showing that many of the companies raided had been advised by their own lawyers not to indulge in the practices that finally led to the raids.

If nothing else, that counter-blast proved that the Government had done its homework well before launching the raids, and that V.P. Singh had not been on an unbridled rampage through the most hallowed boardrooms. Singh told INDIA TODAY: "The admission of guilt by companies shows that our raids were conducted after a thorough scrutiny of the documents and of intelligence reports." Indeed, as Minister of State for Finance Janardan Poojary said in Parliament last month, raids on just 11 business houses in the previous four months had unearthed tax evasion totalling a staggering Rs 49 crore, the Kirloskars topping the lot with Rs 22.70 crore. Next in line was Voltas with Rs 6.43 crore.

Both companies' cases are illustrative of top management flouting its own legal advisers in order to try and wrest tax advantage. For example, during their searches on the Kirloskars, officials from

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the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) found an internal memo written by one of the group's general managers on the question of duty payable on compressors. This read: "Several sessions of discussions were held with the excise consultants and auditors. Initially it was felt that it will be prudent to voluntarily disclose the facts and pay the difference in duty." But this was not done as the excise authorities might then "be strongly inclined to cancel the price list approved by them." The group's tax adviser, C. Sapre, had in turn given the company an explicit warning: "In the first place let me make it clear that the penalty could be as high as three times the value of the goods in addition to the recovery of duty short levied, not to mention the provision for confiscation of land, building, machinery etc and the provision for prosecution for evasion of duty." The basic charge against the Kirloskars was that they were manipulating the prices of their compressors in order to pay a lower excise duty than what was actually due.

A KIRLOSKAR official had also recorded that "appropriate administrative steps were not taken, which resulted in the conduct of business which was contrary to the representations made to the Central excise authorities....Warranty charges were received by us on a day to day basis and the amount was also utilised by us to meet normal factory expenses. Money was physically collected and utilised by the company. On these facts we and the excise consultants felt that there was a strong possibility of penalty and prosecution under the Central Excise Act." Yet when the Kirloskars were raided they initially denied any excise evasion.

If anyone upstaged the Kirloskars in beatedly denying the charges laid at their door by the tax officials it was Voltas, which at times seemed to have launched a public relations war on the Government. The Excise Department's charge against Voltas was that it was not including the amount charged as service charges in the final price list for their product, and the department estimated that the company had saved excise duty of more than Rs 6 crore on the basis of wrong information supplied to the tax authorities. When the Government charged the company with violation of the law, it mantained that it had never manipulated its prices. But once again, the company's internal memos—seized during the raids—gave the game away. It turned out that Atul Sevalvad, a Voltas legal consultant, had

SHAW WALLACE

Guilt Edged

IT IS a classic case of the biter bit. A company chairman battling furiously to prevent a takeover by charging the usurper(s) with violations of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA), has himself been charged with violating FERA, and worse, found guilty. The company is Shaw Wallace, its chairman is S.P.Acharya, and the men who may have something, if not a great deal, to say about the rather unexpected turn of events, are the very same persons who have been accused by Acharya of violating FERA: the Dubai-based M.R.Chhabria and the Bangalore-based Vijay Mallya.

Shaw Wallace has been asked to pay a fine of Rs 1.10 lakh while Acharya has been asked to personally

Acharya: fined for violations

pay Rs 12,000 as penalty for two FERA violations. Interestingly enough, although the order was delivered to the company two months ago, the officials of the Enforcement Directorate (and more understandably Shaw Wallace executives themselves) have kept the event a closely guarded secret, with not a word being leaked out. This is in contrast to the instant publicity given to the actions taken against Mallya and Chhabria.

In a 12-page order passed in February, the Additional-Director of Enforcement, R. Swaminathan, who is also looking into the accusations against Chhabria and Mallya, has charged both Shaw Wallace and Acharya with investing abroad without the approval of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and deliberately not remitting the substantial profits raked in by Shaw Wallace Overseas Limited (SWOL), London, its fully owned subsidiary abroad.

SWOL was floated in 1934 and came under the FERA purview from 1973. The RBI, when granting permission to Shaw Wallace to run SWOL, had made it clear that all the dividends would be remitted back to India and that the company would not make any investments abroad without its prior approval. But in 1979, SWOL acquired a 3 per cent stake in British Gas stock by investing 89,554 Pound Sterling without the RBI's permission. In addition, Swaminathan held that the company misinformed the RBI that SWOL was not making any profit and that the question of remitting dividend did not arise. Swaminathan in his order proved that the company had in fact made a net profit between 1979 and 1982, and more damningly, that the company in question had not remitted the dividend at all.

Both Acharya and Shaw Wallace maintained that their dealings did not violate any FERA provisions. They also maintained that the procurement of British Gas stock was not an investment for which the RBI's permission was required. Acharya also argued that he did not attend any of SWOL's board meetings although he was one of its members. Swaminathan, while dismissing Acharya's plea, ruled that "I am satisfied that purchase of 3 per cent British Gas stock was an investment" and that Acharya couldn't escape penalty by saying that he was not attending the board's meetings. He concluded: "As managing director of the company, he was responsible for all the matters of the company. I therefore find him guilty."

Swaminathan chose to treat the investment in British Gas and non-remittance of dividends as two separate violations and imposed two penalties. While Shaw Wallace was fined Rs 1 lakh for unauthorised investment and Rs 10,000 for not remitting dividends, Acharya was asked to pay Rs 10,000 and Rs 2,000 for the same offences.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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ONE THOUSAND MOONS KRISHNAMURTI AT EIGHTY-FIVE

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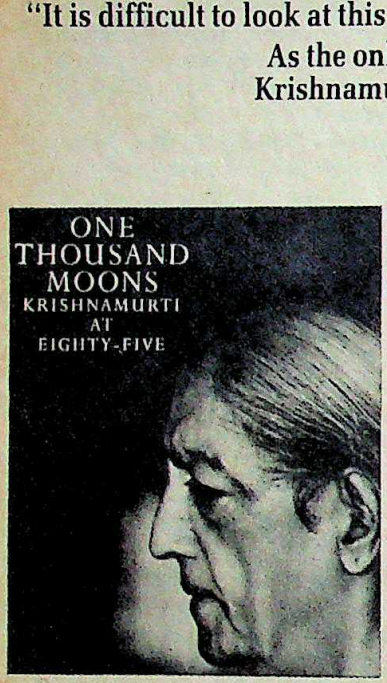

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written to the company that "It is not permissible in law to exclude expenses pertaining to this service from the assessable value for several reasons. The service has been rendered before the sale takes place and to charge a separate amount for this would hardly be a rational explanation of the situation." Earlier, the solicitor firm of Crawford Bayley & Co. had said: "In our opinion, the switch-over in the method of assessment to excise duty in respect of the said goods which the company proposes is fraught with serious legal consequences...The excise authorities are bound to know that, for some reason, the price of the said goods under the proposed change-over is lower than the earlier price based on manufacturing cost plus profit."

Last year when the Supreme Court had ruled that no company can claim excise rebate on service charges, Voltas executives had advised that the company should pay to the Government Rs 2.55 crore collected by it from the dealers. In one of their internal memos the company officials had written that "during the disputed period of over three-and-a-half years we had retained with us the excise duty on post-manufacturing expenses deducted by us, but collected as part of the selling prices from all our dealers." The note also admitted that the company wanted to postpone payment of excise duty and keep assessable value to the minimum.

But the company chose to ignore the advice given to it and finally it was left to the DRI to call the bluff. Voltas Chairman A.H. Tobaccowala commented on the issue at the company's annual meeting of shareholders, but this drew another sharp retort from V.P. Singh. And the department has served a legal notice on all the directors, including Ratan Tata.

Meanwhile, Singh made his overtures of peace as well. The Government framed rules that would be followed by raiding parties, and spelt out the rights of those raided. Also, the proposal to empower tax inspectors to do house-to-house searches was withdrawn.

The overall message, however, was that industry and business should reform itself. As a Finance Ministry official said: "If they don't do it themselves, the Government will have to step in and do the job." And considering the move to debar those convicted of criminal offences from being a member of any company board, the message is clear: the Government means business.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

FERTILISER

Cooperative Success

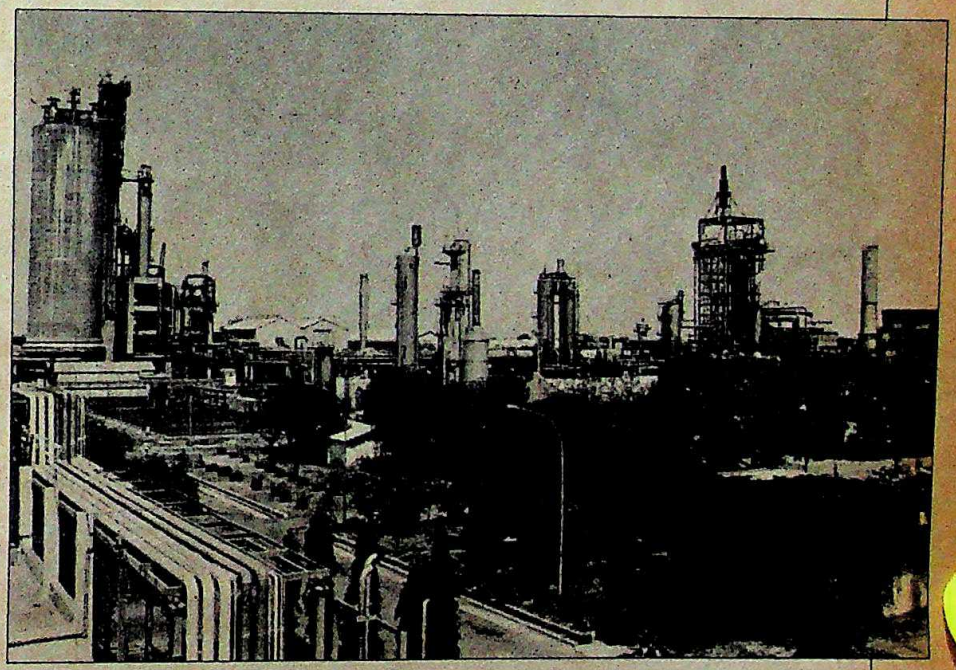
TWO DECADES ago, the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (IFFCO) was only the germ of an idea. Even today, the largest cooperative enterprise in the country is virtually unknown outside fertiliser circles. Yet there are few success stories to parallel IFFCO's, in either the private, public or cooperative sectors.

Despite being among the youngest fertiliser outfits in the country, IFFCO and its offspring, the Krishak Bharati Cooperative (KRIBHCO), now account for a quarter of India's total fertiliser production, straddling a giant industry like colossuses. Where others in the fertiliser industry—in both the private and public sectors—have either floundered or chugged along at a sober pace, IFFCO has led the field with record production levels, unprecedented profits and a blistering pace of expansion; the six-year-old KRIBHCO now promises to follow suit after having commissioned its first plant four months ago.

While rival producers struggle to find the money needed for new projects, IFFCO is investing yet again in a giant Rs 700-crore fertiliser plant in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly district while KRIBHCO—its first Rs 900-crore unit at Hazira just commissioned—is already confident enough of its profits and resource generation to ask the Government for another Rs 700 crore project. If all goes well, the two companies will between them have an asset base in the next five years of around Rs 3,000 crore: enough to put every private sector giant in the shade.

Both companies announced their working results and held their annual shareholders' meetings in the last two months. In March, IFFCO announced record profits of Rs 49.17 crore, reported its usual string of productivity and safety awards, talked of a Rs 150-crore modernisation plan, and indicated how far and wide it had spread its wings: apart from investing Rs 105 crore in KRIBHCO's share capital, it has invested in a chemical plant in Senegal that has just gone on stream and has begun supplying a crucial raw material for IFFCO's phosphatic fertiliser plant at Kandla, on the Gujarat coast; it has also invested Rs 8 crore equity in Godavari Fertilisers and Chemicals at Kakinada.

In April, KRIBHCO Chairman Bansi Lal Mehta, reported at the company's annual shareholders' meeting that it had successfully completed its giant unit at Hazira, in Gujarat, that capacity



IFFCO's nitrogenous fertiliser plant at Kalol: proven technology

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utilisation had already crossed the 100 per cent mark, that by-products would be used in a new Rs 223-crore project for manufacturing heavy water (required in atomic power stations), and that the Government had been asked to allot the company a new Rs 700-crore fertiliser project.

The secret of IFFCO's prosperity lies in its productivity levels. Fertiliser prices are pegged by the Government at a level that assures a 12 per cent return on capital at 80 per cent capacity utilisation. Profits rise or fall if productivity levels exceed or fall short of this norm. And in 1984-85, the cooperative sector recorded 107 per cent capacity utilisation in nitrogenous fertiliser and a staggering 134 per cent in phosphatic fertiliser. In contrast, the public sector managed only 60 and 67 per cent, respectively, while the private sector managed 90 and 91 per cent. A KRIBHCO official said last fortnight at Hazira that it too had exceeded the 100 per cent capacity utilisation level because "our plant is technologically speaking one of the best in the world". Said Operations Director Hardev Singh Kohli: "Sunny days are ahead of us."

IFFCO field worker advising farmers: effective programme

But the success goes well beyond financial data and capacity utilisation, and takes in the efficient use of modern technology, effective project management, optimum use of manpower and an unprecedented farmer education programme. When IFFCO first launched itself in 1967-68, its first managing director, Paul Pothen, decided that only proven technology would be used. The nitrogenous fertiliser plant at Kalol in Gujarat was thus a carbon copy of one at Donaldsonville in the US which was doing extremely well; in comparison, two of the public sector's sick units at Ramagundam in Andhra Pradesh and Talcher in Orissa used unproven coal-based technology and promptly ran into trouble. Similarly, effective project management saw to it that IFFCO's third plant, at Phulpur, came up in double-quick time. Said Paul Pothen: "We knew what we were after, the cooperative sector was on test, and I chose my men carefully and then gave them free rein. They delivered the results."

THERE are other contrasts with the public sector. A KRIBHCO official pointed out last fortnight that the public sector fertiliser plant at Sindri in Bihar employed more than 30,000 people to produce a quarter of the fertiliser that KRIBHCO will do with no more than 1,100 people. IFFCO in turn has at Kalol a far bigger plant than Sindri, but employs no more than 810. While the cooperative giants—which between them have close to 30,000 cooperative societies as their main shareholders—make do with fewer workers, they treat them well. Workers get a cash reward every time the capacity utilisation figure goes up. The Kandla plant has on occasion gone up to a capacity utilisation level of 150 per cent. And the KRIBHCO plant, though targeted to produce 1 lakh tonnes of fertiliser during a 120-day trial run period, produced 2.62 lakh tonnes and once hit a capacity utilisation level of 130 per cent.

The farmer education programme is equally path-breaking: IFFCO last year organised 2,250 farmers' meetings that were attended by 1.55 lakh farmers. In addition, there were 345 soil testing campaigns where 28,500 soil samples were analysed, and 1,681 separate demonstrations were held on improved farming techniques. For good measure, over 400 plant protection campaigns were organised. Said Swaminathan Mani, systems manager at the IFFCO plant in Kalol: "We try to take care of the farmer's needs in as many ways as possible." Added former managing director L.R.Talwar: "Even government departments have acknowledged that if any worthwhile agricultural extension work has been done in the country, it has been done by IFFCO."

There have been problems, of course. IFFCO's plant at Phulpur was shut down for a prolonged period when the Assam oil blockade prevented the supply of the crucial raw material naphtha, and KRIBHCO's Hazira plant was similarly commissioned several months late because the pipeline that was to feed it with gas was not completed in time by the Oil and Natural Gas Commission. Each day of delay in starting up the Rs 900 crore plant is estimated to have cost the company Rs 1 crore. Now, after the plant has started commercial running, the problem is not one of raw material supply but of end-product distribution: the railways promised two rakes every day for freighting the fertiliser, but have been able to provide only one.

Finally, IFFCO may not have been half as successful if it had been in the private sector because, through several years of profitable functioning, it has paid out meagre dividends to its shareholders, preserving the bulk of the Rs 477 crore that it has generated so far for reinvestment, expansion and growth. Ordinary company shareholders may have been unwilling to accept such a policy, and at the company's annual meeting last year even the cooperative societies murmured in protest at the niggardly dividends. But with the resource position tight because of the money needed for the new project at Bareilly, dividends are unlikely to be generous for at least another couple of years. With success, however, written all over the IFFCO and KRIBHCO books, there will be few who will want to carp.

—RAMESH MENON

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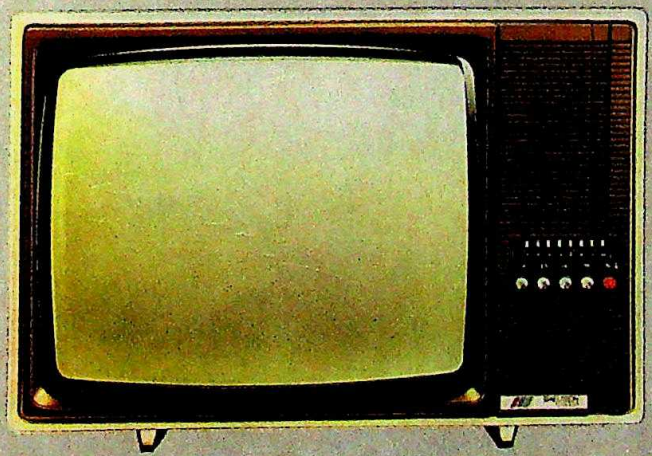

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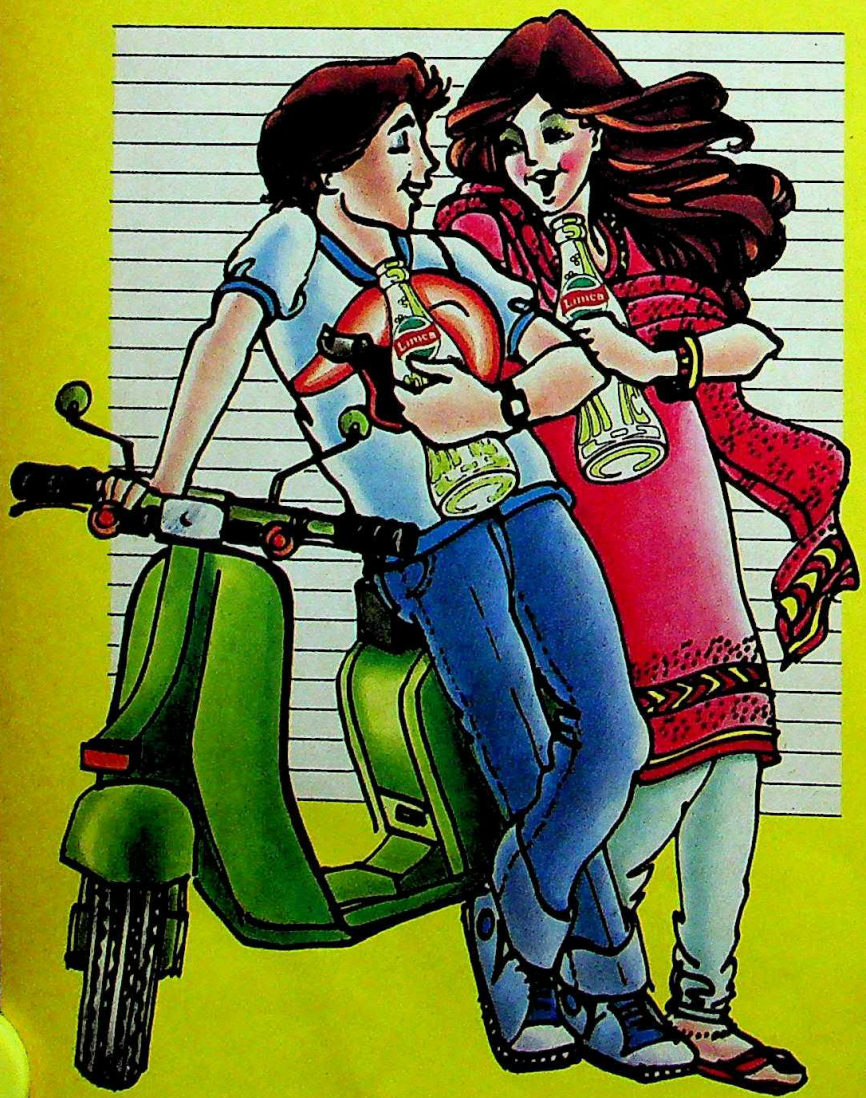

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LIGHT COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

Rough Road Ahead

BARELY a year after they were readying to ride the crest of the light commercial vehicle (LCV) market with their Japanese marvels-on-wheels, the light truck industry's latest entrants face a bumpy ride. Costs have soared, price calculations have gone haywire and truck manufacturers have marked up price-tags in show-rooms. Yet profit margins have been mercilessly squeezed. Customers have cancelled bookings, sales projections have nose-dived, and at least one firm has deployed production staff in its marketing department and faces problems with ancillary suppliers who are no longer assured of large orders.

That is a grim scenario, and the principal actors in this drama are DCM-Toyota, Allwyn-Nissan, Swaraj Mazda and Eicher Motors. The villains of the piece—the soaring Japanese yen (up 40 per cent in the last seven months) and the Government (which slapped on higher excise and customs duties in the budget). Reacting sharply to the levies, Mitsubushi (Eicher's Japanese collaborator) Managing Director M Ueda said at a press conference in Delhi some weeks ago: "The rules of the game have been changed at the halfway stage." Echoed Harpal Singh, Hindustan Motors vice-president for marketing: "If the Government's objective is to promote new technology, it has to nurture it. It has reversed the process it set in motion."

The new LCV companies have been lobbying the Government against the taxes, but officialdom has so far remained unmoved. An Industry Ministry official said last fortnight that the higher customs duties (up from 25 per cent a few years ago to 50 per cent now), were meant to force companies to reduce imports of components from Japan and speed up indigenisation. But industry executives argue that the Government has already vetted the pace of their indigenisation programmes, and that since they are sticking to the agreed schedule, the extra tolls are unfair. For good measure, Maruti Udyog Managing Director R.C. Bhargava contended that it took up to two years for component suppliers to update their technologies for the new vehicles, so that there was "no direct relationship between customs duty and indigenisation."

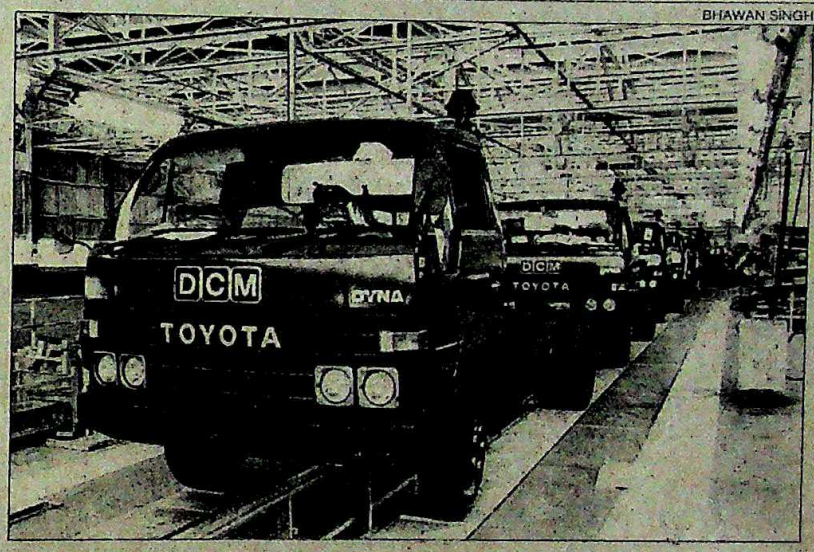
The mounting din is understandable. Taxes account for Rs 85,000 in DCM-Toyota's new price of Rs 1.80 lakh, raised from Rs 1.55 lakh. The cost of other companies' vehicles too has shot up by Rs 30,000 and more. Manufacturers have passed on most of the additional burden to customers, absorbing some to stay in the market. DCM-Toyota would have had to charge almost Rs 2 lakh if it had passed on the full cost escalation to buyers, a price dangerously close to that of a heavy duty truck. Inevitably, most manufacturers have had to cut costs.

But sales remain depressed. Allwyn-Nissan hoped to sell 3,000 trucks in its first year of operation, but industry sources say it has managed less than 1,500, and a company spokesman said he could meet the target only with Government help. Swaraj Mazda is doing no better, and DCM-Toyota may at best achieve 75 per cent of its initial target. Warned Allwyn-Nissan Managing Director, C. Sheshagiri Rao: "If the Government does not intervene to end the stagnation, the industry may face a recession that will affect the economy."

Recession may be too strong a word, but there is little doubt that that LCV sales will stay in low gear. Inder Singh, Swaraj Madza's dealer in Delhi, reports that orders have slowed down by 40 per cent after a price rise in early April. DCM-Toyota had one-third of its 15,000 bookings cancelled, and many who did not cancell their bookings are nevertheless not taking delivery either.

Some lay the blame for the bind the LCV companies are in at the manufacturers' doors. Says Singh of Hindustan Motors: "Their vehicles are overdesigned to take higher loads. It's like designing a bullock-cart and ending up with an elephant. That's why they can't cut prices." He also refers to a survey report that 65 per cent of LCVs are not overloaded, a conclusion that is heresy to the new companies, which swear just the opposite. Says Subodh Bargava, chief executive, Eicher group of companies:

BHAWAN SINGH



Costs have soared, price calculations have gone haywire and truck manufacturers have marked up price-tags in show-rooms. Yet profit margins have been mercilessly squeezed.

Eicher's Bhargava (left) and Allwyn-Nissan's Sheshagiri: grim scenario

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"Any apprehension of overdesign is misplaced. The price relates to the high technology, which is more efficient."

Meanwhile, savage fights for market shares are in the offing. Older LCV manufacturers have obviously not been hit by the soaring yen. And their lighter payload vehicles are cheaper than the new vehicles. Market leader Bajaj Tempo's vehicle is priced at Rs 95,000 and the company has been highlighting its cheaper spares. Moreover, established companies like TELCO have launched a vehicle in the Bajaj range and Hindustan Motors could follow suit. TELCO is also believed to have other models of LCVs in the works, signalling a clear segmentation of the market.

There could also be a glut because of the rapid increase in manufacturing capacities despite stagnation in sales. Two years ago, the industry comprised three companies licensed to produce 35,200 vehicles a year. Last year, this jumped to 1.05 lakh when another five threw their hats into the ring and Bajaj Tempo doubled capacity. A lot of the additional capacities have yet to go on stream but the wars will get bloodier unless demand surges significantly.

DCM-Toyota's Executive Director Vivek Bharat Ram believes that it will in the long run, and points out that despite all the problems, his customers have been regularly repaying bank loans: indicating that they are making money. The railway network may function more efficiently, but it will be at a diminishing rate. "That is why I'm bullish that demand will catch up. It's a question of who will take up the challenge," he says. Eicher's Bhargava adds that the new trucks were the last to enter most countries but captured sizeable market shares in five years.

For all the brave talk, however, most of the new entrants are hedging their bets. DCM-Toyota is branching out into dumpers, ambulances and small buses in an effort to diversify. Allwyn-Nissan has crane carriers, ambulances, concrete mixers and tankers on its anvil, while Eicher too may explore similar avenues if the going gets too tough in LCVs. The consensus is that all the companies may have to exercise such options in the short run. With the Government unwilling to do a rescue act, LCVs have a rough road ahead of them. Whether the shakeout that is common to fledgling industries lies on that road is now the big question.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

POLYESTER

Tax Tussle

DIMETHYL terephthalic acid (DMT) and purified terephthalic acid (PTA) are not the stuff epic battles are made of, but appearances can be deceptive. Savage fights have erupted repeatedly between the rival lobbies that depend on these two raw materials for producing polyester fibre and yarn, the Government has favoured first one and then the other, and each time there have been cries of foul from the aggrieved lobby.

Last fortnight the Government stepped into the act once again when it raised the import duty on both PTA and DMT by Rs 3,000 per tonne; but since DMT is mostly locally produced and PTA is imported, the PTA users are now the ones that are doing the shouting. A Finance Ministry spokesman argued that the duty hike was meant to protect domestic DMT manufacturers, who have been faced with mounting unsold stocks. And certainly the move has met with immediate success. Kapal Mehra, chairman of Orkay Silk Mills (which uses PTA), said that he was planning to shift from PTA to DMT after making the requisite changes in his plant. Argued Mehra: "It is better to save your own industry rather than encourage that of Taiwan."

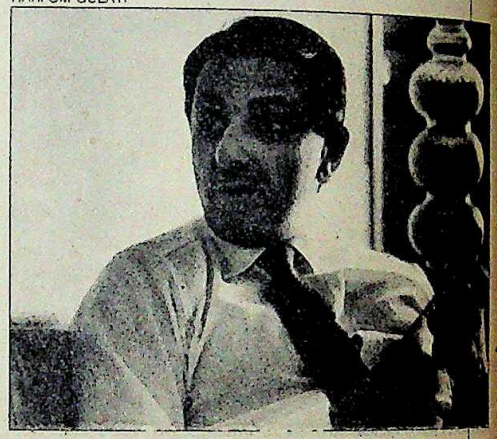
Reliance Industries, the country's biggest user of PTA, shot off protest telegrams to New Delhi even as it announced a downstream increase in the price of its polyester fibre. But Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Company—which has the maximum unsold DMT stocks—complained that the Government had not done enough.

Those protesting the latest decision complained that the Government had hiked import duties a few months earlier by 40 per cent, that DMT manufacturers were already charging more than the price recommended by an official body, that the increase in duties ran counter to the intentions stated in last year's textile policy, and that the Government—in choosing to protect DMT producers—was protecting an obsolete, inefficient raw material that is getting rapidly displaced world-wide by PTA. Said Anil Ambani, executive director of Reliance: "The DMT manufacturers are already charging more than what they should. They don't need additional protection."

But the Government seems to have had reasons for its decision. Figures presented to them showed that it was considerably cheaper for a polyester manufacturer to use PTA rather than DMT. The irony is, of course, that even after the latest duty hike PTA remains a cheaper raw material because of falling prices abroad, and a Bombay Dyeing executive admitted that "we have been handed a potato".

There is little doubt, of course, that all decisions concerning both DMT and

HARI OM GULATI



Nusli Wadia of Bombay Dyeing: getting protection

PTA are determined by the effectiveness of the lobbying, and at the moment Nusli Wadia, chairman of Bombay Dyeing, seems to have a more effective lobby in New Delhi than the once-favoured Reliance. This is ironic, for Bombay Dyeing has a production cost for DMT that is far higher than that of the older public sector unit, Vadodara's Indian Petrochemicals, which has been selling its DMT without too many problems. In contrast, Bombay Dyeing has been forced to hire a chicken farm near its plant to store unsold stocks, while its plant has remained partially or fully shut for a good part of the January-March quarter.

Oddly enough, Bombay Dyeing sprang a surprise last fortnight by asking the Government for permission to expand its capacity from 60,000 to one lakh tonnes. Others feel the future is with PTA, and Indian Petrochemicals may switch its DMT plant to PTA. And with Reliance's 75,000 PTA plant due to go on stream by the end of the year, this may end up as the one company that is not affected by the new hike in customs duty. Clearly, the great terephthalic battle is still to be fully fought out.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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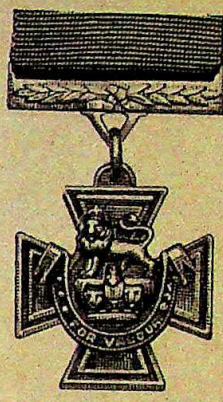
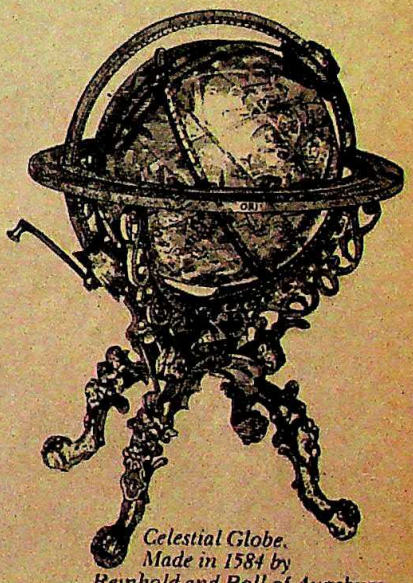
Percussion Pistol.
By Alfred Gauvain of Paris.
First shown at Great Exhibition, Crystal Palace, London, 1851.



Victoria Cross.
Supreme military honour since 1856.
Originally made from guns captured in Crimean War.

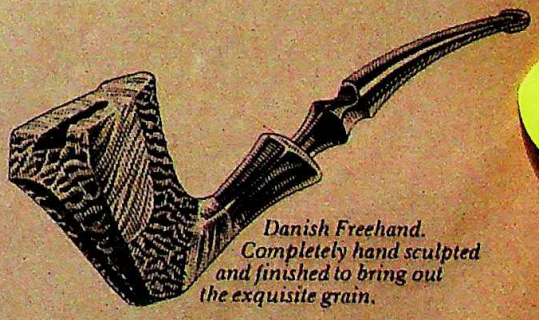
Head of Balzac.
Study in bronze by Auguste Rodin, 1840-1917.



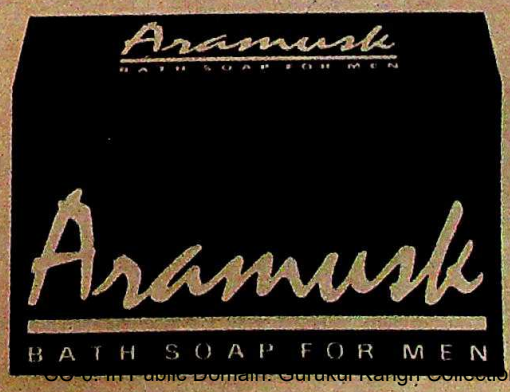
Celestial Globe.
Made in 1584 by Reinhold and Roll of Augsburg.
Almost certainly sold in 1854 to Emperor Rudolph II, Prague.

Waterford Decanter.
Classic full lead crystal brought to life by the breath of a master glassmaker.

Another certain something that's extravagantly male.



Danish Freehand.
Completely hand sculpted and finished to bring out the exquisite grain.



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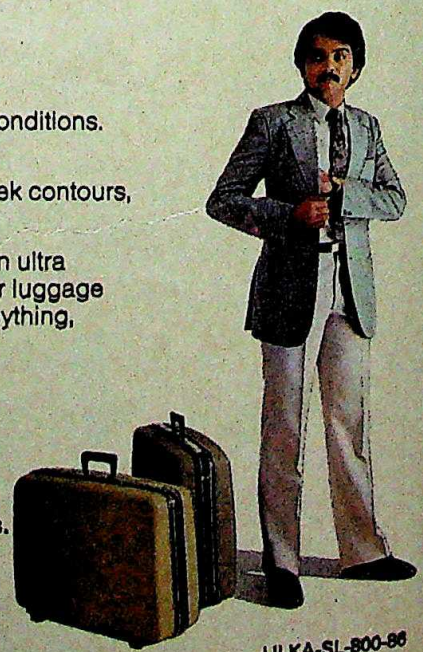

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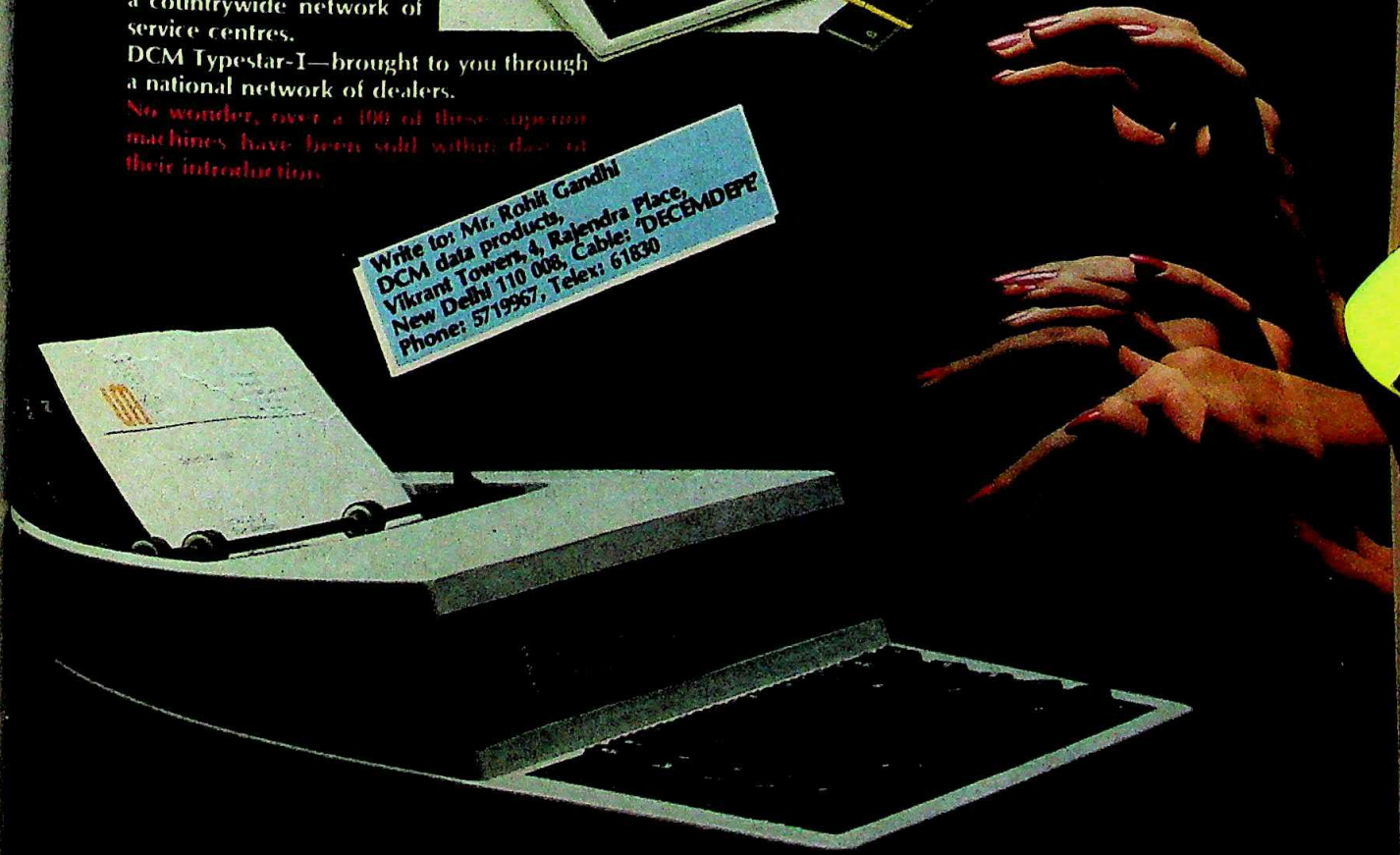

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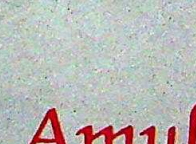
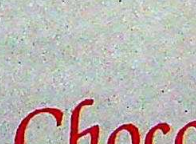


Soft and creamy, like Swiss chocolates...



its creaminess sealed in silver foil...

and foil-board carton to keep it fresh.

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CALCUTTA

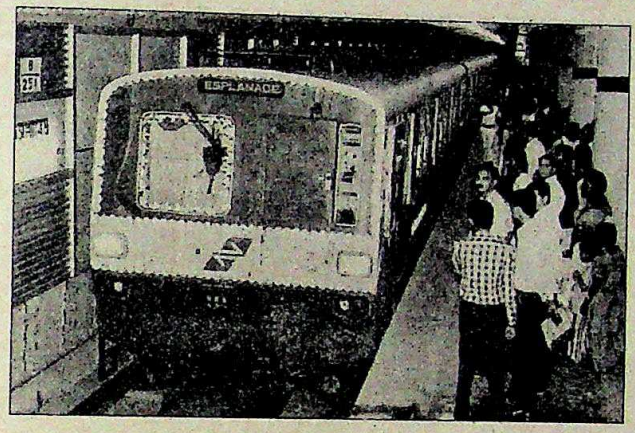
Metro Moves

THE MOOD is distinctly upbeat along south Calcutta's main thoroughfare, from Tollygunj to the city centre of Chowringhee. For the opening of the country's first complete underground railway stretch on April 28 along this route signals boom time. Real estate prices are shooting up and so are commercial prospects as realtors and urban planners get ahead with their plans to extend the city's business district out of its central Calcutta confines down the metro stretch. "Initially almost everybody took the metro with a pinch of salt but today Calcuttans are realising the tremendous social benefits it will generate," says a cheerful metro rail General Manager H.S. Sinha.

Calcutta's metro rail, thundering silently along sound-proof concrete tunnels more than two storeys below ground level, is not just another addition to the city's multifarious old transport modes. It is a generational leap for a city dominated by obsolete tramcars, slowed down by primitive rickshaws and choked by burgeoning crowds. And Calcuttans show signs of treating this symbol of modernity with a reverence they have accorded few public creations in recent times, as testified by the spotlessly clean metro stations, the lack of beggars and hawkers and the exhibition of a certain awe at the air-conditioned subterranean complexes and gleaming tube trains, zealously guarded by railway police.

Whereas it takes commuters more than an hour of gruelling bus trips to get from Tollygunj to Esplanade, the metro will cut commuting time to 15 minutes. So far, the tube has been running just on a 4-km stretch from Esplanade to Bhowanipur, carrying under 15,000 passengers daily. But this number will soon go up to 2 lakh every day as four 8-coach rakes get into operation, covering nine stations every 10 minutes.

In the next five years, when the system's northern stretch is also complete, the world's smallest metro system (17 km long) will be the most heavily used: carrying 17 lakh passengers daily: an intensity of use that is three times more than the next most heavily used system, in Mexico city. Ironically, even this saturation use will not prevent it from suffering an annual loss of Rs 1 crore: but this is small before the Rs 30 crore subsidy that is now paid out annually to the city's government-owned tram and bus companies, which carry less than 25 per cent of the city's total passenger load. Says Sinha: "Considering that the majority of world metros chalk up colossal losses, our modest loss projections are commendable when our fare rate (Re 1 minimum fare) is the lowest in the world."



Passengers on the Calcutta subway: a generational leap

But problems remain. Even Sinha admits that a single metro line in the city will serve a limited purpose: "When the Planning Commission originally recommended a metro for Calcutta in 1969, it approved three lines, out of which one was taken up ultimately in 1974 to begin with." The other two—one running from Salt Lake to Rajaramtolla on the Howrah side of the Hooghly and the other from Dakhineswar in the north to Thakurpukur in the south—were conceived as integral parts of a complete 60-km metro system for the city. "It would be criminal to call it a day after completing the first metro line, now that we have developed the expertise and several private sector companies have become dependent on metro work," said a metro official. But the Government is strapped for cash, and seems unwilling to extend the system to becoming a complete package for the city's commuters.

Sinha argues that the high cost of the metro—Rs 388 crore spent till the end of 1985-86 and another Rs 422 crore to be spent in the next five years—should not be a consideration for future planning. "Our costs work out to $40 million per km, which compares favourably with the cost of metros built in other Third World cities like Sao Paulo, Santiago and Mexico City," he explains.

Curiously however, the metro's severest critics are not the supposedly pusillanimous mandarins at the Centre, but the state's Marxist rulers, who have never lost a chance to deride it. The state Government is squabbling over who should pay for the restoration of the city's surface, devastated by the metro work. Metro authorities are restoring roads and surfaces as they were a decade ago while the state Government insists that the geometry of roads, traffic intersections and points where metro commuters are going to be disgorged need extensive remodelling. But neither the Railway Board nor the state Government is prepared to foot the bill for the necessary remodelling.

To top it all, the Marxists, much to the opposition of the metro authorities, are determined to bring the trams on the metro route. Should this kind of bickering continue, whatever changes the metro rail era promised will be confined to the underground, leaving the city surface with its decaying symbols of a 19th century civilisation and dousing the current hopes of changing skylines, congestion-free streets and all the other effects of an urban renewal boom.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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GODREJ

Perking Up

IN THE TV advertisement, the well-known housewife walks into a grocer's. She tells you, in that I-am-so-virtuous voice, that though the market is full of products, the consumer should not be misled by claims of quality for a price and should go for modestly-priced winners. At this point she raises a detergent powder and a detergent cake, walks out of the shop, and watches in mortification as a taxi passes her by without even so much as a how d'ye do.

The lady is of course the redoubtable Rajani Prabhakar, one of the most successful TV creations of last year, and the company whose products she's touting is Godrej Soaps Pvt Ltd (turnover: Rs 190 crore). The company, perhaps borrowing a leaf from the account book of the termagant whose urban adventures it sponsored, has moved aggressively into the front shelves of the shops with new products, new packaging, new advertising campaigns and a new-found drive that suggests it is finally shaking off its staid image. Says Director Ardeshir Godrej: "We did a survey some time ago and found to our chagrin that people perceived our products as old and not modern. That was when we decided to move, in order not to get left behind."

So the company wiped the dust off its thinking caps and the results:

► Godrej's front-runner premium Cinthol soap now comes in a glossy pack, with a lower weight and price: sales have increased 50 per cent in the last few months, yielding a market share of about 12 per cent.

► Ponds get its highly successful Dreamflower brand of premium soap made at Godrej; this and Cinthol now account for about 25 per cent of the premium soap market.

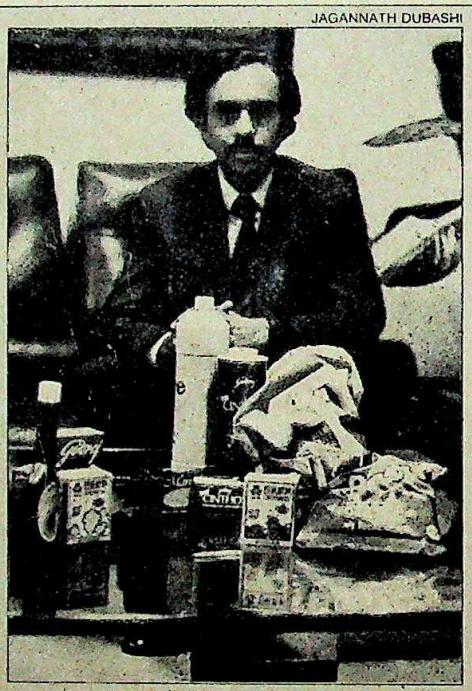
► Crowning Glory—a one-of-its-kind Indian shampoo soap launched with the blessings of the delectable Dimple Kapadia—is also moving quickly six months after launch, with 2 per cent of the market.

► The company has been confident enough to launch yet another soap, Marvel, in March this year—without any test-marketing at all.

► Finally, a low-priced detergent—Besto—was launched last May. At Rs 8 per kg, it is half the price of Key, and about the same price as the legendary Nirma. Besto now claims a 10 per cent share of the expanding market.

On the anvil are plans for another, cheaper, toilet soap, a shampoo and more inputs in the company's successful cattle and animal feeds business, which contributes about a sixth of the total turnover. Says Godrej: "We don't want to diversify completely out of our strengths. We know soaps and chemicals the best, and we will stay in them for some time."

JAGANNATH DUBASHI



"We don't want to diversify completely out of our strengths. We know soaps and chemicals the best and will stay in them for some time."

ARDESHIR GODREJ
director, Godrej Soaps Pvt. Ltd.

Nevertheless, the group decided to take a giant step last month into consumer drinks, based not on the usual fizzy waters, but on the lowly soya bean. Soya has been trying to break into the consumer market for some time now, though daunted by people's perception of it as a dull, tasteless food whose only saving grace is that it is one of the few vegetarian foods rich in protein. Noble Soya House, as the new venture of Godrej and the Bhiwandiwallas is called, will try and market it in the form of flavoured milk, in easy-to-store packs.

Godrej was sold on soya for two reasons: it has already become a fashionable food abroad—Hong Kong drinks more soya milk than Coca Cola—and it should be attractive to Indians, for the idea of a 100 per cent vegetarian drink with high protein content should be welcome. Secondly, with Godrej's immense marketing network—200,000 retailers all over the country—it would be quite easy to push the drink. So the decision to tie-up with soya leader Kibun of Japan for knowhow, and to ask the public for money to partly finance the Rs 11.8 crore plant which the company is setting up to manufacture 90 million 200 ml packs of soya milk a year. "In the third year of production", says Ghanshyam Sheth, company director, "we should be at full capacity and earning profits of about 10 per cent on turnover."

The laundry giant is shaking off the cobwebs because it clearly realises the need for expansion. Also, explains Godrej, import policies with regard to equipment and raw materials have been liberalised, so that "with quite a lot of stuff on OGL (open general licence) it's easier to plan your growth." The last few years have been steady but unspectacular, even as other companies hogged the limelight and the profits, and a need was felt to cash in on the TV boom and the new atmosphere for industry before it was too late. "We have gone on what you might call a capacity utilisation spree and are using up all our 20,000 tonnes a year for soap," says Godrej. He is cagey about figures, but admits that a Rs 10 crore profit two years ago boosted the expansion drive.

Apart from all this, Godrej will remain in the public eye because it spends about Rs 50 lakh a month on advertising, mostly through the sponsorship of TV programmes. It has just bought the 104-part serial *Buniyaad*, directed by Ramesh Sippy, and is looking at others. "We find", says Godrej, "that the vast majority of those who have a TV are those with disposable money to spend on consumer goodies. That is the market we are aiming at and that is the market we will get." The going for Godrej seems good with *Rajani* on their side.

—JAGANNATH DUBASHI

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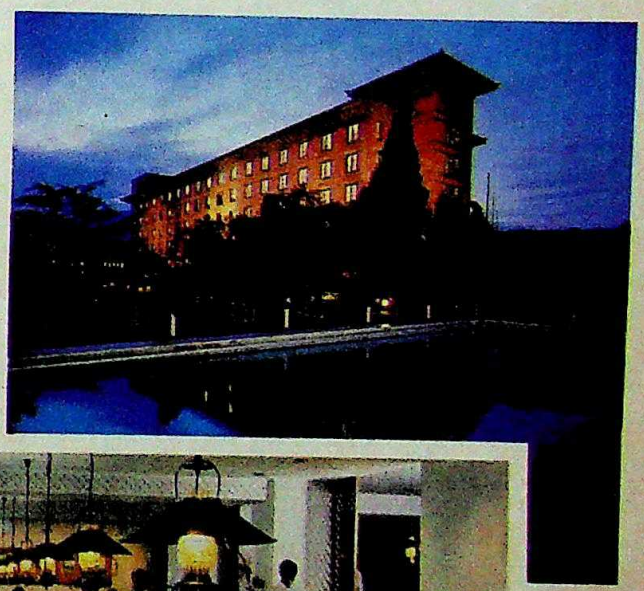

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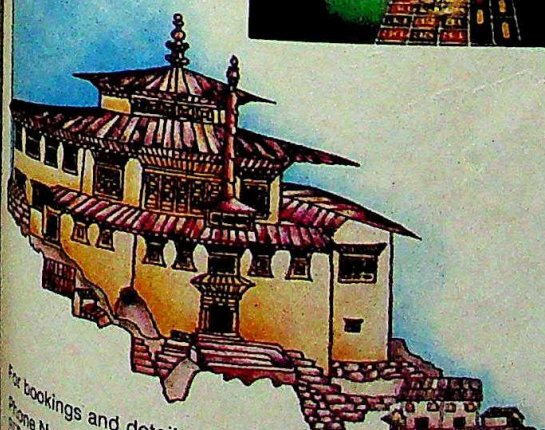

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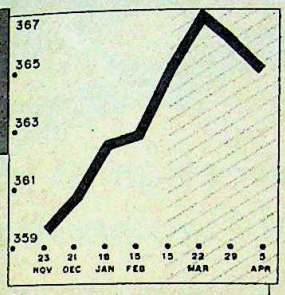
Inflation has slowed down marginally. Money supply has increased somewhat and bank credit is, therefore, less tight. Exports have picked up, the trade gap is marginally narrower and foreign exchange reserves have risen. Shares prices are now on trend and even gold prices have started picking up after falling steadily for the past several months.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trend is computed on the basis of the last six months data to which a regression is fitted.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
5.3% p.a.

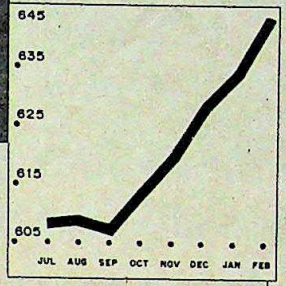


Wholesale prices dipped by 0.5% in the latter half of March. Nevertheless, the long term trend suggests that inflation is gaining momentum.

Consumer Price Index

1960 = 100

Current Trend
13.5% p.a.

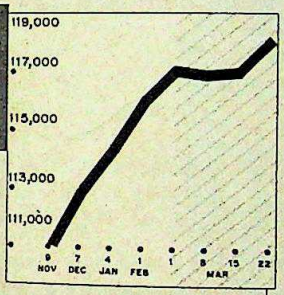


Consumer prices have shot up by 3.8% between November and February, and continue to rise much faster than wholesale prices.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
16.7% p.a.

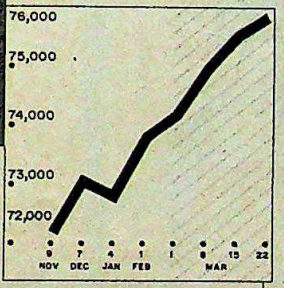


Money supply increased marginally by 0.9% in March. The six month trend, however, remains well within the 16-17% range.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
11.5% p.a.

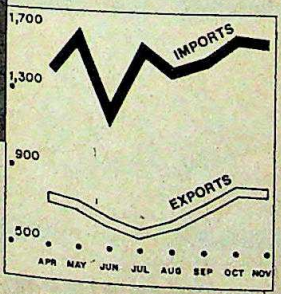


Bank credit jumped by 2.3% in March, considerably easing the "tight-money" position. At 11%, the trend is now still higher than before.

Foreign Trade

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.7% p.a.
IMPORTS
23.0% p.a.
EXPORTS

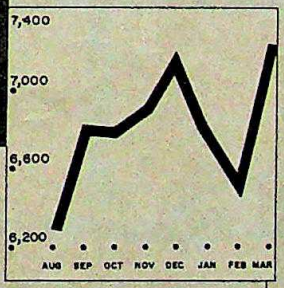


Export growth between August and November has brightened the trade picture, but increasing imports have kept the trade deficit large.

Foreign Exchange Reserves

Rs Crore

Current Trend
2.9% p.a.

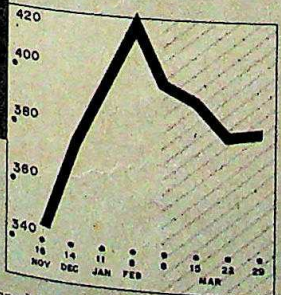


Foreign exchange reserves have risen abruptly, after dropping through January and February, and are now at an eight month peak.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
42.1% p.a.

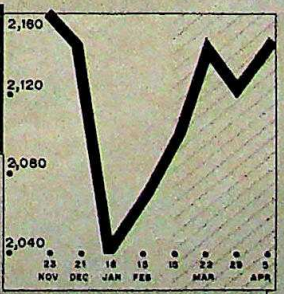


Share prices dipped by 3.6% in the last three weeks of March, reversing the earlier decline. The long term trend remained buoyant.

Closing Gold Price

Rs per 10 gm.

Current Trend
−4.6% p.a.



A 3.7% spurt in gold prices between February 15 and April 5 lifted the long-term trend, which is still negative but less so than before.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of Items in March, 1986

	% Growth
Linseed	15.35
Copra	12.27
Barley	10.98
Oranges	10.6
Coconut Oil	9.69
Timber	8.91
Khandsari	7.98
Fish	7.5
Maida	7.22
Ball-Bearings	7.2
Linseed Oil	7.06
Bananas	5.69
Trucks	5.56
Cashew-Nuts	5.21
Country Liquor	4.32
Gingelly Oil	4.06
Arhar	4.04
Jowar	3.96
Rubber	3.57
Mustard Oil	3.44
Cars	3.25
Mustard Oilcake	3.08
Tobacco	2.99
Board	2.62
Gingelly Seed	2.37
Cotton Seed	2.19
Petroleum Crude & Natural Gas	2.17
Milk	2.17
Bajra	2.08
Rice	1.95
Rape & Mustard Seed	1.93
Ragi	1.89
Groundnut Seeds	1.86
Phosphatic Fertiliser	1.77
Paper	1.7
Tractors	1.52
Electricity	1.47
Caustic Soda	1.04
Groundnut Oilcake	1.03
Polythene Moulding Powder	0.98
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	0.97
Jute Textiles	0.86
Ghee	0.86
Whisky	0.82
PVC Compounds	0.72
Industrial Instruments	0.68

Of the 139 series considered. 66 of them with a total weight of 40.935 had a positive growth and 73 of them with a total weight of 45.69 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1986	1985
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, March	18645	16667
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, March	918.2	814.0
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes March	3251	2739
Fertiliser		
Thousand Tonnes, March	560.4	471.0
Thermal Plant Load Factor		
Per cent, March	57.4	55.5

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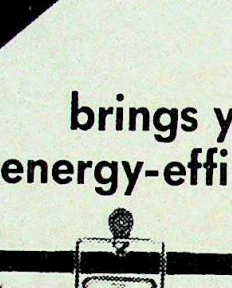
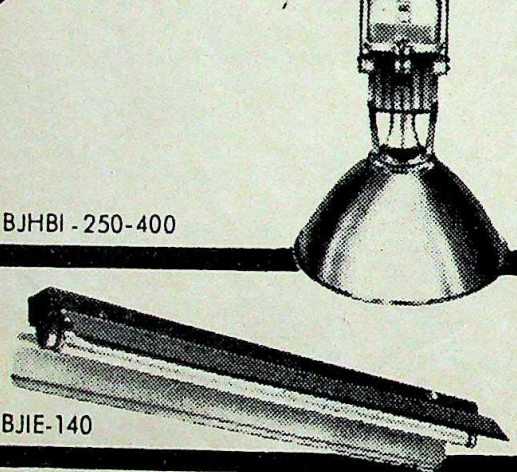
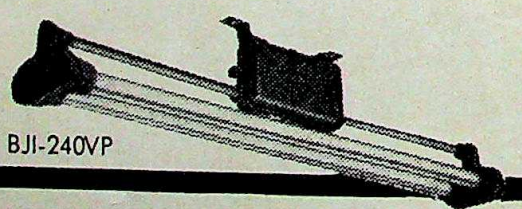


BJHBI - 250-400

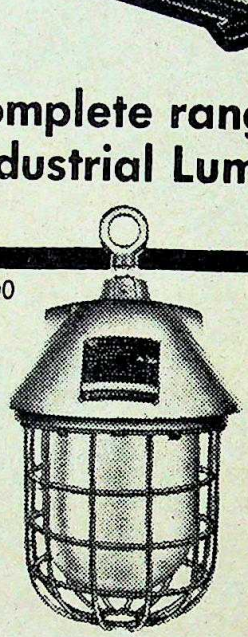


BJIE-140

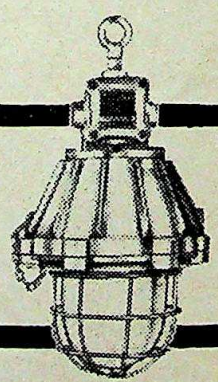


BJI-240VP

BJIW-200



BJFW-200



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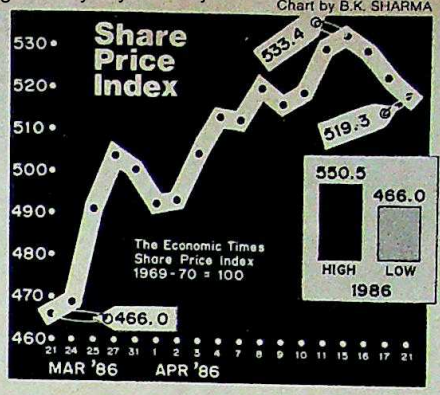
THE MARKETS

Up and Down



THE MOST unrelated developments can send shock waves through the stock-market. Just when share values were sustaining their recovery and climbing back to near the pre-budget levels, the American attack on Libya and fears of a possible oil boycott that might affect an oil-importing country like India as well, sent stock prices downward again.

Inevitably, price movements varied substantially during the fortnight. Reliance took a small beating, moving down from Rs 348 to 343, in the wake of the Government's decision to hike the customs duty on purified terephthalic acid (PTA), a major raw material for the textiles and petrochemicals giant. Just as inevitably, Bombay Dyeing—which manufactures a domestic substitute for PTA—found its share price soaring from Rs88 to Rs 104 in next to no time. Orkay (which also uses PTA as a raw material) slumped far more than Reliance, losing Rs43 at Rs 118 despite the news that the Government had finally cleared the company's long-delayed debenture issue.

Other developments were similarly pegged to individual corporate events and expectations. Gujarat State Fertilisers climbed quickly by Rs 122.50 to Rs 1,537.50 because of expectations of a convertible debenture issue tied to the company's expansion programmes. Tata Steel also did well, moving up by Rs 102.50 to Rs 1,412.50, because the market looked forward to a stepped up dividend and even a bonus issue. The company is also expected to use its comfortable financial position to launch a major expansion programme. Two automobile companies also did noticeably well: Bajaj Auto shot up by Rs 200 to Rs 2,575, and Premier Automobiles gained Rs 122.50 at Rs 805.

Through these various ups and downs, the market now seems in healthier shape than it has been for some time. The market may have been somewhat over-sold during the post-budget slump, and the subsequent recovery helped restore some balance. The financial institutions have also used this period to offload some shares and adjust their portfolios by buying at other counters. The low carry-over charges for share transactions confirms that neither bulls nor bears have a stranglehold on the market any more, as has often been the case in the recent past.

The future should see a lot of activity concentrated in the new issues market. Tata Fertiliser is due to come up with an issue of unprecedented proportions, totalling Rs400 crore, and several companies have large expansion plans on their drawing-boards. So new capital raised on the market this financial year should be substantially more than what was done last year.

ACTIVE STOCK

	1986 HIGH	1986 LOW	CLOSE 21.4.86	Change In Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	26.00	30.50	1.75 –
Associated Cement	389.00	236.00	251.00	2.00 +
Atlas Copco	92.50	71.00	73.00	2.00 +
Associated Bearings	990.00	730.00	750.00	nil
Avery India	146.00	103.00	119.00	1.00 +
Bajaj Auto	2775.00	1950.00	2575.00	200.00 +
Baroda Rayon	490.00	315.00	380.00	20.00 +
Bata India	82.50	64.00	64.50	4.50 –
Bayer	680.00	445.00	525.00	10.00 +
Bharat Forge	86.00	48.00	65.00	3.00 +
Birla Jute	97.00	42.90	48.00	3.00 –
Blow Plast	160.00	98.00	114.00	2.50 +
Blue Star	110.00	75.00	95.00	10.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	120.00	77.00	97.00	13.00 +
Brooke Bond	96.75	74.00	91.00	2.00 –
Ceat Tyres	520.00	240.00	410.00	nil
Century Spinning	169.00	1220.00	1385.00	30.00 +
Chloride India	122.00	91.00	97.00	3.00 –
Chlorgia	65.00	43.00	53.00	6.00 +
Colgate	262.50	200.00	217.50	7.50 –
Cyanamid	100.00	70.00	75.00	2.50 +
DCM	58.50	36.00	38.50	2.50 –
Dunlop	74.50	49.75	67.50	0.75 –
Elecon	117.50	80.00	85.00	10.00 –
Escorts	105.00	69.00	95.50	8.50 +
Food Specialities	300.00	215.00	217.00	nil
Garware Nylon	61.50	36.00	42.00	1.00 –
Glaxo	87.00	62.00	67.00	4.00 –
G.E. Shipping	36.00	22.50	23.50	1.50 –
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	1700.00	925.00	1537.50	122.50 +
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	59.00	80.50	6.50 +
Hindustan Lever	163.00	124.00	144.00	6.00 –
Hindustan Motors	128.50	52.60	56.00	2.00 +
Hind. Dorr	505.00	380.00	460.00	20.00 +
IEL	84.50	64.50	72.50	0.50 –
Indian Hotels	157.00	115.00	135.00	nil
Indian Organic	90.00	63.00	74.50	2.00 +
Indian Rayon	151.00	100.00	135.00	13.00 +
Indrol	390.00	200.00	310.00	5.00 +
Ingersoll-Rand	480.00	360.00	435.00	nil
ITC	76.50	53.00	74.25	1.75 +
J.K. Synthetics	132.00	90.00	118.00	2.00 +
Kinetic Engineering	325.00	220.00	290.00	5.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	715.00	547.50	590.00	5.00 –
Lakme	195.00	120.00	132.50	5.00 +
Larson & Toubro	204.00	157.00	185.50	6.00 +
Lipton	69.00	46.50	62.70	1.30 –
Lohia Machines	70.00	44.00	46.00	9.00 –
Madura Coats	92.00	71.00	88.00	0.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	52.00	64.00	2.00 +
Motor Industries	910.00	605.00	810.00	70.00 +
National Organic	777.50	530.00	630.00	10.00 –
Nirlon	77.00	48.00	53.00	2.00 +
Orkay Silk Mills	186.00	111.00	118.00	43.00 –
Peico Electronics	104.50	56.00	56.00	nil
Pfizer	125.00	78.00	91.00	5.00 +
Premier Auto	840.00	555.00	805.00	122.50 +
Ranbaxy	160.00	105.00	122.00	13.00 –
Raymond	97.00	72.00	86.00	5.00 +
Reliance Industries	367.00	226.00	343.00	20.00 +
Shriram Fibres	88.00	61.00	61.00	6.00 –
SPIC	184.00	129.50	154.00	3.00 –
Tata Steel	1442.50	1090.00	1412.50	102.50 +
Telco	910.00	575.00	685.00	5.00 +
Vulcan Laval	162.50	85.00	125.00	5.00 +
Wimco	98.00	54.00	64.00	3.00 –

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.8845	8.7987
Austria	Schilling	100	79.7988	78.6687
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.3052	33.2950
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.0730	42.0092
Canada	Dollar	1	8.9481	8.8719
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.5146	1.4989
Egypt	Pound	1	15.1732	15.0178
France	Franc	1	1.7652	1.7241
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.5884	1.5749
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1230	1.0933
Iran	Rial	100	15.5730	15.4330
Italy	Lira	100	0.7930	0.7811
Japan	Yen	100	7.1187	7.0502
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7713	0.7601
Kuwait	Dinar	1	43.1507	42.0181
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.8756	4.8195
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9110	0.9032
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6050	0.5931
Netherlands	Guilder	1	4.9521	4.9032
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7692	0.7517
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.6780	5.6268
Spain	Peseta	100	0.0860	0.0800
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4491	0.4480
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.7398	1.7212
Switzerland	Franc	1	6.6745	6.6103
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6993	0.6817
Thailand	Baht	100	47.7313	47.6010
UK	Pound	1	18.7687	18.6445
USA	Dollar	1	12.3525	12.2475
UAE	Dirham	1	3.3723	3.3517
USSR	Rouble	1	17.1832	17.1517
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	5.6947	5.5555

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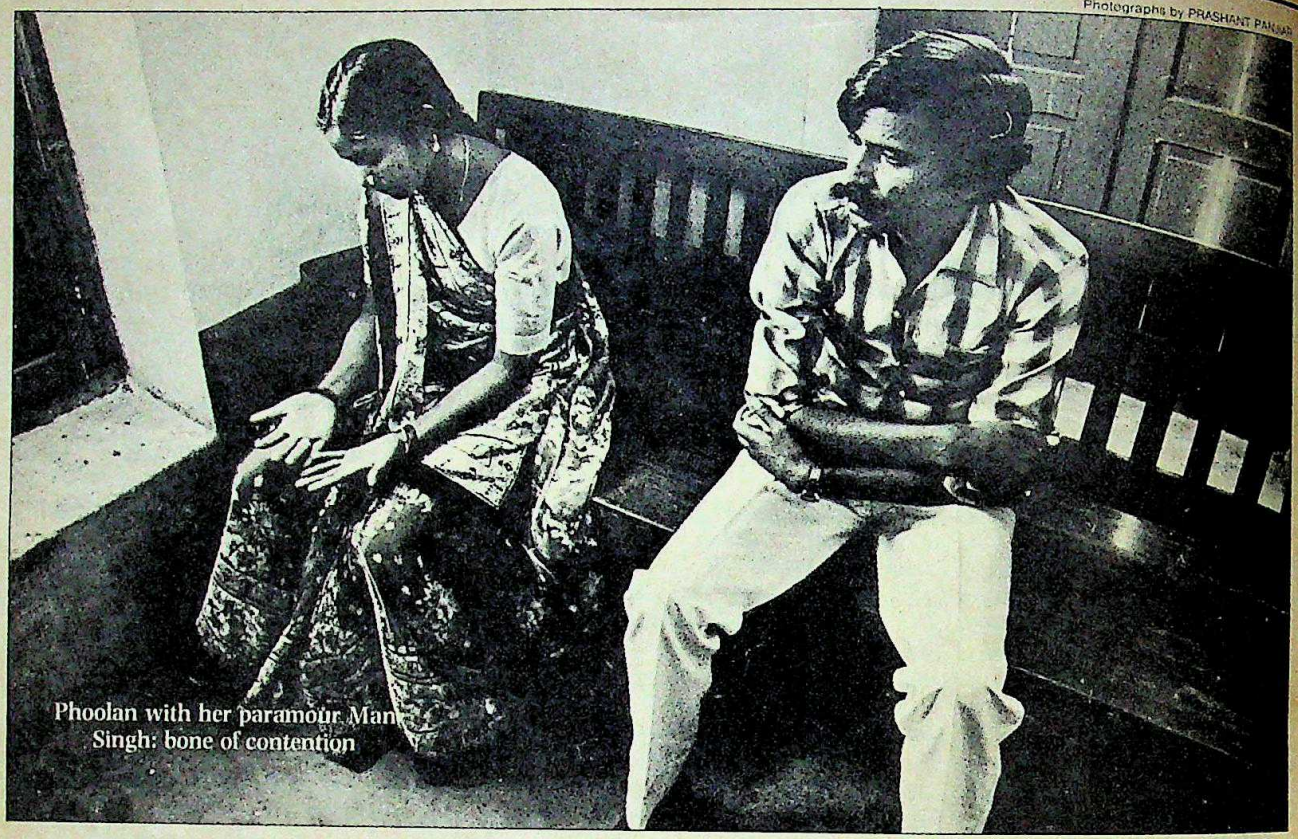

Phoolan with her paramour Man Singh: bone of contention

MADHYA PRADESH

Dacoits' Dilemma

THERE is new tension in Gwalior Central Jail where a large number of dacoits, including Phoolan Devi and Malkhan Singh, have been lodged after their surrender. Phoolan's fate has become a major bone of contention amongst the rest of the dacoits as well as between the Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh Governments. With Phoolan's last case in Madhya Pradesh over, she cannot evade the Uttar Pradesh Government for much longer. Assistant Editor AJAY KUMAR *was allowed into the special jail to talk to the dacoits and gauge their new mood of uncertainty. His report:*

THE COUNT-DOWN has started for Phoolan Devi, the most famous dacoit in Gwalior Central jail. She had surrendered a little over three years ago to the Madhya Pradesh police in the hope that she would escape the long arm of the Uttar Pradesh Government, which has 68 cases lodged against her. The courts in Uttar Pradesh have been repeatedly sending warrants for her, but so far the Gwalior jail authorities have been returning them on the plea that she still has cases against her in Madhya Pradesh. But with her last case disposed of two months ago, time is running out for the bandit queen.

At stake is not just Phoolan's fate, or that of the 73 other dacoits (including Malkhan Singh and his gang) housed in the same jail, but also the credibility of the Madhya Pradesh Government itself and its well-publicised policy of inducing dacoits to surrender. "There is no doubt about it," says J.P. Gupta, a leading criminal lawyer of Gwalior. "If Phoolan is sent off to Uttar Pradesh, the people of Madhya Pradesh will lose faith in the word of the Government."

One of the unwritten conditions of the surrender of Malkhan Singh's gang in June 1982—which became a precedent for the subsequent surrenders of the Phoolan Devi and Ramesh Sikarwar gangs—was a commitment by the state Government that all the cases against the dacoits would be transferred from Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan to a special court in the Gwalior jail. That, it was hoped, would set the ball rolling for their eventual rehabilitation. But nearly four years

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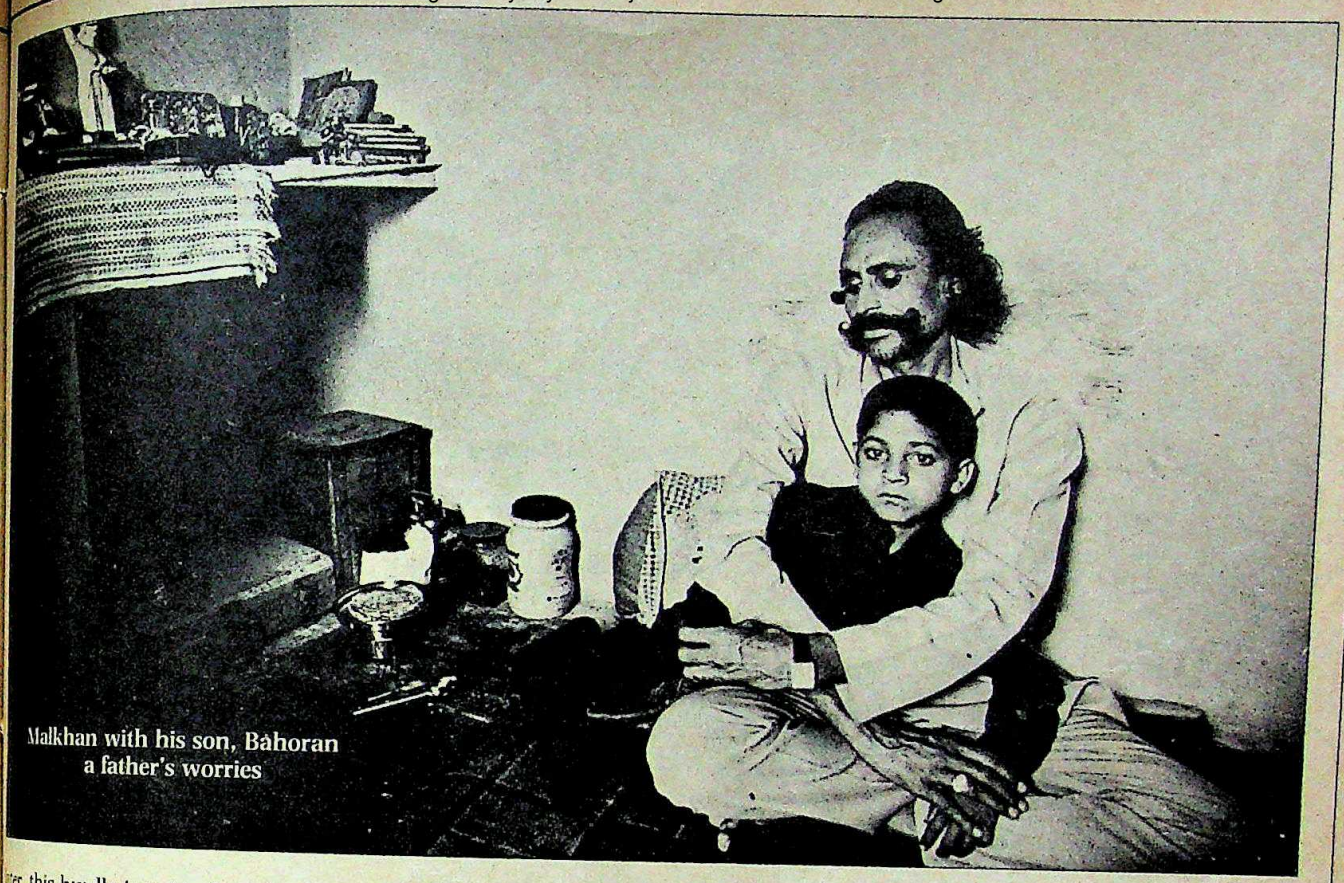

Malkhan with his son, Bahoran
a father's worries

ter, this hurdle is yet to be crossed.

The Uttar Pradesh Government has refused to fall in line, and its main objection is to Phoolan. The powerful Thakur lobby in the state cannot forget the Behmai massacre of February 1981 in which 22 Thakurs were killed. Not surprisingly, the state Government has refused to transfer any of the cases against the dacoits to Madhya Pradesh: not even those of Malkhan Singh, as that would set a precedent which would suit Phoolan.

With their fate hanging in the balance, the dacoits are in a state of virtual panic. More than anything, it is the uncertainty regarding their future and their inability to help their families that worries them. Members of Malkhan Singh's gang say openly that now they regret having surrendered, though Malkhan himself does not go as far. Said Bashir Khan: "It would have been better if we had been killed in the jungle." Added Munshi Lal: "Nobody is happy here."

What is more, they know that Phoolan is the cause of their predicament. Save for her paramour, Man Singh, none of the other 72 dacoits in the Gwalior Jail have any sympathy for her. Asks Malkhan angrily: "Why should so many innocent people suffer because of that one girl? If her case is not transferred for 10 years, are we going to rot here till then?"

Malkhan Singh and Phoolan Devi have long been at loggerheads. Malkhan, who had crowned himself *Dasyu Samrat* (dacoit king) some time before he surrendered, has never been able to reconcile himself to the fact that Phoolan is the real star of the prison. Phoolan, on her part, has never acknowledged the supremacy of *Dadda*, as Malkhan Singh is referred to.

Members of Malkhan's gang play chess in the special jail

When, some time ago, Phoolan managed to win over some members of Malkhan Singh's gang, the tension boiled over and a fight broke out on the premises.

Subsequently, Phoolan and Man Singh were shifted out of the special jail in which all the dacoits were housed and taken to the adjoining main jail, where Phoolan now stays with other women prisoners. Her 'banishment' is a sore point with her and she hasn't forgiven Malkhan Singh for it. Says she contemptuously: "*Dadda* is married to the special jail." According to a jail official, Phoolan had once said she would rest in peace only after she openly slapped Malkhan Singh with her slippers.

The police's sympathetic attitude towards Phoolan's family is another irritant. Deputy Inspector-General (DIG) Ayodhya Nath Pathak and Superintendent (SP) of Gwalior, O.P.Rathore have gone out of their way to help her family. Her brother and her sister's son have been employed as 'half-constables' in the office of the Gwalior SP. They attend office and school on alternate days, and are paid Rs 450 a month. They have also been given two houses in the police lines. The other dacoits resent it that their families have not been shown similar consideration. Said Nawab Singh of Malkhan's gang: "The police is only concerned about

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Phoolan, nothing is being done for our relatives."

Painfully conscious of her isolation and aware that her time is running out, Phoolan's plight is beginning to tell on her nerves (*see box*). Mortally scared of being sent off to Uttar Pradesh, she has written three letters in the last month alone to Rathore pleading with him to think of some way of keeping her in Madhya Pradesh. She flies off the handle at the slightest provocations: "Why doesn't the Government throw a bomb and kill us."

The other dacoits, mostly from Malkhan's gang, also complain about several irritants. One of the conditions of the surrender was that they would not be handcuffed when taken to court. The Madhya Pradesh police initially honoured the commitment but has been handcuffing them after Ghanshyam Mirdha gave the slip to a police party that had escorted him to his village a year ago. Says Pathak: "I am willing to trust them but the constables refuse to take the risk. There is little I can do unless I get orders from the top."

The authorities' refusal to grant parole is another sore point. Save for Malkhan Singh, who has been out on parole several times hardly anyone else has been allowed out. The police have been using Mirdha's escape as a reason to deny parole. Says a bitter Bashir Khan, a member of Malkhan Singh's gang: "We showed trust in the Government when we surrendered but they don't have faith in us." For the dacoits, the Madhya Pradesh Government's intransigence on these two issues has become a symbol of its insensitivity. Says Malkhan Singh, who has refused to be handcuffed: "If they stopped handcuffing us, we would start trusting them again."

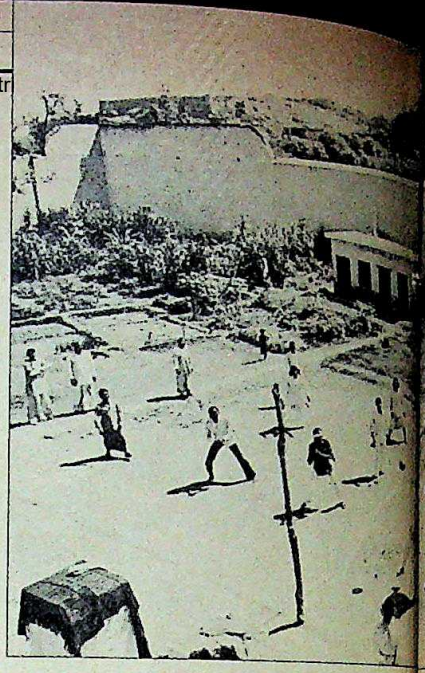
Malkhan's greatest worry these days is schooling for his eight-year-old son, Bahoran. A doting father who even kept his son with him for a brief period while in jail, he says with feeling: "I don't mind if they keep me in jail for a year more than is my due but something should be done for Bahoran." The state Government agreed two years ago to Malkhan's request that the state should arrange his admission in some residential school and pay for his schooling, and a sum of Rs 400 per month was sanctioned.

Malkhan is keen on getting Bahoran away from Gwalior, where he now stays with Malkhan's second wife. Tutored at home, the sprightly and well-behaved Bahoran is not allowed out to play and does not go anywhere without an armed escort. Malkhan's heart is set on admitting him to the Central School at Pachmarhi. But when the Madhya Pradesh Government approached the school authorities, they were told that Pachmarhi admits students only when they are 11 years. Rathore, who has been personally following up on the matter, now admits he is stuck. But, says Malkhan: "These are only excuses. Is this such a big problem that the Government cannot solve it if it wants to?"

THE CONDITIONS on which the dacoits had surrendered were nothing new. They were the same as in 1972, when 508 dacoits, including the gangs of Madho Singh and Mohar Singh, had surrendered at the behest of Jayaprakash Narayan. Then, the cases had been completed within a year-and-a-half and by 1980 the last of the dacoits had left the open jail in Mungaoli to live with their families.

The involvement of JP's band of followers, led by Tehsildar Singh, son of the legendary Man Singh, and of socially conscious lawyers like Gupta, who had appeared free of cost for the dacoits, had gone a long way in smoothening the whole process of rehabilitation. This time around, however, there is no dedicated group following up on the cases on the spot. Tehsildar Singh was not even involved in the main surrenders and Gupta's offer of appearing free of cost again has, surprisingly, not been taken up. Says Tehsildar Singh: "There was a sense of a mission then. This time, the mercenaries have taken over."

Even the proceedings of the special



Dacoits playing volleyball in the jail compound: uncertain fate

PHOOLAN DEVI

"I am fed up of waiting"

PHOOLAN DEVI, 23, is the star undertrial in the Gwalior Central Jail and she knows it. And like all stars, she throws tantrums. On the day that INDIA TODAY *met her last month, she was very upset that a police* DIG *had not called on her though he had spent over an hour with Malkhan Singh and his gang. Initially, she even refused to be photographed, relenting only when she was alternatively cajoled and scolded by the jail authorities.*

But she was bitterly defiant right through the interview with Assistant Editor AJAY KUMAR. *Clearly irritated by Phoolan's belligerent mood, her paramour Man Singh, who had come along for the interview, threatened to walk out. But Phoolan would not relent, even after she was told that her angry words could damn her. Excerpts:*

Q: Now that all your cases in Madhya Pradesh have been concluded, are you afraid that you will have to go to the courts in Uttar Pradesh?

A. No, why should I have any fear? If I have done anything, I will have to face the consequences. I am just fed up of waiting, of eating at the Government's expense. I want to go to Uttar Pradesh so I can pay for my deeds.

Q. Will you ever plead guilty to the Behmai massacre?

A. No, never. I didn't do anything personally except show my face. So I suppose I will have to face the consequences.

Q. Do you now regret having surrendered?

A. Yes, and I am not the only one. Ghanshyam Mirdha escaped because nothing was being done. It's better to die in the jungle than to die a slow death here, saying 'yes sir, yes sir' all the time.

Q. Does this mean that you are not happy in jail?

A. No, I am very happy here. I have no regrets. I have even grown fatter.

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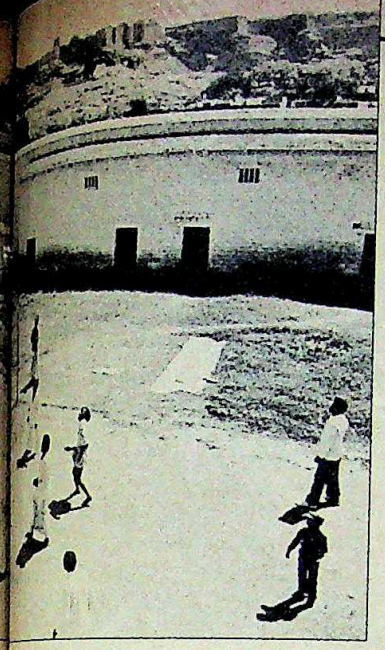

court in the Gwalior jail, currently being presided over by Sessions judge Chandrika Prasad, have followed an odd sequence. The court has been trying the cases of Malkhan Singh and others, and though several cases of kidnapping and murder have come up not a single conviction has been handed down on a major charge. In contrast, in 1972, the dacoits had been persuaded to plead guilty to a major charge. Several had received life sentences and Mohar Singh was sentenced to death—this was later commuted to life imprisonment by the President.

THIS time around, since the whole scheme has come unstuck, nobody has pleaded guilty and all witnesses for the state have turned hostile. Says Gupta's associate Ram Babu Tiwari, who has appeared for the dacoits: "We hardly have to do anything. We haven't had to cross-examine a single witness in the cases against Malkhan Singh." Consequently, the dacoits have been getting acquitted in one case after another. This can only strengthen the Uttar Pradesh Government's resolve not to transfer the cases. Says Gupta: "If this goes on then the Uttar Pradesh Government can say with some justification that what is happening in the special court is a farce."

Unfortunately for the dacoits, they have also become victims of crossed political wires. The surrenders had been negotiated by Arjun Singh when he was the chief minister. Flushed with the favourable publicity of the Malkhan Singh surrender, he could not resist roping in Phoolan also, not realising the problems her surrender would pose. But before he could untangle the knot, he was sent off to Punjab, leaving the vexatious problem in the hands of Motilal Vora, who has neither Singh's personal commitment nor his political stature to influence the Uttar Pradesh Government.

Though Vora has repeatedly told the dacoits and their emissaries that he is doing what he can, relations between him and Singh have become strained and it would be unrealistic to expect him to go out of his way to honour a commitment given by Singh. The dacoits know this. Said Malkhan with a wry smile: "The Government has put us in the jail and, with peace restored, forgotten us."

Even the mediation of the Union Home Ministry has been to no avail. Uttar Pradesh officials once even failed to turn up for meetings in Delhi while a high-level delegation of the Madhya Pradesh Government waited in vain for them to show up.

Understandably, then, there is a feeling of helplessness among the handful of officials in Gwalior, as well as among concerned citizens like Gupta, who empathise with the plight of the surrendered dacoits. Whether it be Gwalior Commissioner Ajay Shankar or Collector Shivraj Singh, or the two DIG's A.N. Pathak and D.C. Jhugran, or Gwalior SP O.P. Rathore, or even jail Superintendent Prem Srivastava, they are all old Chambal hands. They recognise that this problem needs to be tackled immediately before the situation gets out of hand. But there is little they can do since only an intervention at the highest political level can untangle the knot. The solution lies with the prime minister, the only person who can make the Uttar Pradesh Government relent at a time when it is in clear sight of its quarry.

But there is no compelling hurry for Rajiv to act. In the past, dacoit gangs used to invariably crop up within a few years to replace gangs that had surrendered. With the face of the Chambal area transforming rapidly—thanks largely to the Chambal Command Area Project which is changing Chambal into the granary of Madhya Pradesh—and the police not relaxing their vigil, it is unlikely that the menace of dacoity will ever stage a decisive return to the area.

Today, in the six districts of Bhind, Morena, Gwalior, Guna, Shivpuri and Datia, which are normally dacoit-infested, there isn't a single dacoit gang of any strength. Says Jhugran: "Perhaps the one thing that can force the issue (of the transfer of cases) is a resurgence of the dacoity problem." But since that is unlikely to happen, the dacoits are doomed to a prolonged period of uncertainty.

Q. What have you done personally to see that the Madhya Pradesh Government honours its commitment to get the cases from Uttar Pradesh transferred to a special court?

A. I have done all I could. I even sent another to Punjab to see Arjun Singh. I had the maximum faith in him but now I have lost faith in everybody.

Q. Even in Rajiv Gandhi?

A. No, not in him. He is above Arjun Singh so I have expectations from him.

Q. What should the Madhya Pradesh Government do to make you happy?

A. (Pauses, and then says with an impish smile): I would like the Madhya Pradesh Government to set us free.

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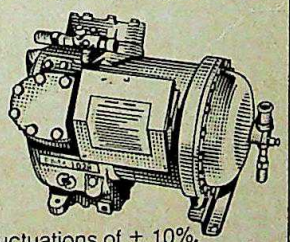

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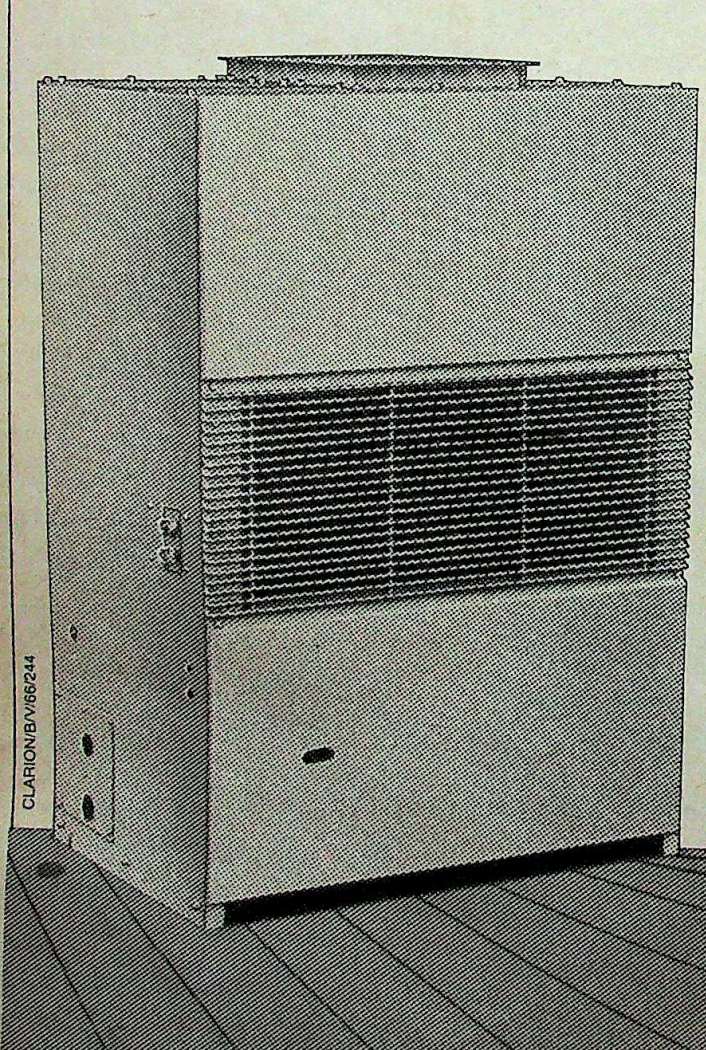

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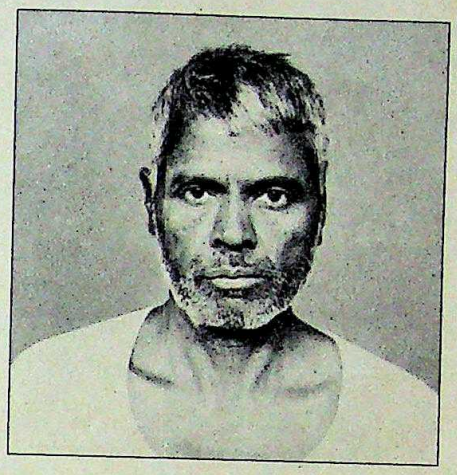
KARNATAKA

The Brute of Bellary

IT IS not often that a man is arrested for one murder and then confesses to having committed 44. But that startling development is exactly what took place in Hospet in the Bellary district of Karnataka last fortnight, when police arrested the lean and bearded Waddar Sunkappa, 56, for allegedly killing a woman in January this year. But when they interrogated him, they were dumbfounded by his macabre revelations.

He reeled out the names of 44 *jogithis*" (nomadic women priests in Karnataka) whom, he said, he had killed over the last decade usually by smashing their heads with stones. Police in six districts—Belgaum, Dharwar, Raichur, Bellary, Chitradurga and Bijapur—where he said he had killed the women, were galvanised into leafing through musty files of unsolved murders to reopen investigations and get the evidence necessary to support his confessions in court. In the last fortnight, police in Bellary and Dharwar districts had traced four murders to Sunkappa, and with the latter's willing cooperation were continuing efforts to work out the others.



Sunkappa told the interrogating officers that he had nothing against *jogithis* and he killed them solely because they are nomads with no dependents. And even if they did, by the time he finished disfiguring his victim's face, not even the closest relation would be able to make a proper identification. The 'success' which crowned his efforts was made amply clear by the enormous difficulty the police had in pinning a murder rap against him.

Earlier, he had been charged with the murder of four *jogithis*—one in 1974, two in 1975, and another in 1981—all in Raichur district. But the district court could only sentence him to two years of rigorous imprisonment in the 1981 case, and had to acquit him for lack of evidence in the other cases. Interestingly enough, Sunkappa's criminal dossier at the Hospet rural police station goes back to 1946 when, as a 16-year-old, he broke into a house in the town and stole some valuables. He has been arrested an incredible seven times earlier, and has served 19 prison sentences that add up to some 12 years.

Sunkappa (top); latest victim Mudevva (above); and Hosur: macabre revelations

The *jogithis*' nomadic life-style apart, what has made the job of the police even more difficult is tracing the remains of the victims. Sunkappa claims to have thrown quite a few bodies into the Tungabhadra canal. Not surprisingly, the police found nothing at the spots where Sunkappa said he had struck, and there were no local records of any *jogithis* missing.

But at Saundatti in Belgaum district, which the police visited along with Sunkappa, the local people recognised him and said a woman seen with him a few years ago was missing. But no one knew her name and again there was no body. Said Raichur district's Police Superintendent K. Srinivas: "Even if we know everything, the only evidence we can get is the things stolen from the victims and recovered from those who bought them. And that is hardly any evidence for a conviction."

Sunkappa's *modus operandi*, as he revealed during his interrogation, combined simplicity with ruthlessness and a total disregard for human life. The motive was always money—an arrack addict, he was perennially running short of money that could pay for his drinking. He would go to a temple early in the morning on a full moon day and sit there till a *jogithi* approached him, begging for alms. He would give her a rupee, chat with her and make her feel that he was "one among them". He would then tell her that he had a vow to fulfil and needed a woman priest's help. Would she accompany him to his village "somewhere neary"? The plea was sweetened by the promise of a new sari and, in most cases, the woman agreed.

Some time in the evening, he would take her to a deserted spot on the outskirts of the town, avoiding busy roads, and would excuse himself to answer nature's call. Then, armed with the biggest stone available, he would sneak up behind and repeatedly hit her on the head till she was dead. He would then remove her ear-rings and chains, which all *jogithis* wear, and whatever money she had on her. Said Gadag Circle Inspector V.K. Hittalkeri: "He is really a cruel fellow. I have been in the police force for 20 years. I have never seen such a man."

What prompted a full-blown police investigation was a series of four murders allegedly committed in a span of less than three months. The saga began on Decem-

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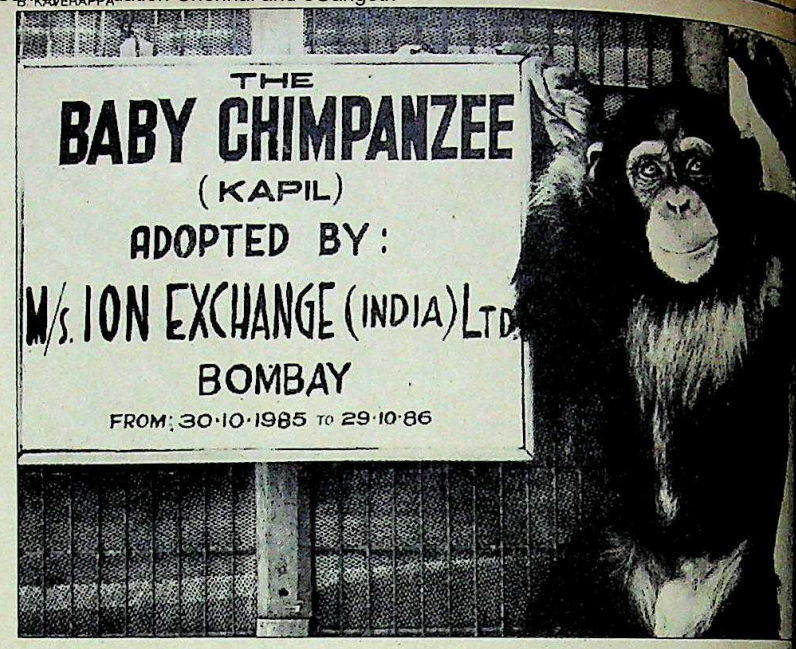
ber 1, last year, when police Sub-Inspector A.R. Mukashi discovered the body of a 50-year-old *jogithi* on the outskirts of Gadag in Raichur district. On January 18, this year, beat constable K. Bhimappa came upon the body of another middle-aged *jogithi* in the famous Hampi ruins in Bellary district. The Hampi police, not surprisingly, could not identify the victim. Nine days later, a passer-by informed the police at Hospet that he had seen the body of a dead woman, with her head smashed, in a thicket outside the town.

Twenty days later, on February 17, the Hubli railway police found the body of another *jogithi* under a railway overbridge. In all these cases, the respective police stations, after exhaustively going through the records for any pattern, came to suspect Sunkappa. A team led by Deputy Superintendent of Police Gopal B. Hosur, printed a few copies of Sunkappa's photograph and those of his victims and showed it around to hundreds of people. Patient inquiries revealed that Sunkappa often visited a 35-year-old woman called Hupigamma who lived nearby. She was kept under 24-hour surveillance and within a week Sunkappa walked into her hut to be taken into custody.

Questioned on the Hospet murder, Sunkappa told the police he had nothing to do with it. Sustained interrogation, however, paid off and Sunkappa not only confessed to the Hospet murder but also to those of Neelavva at Hubli, Umanavva at Gadag and Basavva at Hampi. And he told the shocked interrogators that he had lived by killing *jogithis* and had murdered 44 of them so far. Said a shaken Hosur: "We did not know whom we had caught. His disclosures suddenly made him a very important catch."

Sunkappa, son of a sheep trader, grew up with crime. Inquiries by INDIA TODAY at his native village Hombala, some 150 km from Hospet, revealed that he had taken to crime at the age of 10. The eldest of three brothers, he was often thrashed by his father for stealing from neighbours. Recalled G.S. Yelamali, 58, a neighbour of Sunkappa's family: "He was a bad boy from the beginning and getting worse day by day." While most villagers are upset by the notoriety brought to the village by Sunkappa, his youngest brother Jengirappa, who took up the family profession of sheep trading, refused to talk about his brother, dismissing him as a "different person". Just how different is the question the Karnataka police are now trying to establish.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD in Hospet



Kapil posing for the camera: novel scheme

MYSORE ZOO

Adoption Aid

KAPIL is a precocious but popular two-and-a-half year old chimpanzee in the sprawling Mysore Zoo. A year younger but almost as popular is Priyadarshini, a white tiger cub. Kapil's parents, Max and Anjali, keep a low profile as do Priyadarshini's parents, Arun and Anita. But the chimp and the tiger cub also have adopted parents, and rather unique ones at that—Ion Exchange Ltd and Vikrant Tyres, two local companies.

The Mysore Zoo is the only one in India to have introduced the adopt-an-animal scheme. The zoo took up the novel idea, common in America and Europe but unknown in this country, for the same reasons as its foreign counterparts—to beef up its income by collecting adoption fees and, more important, to develop affection for animals. Said a delighted zoo Curator, C.D. Krishna Gowda: "It's a two-pronged effort to improve the zoo's upkeep while promoting public awareness of wildlife."

Under the scheme, those who want to become "zoo parents" can take their pick from among the birds and animals in captivity and pay for the animal's feed for a year. That can range from Rs 180 for a tortoise to Rs 25,000 for an elephant. The prices of some other animals: Rs 7,000 for an adult tiger, lion or rhino, Rs 5,000 for a panther or a bear, Rs 2,500 for a jungle cat, deer or crowned pigeon. And takers for the king cob pay only Rs 2,500—which works out a beggarly Rs 208 a month. All mon received through such fees is spent improving the surroundings of t animals.

The zoo officials have, howev made it clear that participation in t animal adoption scheme does not stow any special rights on the "paren over their offspring. The animals rema the responsibility of the zoo and its st look to their upkeep. But "parents" get something in return—a certificat adoption, a glossy photograph of th "child", a year's free pass to visit the and free subscription to the zoo ma zines. Above all, their names are paint in bold letters outside their adop animals' cages.

The campaign was really the bra child of American naturalist S Walker who convinced C. Muniswa then chairman of the Zoo Authorit Karnataka, to introduce the sche The latter promptly convened a mee of industrialists and the leading ligh Mysore and outlined his plan. The sponse was immediate—chartered countant A.K. Ranganathan han over a cheque for Rs 180 and adopt tortoise, and others followed. So far zoo has acquired 13 such 'parents' the zoo authorities are confident tha success will entice other zoos in country to ape their pioneering ch

—SRINIVASA PRA

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A working still from Basu Chatterjee's popular TV serial RAJANI featuring Priya Tendulkar

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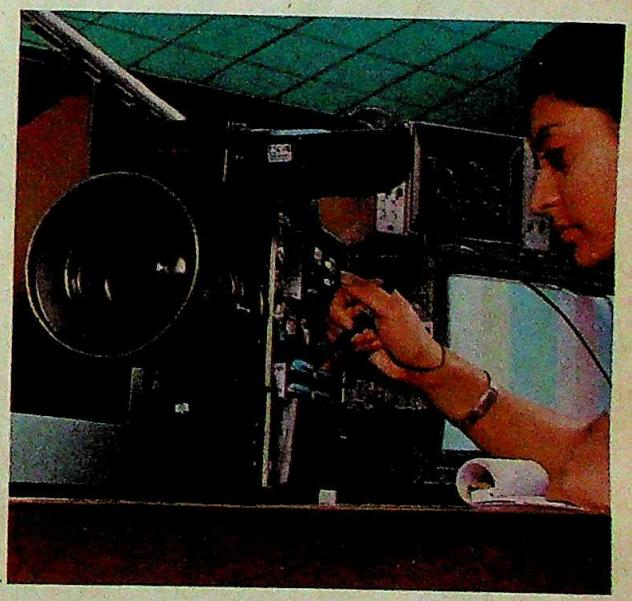

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INDO-US RELATIONS

The Reaganeagle Factor

INDIA'S 10-month-old love affair with the United States came under severe strain when the Reaganeagle fell like a thunderbolt on Gaddafi's Libya on the night of April 14. The powerful American air strike was a wrong act wrongly timed, for it came just on the eve of the meeting of the foreign ministers or their deputies of 101 non-aligned countries in New Delhi to prepare for the next NAM summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, in September. The US was condemned in the strongest terms at the New Delhi meeting, and, when the issue came up at the Security Council, was censured even by Thailand, its trusted ally in Southeast Asia.

True to his hawkish colours, Reagan outwardly shrugged off the anger and disgust of three-fourths of the world community, and kept the eagle's lethal claws bared to the gaze of the planet. However, the NAM censure, of which more will be heard at the UN and elsewhere, will not be without an impact. For it was a "proportionate response" to the doctrine of "proportionate response" designed by the vice-admiral who is now Reagan's national security adviser, a doctrine that is said to have magically closed the debate between Caspar Weinburger and George Shultz over the use of force in third world situations.

The air strike on Libya resurrected the sharp divide between India and the United States over Washington's global assertion of military power. For 10 months, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had treated the Reagan Administration to a tasty menu of understatements on differences and overstatements on new-blossoming amities. But the Libyan attacks broke the budding romance. Rajiv Gandhi picked up the sharpest words from his diplomatic vocabulary in the statement he made in the Lok Sabha on April 16 and in his inaugural address to the Delhi NAM: The US action was transgression of Libya's integrity and sovereignty, a violation of international law. The prime minister condemned all kinds of terrorism, asked all nations to unite together to combat this growing peril, but he left no doubt in anyone's mind that he regarded the American attacks on Libya as nothing short of state terrorism.

If the prime minister maintained some of his fortified coolness of language, the Indian External Affairs Minister, Bali Ram Bhagat, broke all barriers of reticence. The American strike was a "clear act of aggression" he declared in the Lok Sabha, and it placed "regional security and international peace in grave jeopardy". With Bhagat leading it, a NAM delegation went to Abu Dhabi and Tripoli, where it conveyed sympathy and support, and to New York and the UN Secretary-General, where it asked for a special session of the Security Council for another round of discussion on the US attacks.

To be sure, in responding with anger and indignation to the American act of war, India was, in a large part, fulfilling its role as NAM's retiring chairperson. But the prime minister's and the external affairs minister's remarks in Parliament and the resolutions adopted unanimously by both houses, are unmistakable articulations of India's own strong feelings. For these sentiments of India and the other non-aligned countries, the Reagan Administration will probably have little time. It draws comfort from the fact that the NAM countries are adequately divided among themselves, most of them are currently licking their economic wounds, and a great many of them are in any case too dependent on the US to open more than their mouths in anger.

That this would be a myopic vision may not worry a president whose term will end in two years. The measure of the Third World anger could be seen in Bangkok even more clearly than in New Delhi. The Thai language newspaper *Matichon* took a swipe at Reagan's remark that Gaddafi was "the mad dog of the Middle East". "The air strikes were not different from an act of a mad dog," it hit back in an editorial on April 16. It likened the American action to "an act of hooliganism".

Colonel Mo'ammar Gaddafi is no good Samaritan of world (or even Arab) politics. His brand of radicalism is often more of an embarrassment than an asset even to his friends and allies. However, Libya occupies a strategic piece of real estate in Arab North Afirca, and is not without clout among the volatile Arab masses. Now Reagan has made him a hero, a man who can stand up to the Eagle, much as the tripartite invasion of Suez in 1956 which made Gamal Abdel Nasser the hero of Arab nationalism.

India's strong criticism of the US attack on Libya is not likely to hurt the bilateral relationship which has improved remarkably in the last one year. Neither the Reagan Administration nor the American media have taken public note of Indian invectives. Foreign office sources say that India has no wish to let Libya muddy the currently calm waters of bilateral Indo-US relations. However, they also point out that the relationship has probably peaked. Its threshold cannot rise much higher. India will not buy American weapons. The US will not sell to India the sophisticated military technologies that Indian eyes are fixed upon, nor change its strategic thrusts in south and south west Asia.

Something else also has happened. The prime minister was under strong pressure to retreat on three flanks of his New Politics. First, he was being persuaded to stick as much as possible to the foreign policy of Indira Gandhi. Secondly, he was under pressure to go slow on his domestic policy of reconciliation and accommodation with regional political forces. Thirdly, he was being urged to fall back on self-reliance. After some four months of inner-party and inner-government struggles, the prime minister appears to have partially conceded some ground on the first and the third, but regained his initiative on the second.

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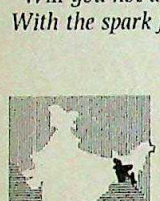
BANGLADESH

Ershad's Gamble

ON THE eve of the Bangladesh elections, with one major opposition group standing for election and the other staging a boycott, the straight split in the Opposition ranks was proving crucial for President Ershad who, meanwhile, was busy chalking up an impressive pre-election score. Senior Correspondent INDRANIL BANERJIE *was in Dhaka last fortnight assessing the situation. His report:*

"Will you not awake to light the lamp
With the spark from the thunder".
General H.M. Ershad

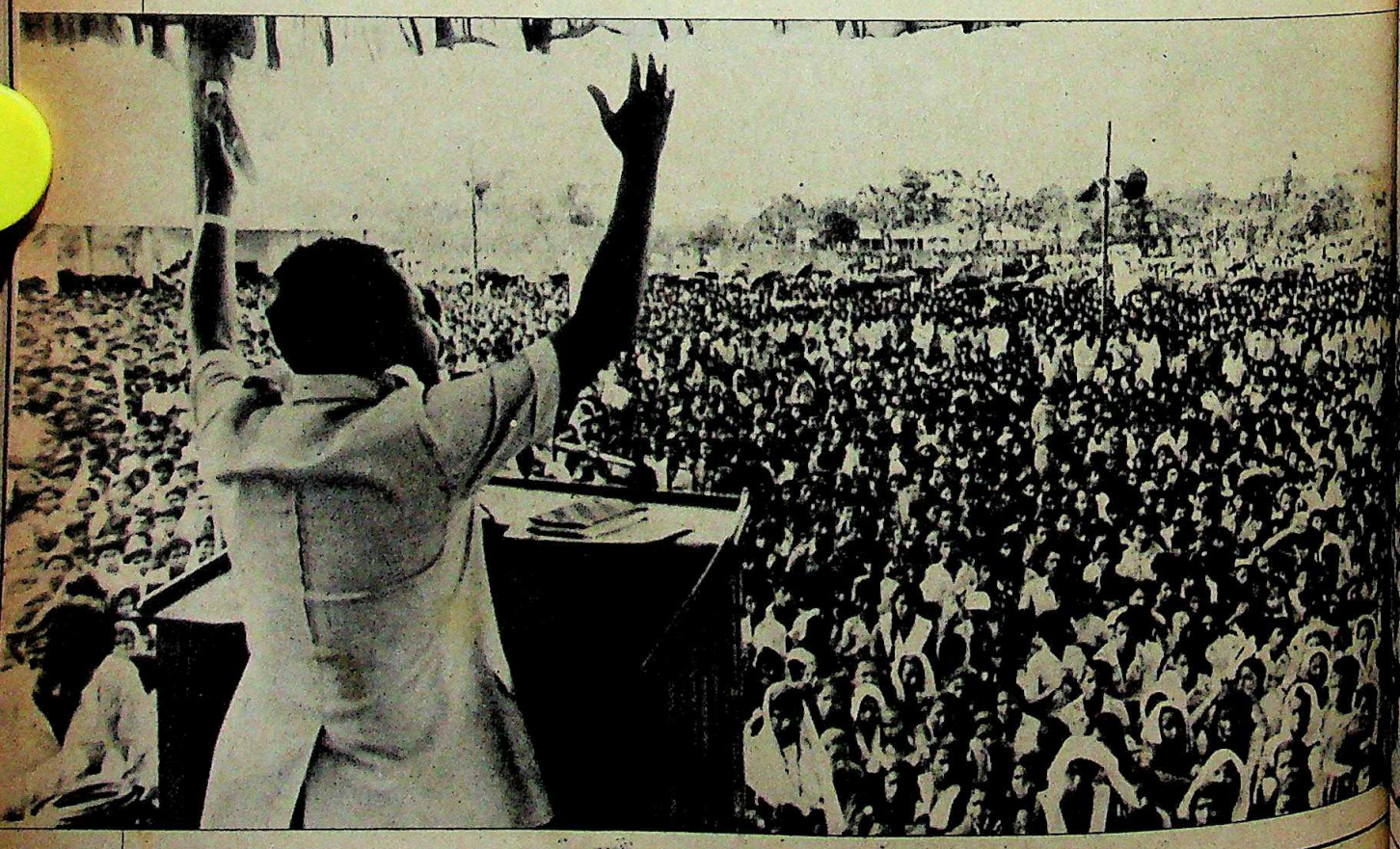


LAST fortnight, as the count-down began to the third parliamentary elections fixed for May 7 by President Ershad, Bangladesh split into two opposing camps: one determined to go to the hustings and the other equally determined to stay away. Most enthusiastic about the elections are of course, General Ershad, his new party, the Jatiya Dal (JD), and the supporters of his regime. Less enthusiastic but reluctantly clubbed in is the country's biggest and best-organised opposition group, the eight-party Awami League alliance led by Sheikh Hasina Wajed, daughter of assassinated President Mujibur Rahman.

The other major opposition group, including the seven-party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) alliance and numerous other parties like the powerful Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BKSHAL) formed in 1975 by Mujibur Rahman which are all opposing the polls, consider both Ershad's and the Awami League's claims to be wholly spurious. Begum Khaleda Zia, widow of assassinated President Zia-ur Rahman and leader of the BNP alliance, has repeatedly threatened to disrupt the polls and feels there is no point contesting with martial law still in force, the constitution suspended and fundamental rights curbed. "The election is a blueprint to legalise the illegal military Government," says she. At well-attended public meetings throughout the country, she has been hinting that the Awami League has betrayed the people by falling in line with Ershad's conspiracy to legitimise his rule.

With the Opposition in Bangladesh split, the tepid electoral mood suggests that it will be Ershad who will light the victory lamp.

Begum Zia's stance has struck a responsive chord among large sections of



Ershad at rally: chalking up points

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...Bangladeshi people, sceptical as they have become after 15 years of political double-think, violent coups and mutinies, as well as the velvet promises of iron-handed dictators. Bangladesh's highly militant and vocal student community, which has proved to be the Ershad regime's most implacable foe since the infamous police firing in February 1983 when at least 27 students were massacred, has, inspired by Begum Zia, exploded into action. Pro-Awami League students were attacked, pitched battles were fought with the police and from the beginning of April, bombs and crackers started shattering the peace.

Even the parties participating in the polls were, by last fortnight, beginning to voice their anxiety about the Government's partisanship. Though it is well known that the leader of the Jatiya Party is Ershad, the president is supposed to have no official connection with the party. BNP leaders allege that not only is the president's portrait being used on all JD posters but that even the posters are being printed at the government press at government cost. Moreover, government telephone and transport facilities are being used by JD candidates and Ershad is openly campaigning for his party.

These developments are proving embarrassing to the Awami League, since it had earlier pledged not to participate in the elections till the Government conceded its charter of demands: immediate end to martial law, restoration of fundamental rights and the establishment of a democratic atmosphere to enable resumption of political activities, election of a sovereign parliament to decide all policy issues before presidential elections, release of political prisoners and an inquiry into the February 1983 massacre.

On March 21 this year, a clearly annoyed Ershad went on television to declare that this was the "last chance" for the opposition parties, and hinted that sterner measures would be imposed if they failed to respond.

Bangladesh's militant students have proved to be Ershad's most implacable foe since the police firing on students in February '83.

The widespread feeling that the Awami League has been cowed down by this threat is understandable considering that the decision to contest was announced by Sheikh Hasina the day after Ershad's TV broadcast. Five, albeit minor, parties broke with the Awami League alliance, leaving eight parties (after the merger of a few) in the alliance. For a week, the BNP alliance remained undecided, but ultimately decided to stay out and condemn the Awami League while the Government graciously acceded to the Awami League's request to postpone the election date from April 26 to May 7.

"It's simply not true that we betrayed our pledge," declared Hasina, maintaining that, "what most people are unaware of is that even the BNP had intially agreed to contest the elections." The BNP, however, maintains that the Awami League's decision was taken unilaterally.

From then on, the Opposition's campaign degenerated into a slanging match between Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina. More important is the undoubted fact that the BNP has been seriously emasculated by large-scale defections of its senior leaders to Ershad's JD (*see interview*). Defections from the Awami League have been negli-

Police vs students: explosive element

LUFTAR RAHMAN BINU

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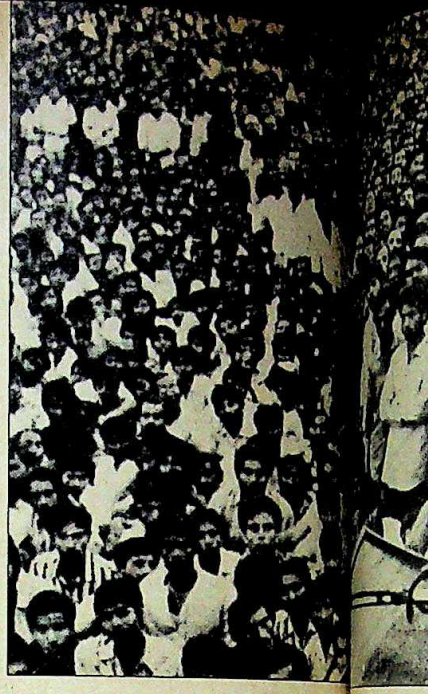
gible, though a couple of heavyweights like Vice-President Korabn Ali and Mizanur Rahman Choudhury, former information minister, have crossed over.

Ershad, meanwhile, has been steadily chalking up points, his daily trips to far corners of the country being televised along with his message: "Whatever promises I have given to the people, I have so far been able to keep all, except I have not been able to give you a democratic government. But on May 7, *inshallah*, I will be able to give my final gift to you all."

Ershad, unlike Pakistan President Zia-ul-Haq, shrewdly kept away the *mullahs* from the Government and steered clear of fundamentalist forces. His progressive drug policy—now a model for third world countries—the setting up of "family courts" where a married woman can sue her husband on matrimonial and divorce matters for just 25 takas (against the normal 500 taka fee), and the decision to involve women in policing and other jobs have won him considerable support among the basically liberal Bangladeshi peasantry. And the country's small but influential business community was,

LUTAR RAHMAN BINU



Sheikh Hasina (left) and Begum Zia: debilitating duel

acoording to Dhaka Chamber of Commerce President Mahbubur Rahman, "won over by President Ershad's decision to denationalise 35 jute mills, 33 textile mills and two banks which had belonged to Bangladeshis before Sheikh Mujibur Rahman socialised the country".

But even President Ershad cannot deny that many basic problems remain.

GENERAL ERSHAD

"Martial law will go"

"A NEW Bangladesh shall we build, this solemn vow we take anew" wrote General Ershad, Bangladesh strongman, in a recent poem. And he says it is in fulfilling this vow that he decided to take the country to the polls—with himself at the helm of the Jatiya Dal, which boasts that it will secure a two-third's majority in Parliament.

Through four years as Bangladesh's dictator, Ershad has miraculously been free of any coup attempts, and the country's vociferous opposition has so far been able to do little other than force a postponing of the elections, first promised last year. This Ershad attributes to "hard work" and the almightly Allah. "I don't believe we can ever change what is destined," Ershad explained during an interview in Dhaka last fortnight with INDIA TODAY *Senior Correspondent* INDRANIL BANERJIE. *Excerpts:*

Q. Why did you decide to call elections now?

A. I had pledged that I would restore democracy in the country, and for the last two years I have been trying to call elections. But the opposition parties were refusing to participate. This time I decided to go it alone even if no other party came forward. It was wise of the Awami League to agree to the polls.

Q. Why were the opposition parties refusing to participate?

A. They thought they would be able to create a mass uprising. But they could not muster people. They had no cause and our credit balance was better.

Q. Why does the* BNP *continue to oppose the elections?

A. The BNP does not exist as a party. If they had decided to participate, they would not have been able to put up more than 30 or 40 candidates since most BNP leaders have joined our party. I think Hasina (Awami League) herself mentioned that 178 former BNP MP's have joined the Jatiya Dal.

Q. But the* BNP *alleges that you are not allowing many middle-level* BNP *leaders to contest the polls?

A. Most of the BNP ministers had been convicted by the BNP government itself on corruption charges. Now the BNP wants them to contest but they are debarred by the election rules which impose a five-year ban following their conviction.

Q. Do you expect free and fair elections under martial law?

A. The Opposition are the rigging experts and the whole country knows it. How can the Government rig the polls? There are over 30 parties taking part and their representatives will be present at every polling booth. How is it possible to rig? One day or the other, people will come to know whether the election results are true or not. Besides I don't want to remain president in a country where the people don't have faith in me.

Q. What will be the use of a Parliament and what will be its relationship with you since you will remain the President?

A. With the completion of the parliamentary elections, the suspended Constitution will be revived and martial

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LUFTAR RAHMAN BINU

cent during 1973-78 to 3.8 per cent in 1980-85. And a growing resource gap has been plugged by foreign aid—a record $1.85 billion are due in 1986-87.

"The Awami League had a good chance of winning but without the BNP and Khaleda Zia it is impossible now," feels Khalilur Rahman of Dhaka's leading English daily, *The Bangladesh Observer*, echoing a general sentiment. But to remain with the BNP would have meant boycotting the elections, which the Awami League could hardly afford. Says Hasina: "We know elections cannot ensure removal of a military dictatorship, but neither can continuous agitations; and since we do not have guns we can only try with the ballot-box, knowing our movement will ultimately succeed."

With the Opposition split, confused and already quite despondent, the election mood prevailing in the country is understandably quite tepid. That seems to suggest as an almost foregone conclusion that it will only be General Ershad who will light the victory lamp. But it is equally certain that there will be no spark from the thunder.

enerating discontent against the mili- ry rulers. The Dhaka Chamber had, rlier this year, drawn his attention to e fact that the "declining purchasing wer of the vast majority of the pulation", unabated smuggling, undue pressure on small trade by taxation teams in the name of tax surveying, power famine and massive hikes in power tariffs were "wreaking havoc" on the economy. Annual economic growth rates have also been declining from an average of 6.1 per

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w will go. Parliament as a legislative dy will be sovereign and my relation- p with it will be determined by the ovisions in the Constitution. Nothing re, nothing less.

Q. Have fundamental rights been tored as yet?

A. I have revived some fundamental hts. I can't remember exactly. But ople are free to write or express what- er they want. I have also dissolved all rtial law offices throughout the untry.

Q. How did you form the Jatiya Dal?

A. It was all part of a process. We eded a political party to continue with e policies and programmes taken up ring the past four years.

Q. Do you think such a young party ll be able to make any dent in the coming elections?

A. The party may be new but its ders are old. The nucleus of the party mposed of politicians who had de- ed from the BNP. Moreover, a number naller parties like the Democratic on League and an Awami League on have joined us. Our party's great- strength is the achievements of this vernment during the past four years. ody, not even the Opposition can y that they will make things better n they are.

Q. What have been your major achievements as President?

A. I have been able to give the country a new sense of direction and self-respect. I have managed to decentralise administration, beginning with the introduction of the upzilla system. Today we record all important data—like food prices and family planning—from the upzillas and take immediate action if something is wrong. We are trying to decentralise everything, to cut down bureaucratic interference and make people accountable. It's a difficult job but now we are going to get in computers to evaluate people and data and make sure things don't get bogged down.

The constitution will be revived. Parliament will be sovereign and my relation with it determined by the constitution.

Q. In Bangladesh's history, the army has played an important role in destabilising successive governments. Are you confident about the continued support and backing of the army?

A. I have changed the course of history of the country in the last four years. There has not been a single coup attempt. Today, the armed forces are happy with the situation and are totally committed to restore democracy.

Q. Countries like Bangladesh have always been a bit suspicious of India. Does this suspicion linger?

A. Suspicion has greatly been removed due to your new prime minister, especially after the SAARC. But some sections of the people are still supicious of what they consider the Indo-Soviet axis. But then there have been many positive signs—agreement on the sharing of the Ganga waters, the barbed wire fence not coming up. We, however, have been disappointed by India's refusal to hand over the Tin Bigha corridor. After all, India is a big country and it can afford to be more generous.

Q. What is your dream about Bangladesh?

A. The aim is to mitigate some suffering, some pain, not by words but by policy decisions. If we can improve the conditions of the villages, Bangladesh will automatically take off. It has been static for centuries. It has to shrug off this weariness and I have showed that this is not impossible.

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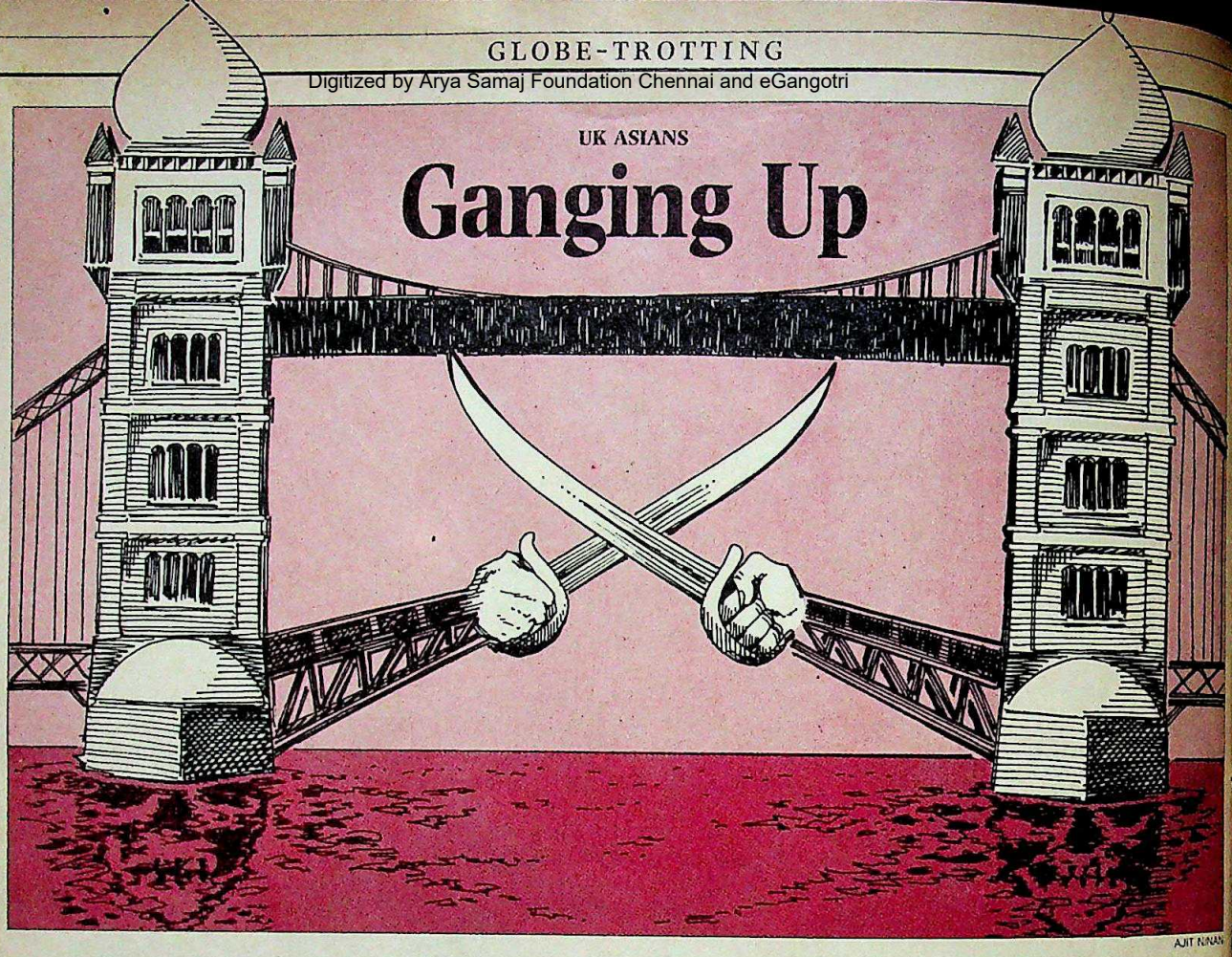
UK ASIANS

Ganging Up



AJIT NINAN

A SECRET Scotland Yard police dossier on Asian gangs dealing in protection, drugs and prostitution and battling for control in west London has created deep misgivings among the Asian community and growing apprehension for senior detectives in Asian-dominated boroughs. The dossier's sprawling study on Asian gangs is redolent of Chinese Tongs, the Italian mafiosi and crime syndicates in the US.

The alarming dossier diligently prepared by Scotland Yard's research team states that violent clashes between Asian gangs in London have been growing for the past one year. Organised crime and gang fights within the Asian communities of west London emerged after a series of pitched battles involving Sikh youths from May 1, 1983, to February, 1984. After the arrest of gang leaders there was a lull until January last year. The violence—says the Yard report—has escalated since.

A police coordinating committee set up to combat and monitor the situation commissioned a detailed research document at its meeting of October 29 last year. The report identifies the names and organisational set-up of the gangs, their criminal activities, motivation, distribution and effects on the community. The report states: "The fact is that the gangs are fighting and that serious injuries have been caused. The fact that no deaths have occurred is fortunate." The police report states that at stake may be the leadership of the "disaffected Sikh youth of Southall and Hounslow", who have grown in militancy since the race riots of 1979 and 1981. Five groups—two major and three minor—have come in for special attention:

The Tooti Nungs: This is one of the oldest in west London. The Yard dossier states that the likely origin of the name could be a corruption of "Nihang". Apparently, most members do not wear turbans. Their activities allegedly include protection, drugs and, in a small way, prostitution, with drugs being the main source of income. The Tooti Nungs—known in local street jargon as "the Toots"—are hired to resolve local disputes between Asians in the community which are settled with money or violence. The Toots have a two-tier rank system—the over-20s and the under-20s. There are reportedly 200 known members but the police say the actual membership could run into thousands. The gang has branches in Gravesend, Leicester, Wolverhampton and Birmingham.

The Holy Smokes: The name is said to have originated from the burning of the Hamborough Tavern in 1981 by Southall youth and to emphasise the "higher caste" nature of the Sikh members. It was basically formed to confront National Front (NF) thugs who made forays into Southall. Many belonged to the erstwhile Southall Youth Movement but the police report states that the gang has now drifted into a variety of criminal activities. It has a three-tier rank system and is known to have branches in Birmingham. They are known locally as "the Holies".

The Billi Boys: Whereas the two major groups are predominantly Sikh, this group is mainly Hindu and originated in the Wembley and Willesden areas. The report states that the Billi Boys or Billi Brothers are "allied" with the Tooti-Nungs.

The Cranford Crusaders: This little-known group is believed to have its base at "the Berkeley Arms" in Cranford and is suspected to be carrying on a running duel with white youths in Hounslow. It is believed to have an alliance with the Holy Smokes.

The A1 Gang: A small group which earned its name from the A1 Mini Cab

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...ere. The police report states that this ...roup has a drug connection.

With such comical names, at first ...ance they could have been dismissed as ...ouths getting together for some harm...ess mischief. Instead the Scotland Yard ...ssier draws up a chilling catalogue of ...mes committed by the tautly-organised ...gs over the years. The report says: ...th principal gangs (the Tooti-Nungs ...d the Holy Smokes) are believed to be ...olved in local crime. An armed robbery ...Southall on November 21, 1985, in...ving young blacks is suspected to have ...n assisted by Tooti-Nungs. The extent ...organisation is supposition but it is ...ged that both gangs are involved in ...rtion and extortion. It is strongly ...pected, but not positively established, ...t both gangs are heavily involved in ...distribution of drugs."

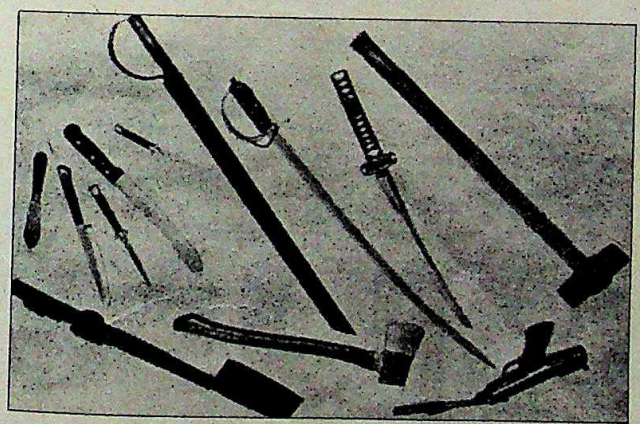
Last October, after a gang fight be...n the "Toots" and the "Holies", the ...e were startled to discover a vicious ...e of weapons that included ceremo...words, meat cleavers, hammers and ...ed stars. The most bizarre aspect of ...comprehensive Scotland Yard report ...e allegation of "ritual rape". Says the ...t: "There is some evidence of ritual ...s but as victims may be reluctant to ...t these to police, the full picture is not ...wn. It is believed that ritual rape is a ...e of a Tooti-Nung initia...ceremony."

...e report states that follow...e affrays of 1983, it was ...gnised that many other inci...s were gang-oriented. Fol...g the setting up of a re...h team to monitor Asian ...s a police micro-computer ...stalled in Southall to con...e with the inquiry. Appar...400 names are on file and ...port states that this may ...be the "tip of the iceberg". ...nd Yard frankly acknowl...s that their inquiry was be...ed by a lack of firm information from ...the Asian communities and a ...of understanding" of the picture by ...police officers. If real progress is to be ...e, the report goes on, target surveil...e, liaison and community coopera...e of paramount importance.

...e most police reports, the Scotland ...report is grim and ominous but not ...y eloquent as to the sociological ...s of why youthful Asians are being ...n into gangland crime. Referring to ...ooti-Nung gang, the report makes a ...mention that, rejected by the host ...unity (read 'white') and with no desire to return to Punjab, the poor achiever in the Sikh community seeks solace in the security provided by a gang.

A GRAVESEND-based small entrepreneur, S.S. Paintal, who came to Britain in the early 1960s and has three sons, said: "What does Scotland Yard know about Indian or Sikh traditions to make these sweeping references? Who are their informants anyway? In my town and within our community, we strive to help one another. It is not just the Indo-Chinese who do that. When he saw that he was not suited to pursuing academic studies, my eldest boy became a welder. My other sons, being of different temperament, will follow more intellectual pursuits. All three speak Cockney, but they speak Punjabi too. All wear turbans and we try to visit India once every year. We are a tightly-knit family. I fail to understand what bloody status a youngster acquires should he become part of one of these stupid gangs."

The police report refers to 'status' in a community by providing "sanctuary from at best a disinterested, or at worst, a hostile white community". This is endorsed by many Asians who spoke to INDIA TODAY. L.S. Grewal, an elderly Ealing-based Asian says: "I used to live in Southall for years. Subtle racism has always existed in this country. But when you live in an Asian stronghold like Southall, Wembley or Leicester it is less palpable. Today, racism has taken a more violent and ugly form. You could get attacked in a tube by a National Front thug for no apparent provocation except that you are brown-skinned or you may be better dressed than the skinhead. I do grant that some of our youngsters have got into undesirable activities like drug-running but do not forget that the Holy Smokes did a great service to the entire Indian community by bashing the hell out of NF goons in Southall."



Weapons recovered from Asian Gangs

Even if people like Grewal are right about the origin of gangs like the Holy Smokes, today Asian gangs have gone far beyond being just 'protection squads' for the Asian community. Community elders say unemployment among the Asian youth is a prime factor. Says Wembley resident B.S. Patel: "If there are two applicants—one white and one brown—for a job slot, you can bet your last dime that the white will get the job, even if the Asian may be better qualified. Now a couple of experiences like that can get terribly demoralising. Can you blame our youngsters for taking out their frustration in other dangerous activities?"

But elders like Patel and Paintal also admit that family bonds among Asians are "disintegrating" or are "not what they used to be", which in turn could lead the youngsters astray. Except to talk about increased gainful employment for Asian youths, community elders seem to have a disquieting lack of ideas or solutions to the problems confronting them.

Understandably, the police report has raised the hackles of the Asian community elders, who are incensed that the proud record of the community is being questioned. Some leaders have questioned the validity of the report, drawing parallels to what they describe as a "smear campaign" against Afro-Caribbean youth a decade ago. They feel the police coordination committees and computers ought to be more gainfully utilised against "fascist thugs" (a reference to the National Front) who roam Asian boroughs, attacking and burning Asian homes with apparent impunity. Some young Asian gang members, while admitting that they do have gang fights, insist that the allegations of ritual rape are " pure rubbish".

There is little doubt that the report may be rather exaggerated and oversinister but the police dossier has been based on meticulous research bolstered by a catalogue of incidents related to drug-running and extortion. Obviously Asian elders in areas like Southall, Hounslow, Wembley and Willesden ought to refocus their attention on their idle youngsters. And community welfare officers have a formidable task confronting them if more macabre Yard dossiers "on Asian armies terrorising London's streets" are to be avoided in the future.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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NEPAL

Monumental Effort

AS A PLACE of pilgrimage it ranks with Mecca, Jerusalem, the Vatican, Varanasi and Amritsar. In antiquity it predates them all. But for centuries, Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha a few miles across the India-Nepal border in the terai region of central Nepal, has remained a monument to neglect. Only now is the world beginning to pay rightful tribute to mankind's earliest apostle of compassion—Prince Siddhartha, who came to be known as Buddha, the Enlightened one. An unusual memorial is being constructed at Lumbini which, like the man and his message, will transcend national boundaries: it is a UN project funded by contributions from around the globe and supervised by a committee of 15 Asian nations.

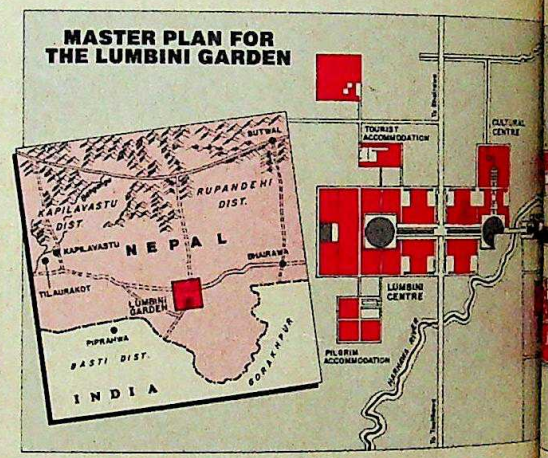
Ironically enough, the inspiration behind the resurrection of Lumbini was a man long dead and virtually forgotten. Nineteen years ago, Lumbini was a forgotten wilderness till U Thant, then secretary-general of the United Nations and a Buddhist himself, visited the site. Anguished by its run-down condition, U Thant appealed to King Mahendra to develop Lumbini as a sacred garden and centre for world peace. The King agreed and in 1970, an international committee for the development of Lumbini was set up by the UN to "create a living, growing centre that could help foster international peace and understanding."

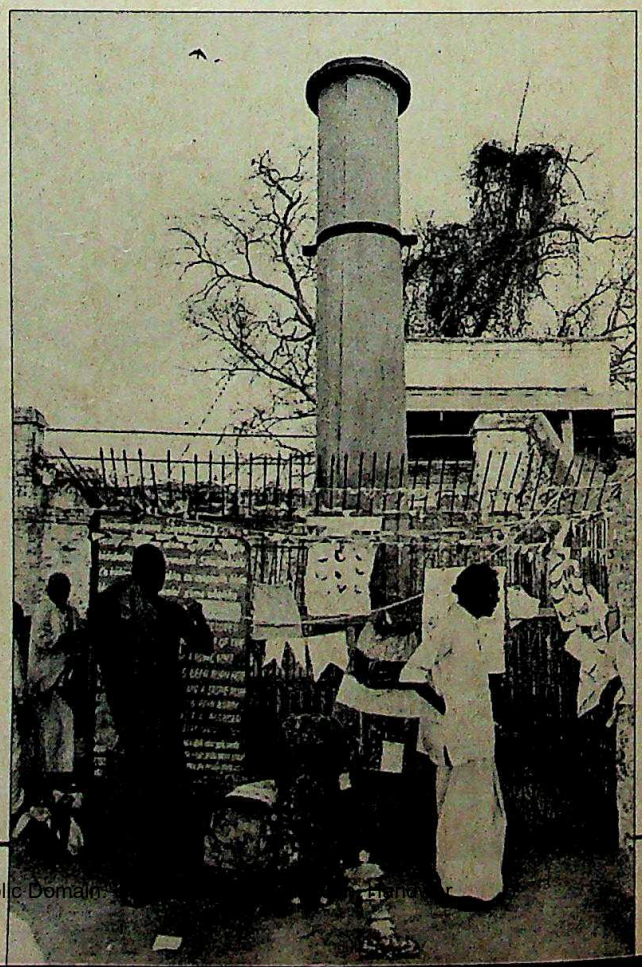
The idea soon caught on. The United Nations Development Fund contributed $1 million to commission celebrated Japanese architect Professor Kenzo Tange to prepare a master plan. With this began a frantic fund collection drive. The master plan, completed in 1978, visualised transforming the three square mile area into the kind of sylvan glade it was at the time of the Buddha's birth. Legend has it that in 623 BC the Sakya queen Mayadevi gave birth to Siddhartha while passing through this sal forest on her way to her maternal home. Evidence of the event is provided by a stone pillar erected here in 249 BC by Emperor Ashoka with an inscription in the Brahmi script identifying Lumbini as the spot where Buddha Sakyamuni (the sage of the Sakya clan) was born. Around the pillar, archaeologists have excavated ancient monasteries and stupas dating to the time of Ashoka's visit. The area is a treasure trove of ancient artifacts and archaeologists have dug up rare pottery, coins and terracotta objects, confirming the belief that Lumbini became an important pilgrimage centre soon after the Buddha's death.

The pillar and the excavated ruins are now being transformed into a "sacred garden" enclosed by a circular pond of water. This will be the focal point of the Lumbini project. Existing buildings are to be removed and the ruins divided by elevated grassy walkways. To the north of the garden, a block of 40 monasteries and viharas is planned with a cultural centre comprising a library, museum and an institution of Buddhist research. Further north will be the new Lumbini village, service centre for the complex with facilities like hotels and camping grounds, restaurants, police station and tourist information and immigration services.

The village will be linked to the sacred garden by a central canal and walkway passing through the monastic block. "The sacred garden represents the past and the village the present. And to make the trip from the present to the past, pilgrims will have to walk along the canal or use paddle boats. From any point along the central walkway, the Ashoka pillar will be visible," says Amrit Sresthacharya, 34, deputy project manager at Lumbini.

The entire area of three square miles—three blocks of one square mile each—is to be heavily wooded with sal





Buddhist pilgrims at the pillar: paying homage

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...d fruit trees; 620,000 trees have al... ...ady been planted. The newly expanded ...hairhawa airport enables Royal Nepal ...lines to run daily services from Kath... ...mandu and Nepalganj, and a new road ...ks backward Bhairhawa with ...mbini. The airport, the road, electricity ...d water supply are part of the essential ...frastructural facilities provided by the ...epal Government at a cost of $ 7 million ...a token of its commitment to the ...ject.

Lumbini, when it is ready, will above ...be a monument to international co... ...eration. India and Thailand jointly ...nsored a resolution asking the UN to ...e over the project. Eight countries including India, Nepal, Japan and the US have set up national committees to raise resources for the project while the World Fellowship of Buddhists will mobilise resources from its 74 chapters in Buddhist communities. (India will finance the $ 2 million museum which will house relics of the Buddha's life collected from all over the world). Member countries and Buddhist organisations have already pledged $ 11 million out of the $ 55 million required to complete the project. Says the international committee's coordinator Romen Basu: "Funds will never be a problem for a project of this nature."

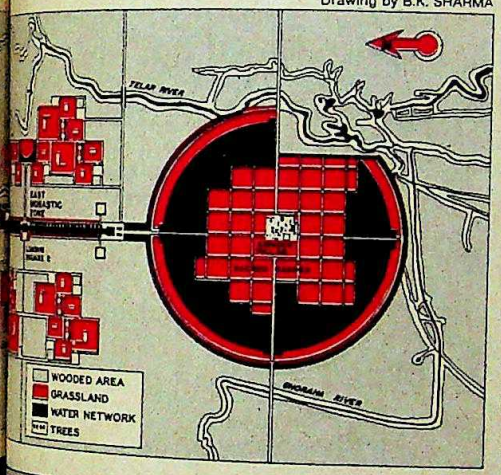
Nevertheless, work has been slow, and pressure has built up for a quickening of the pace. This prompted the Nepal Parliament to constitute, last August, a high level trust to take over the reins of the Lumbini project. King Birendra is the trust's patron and his younger brother Prince Gyanendra is chairman. "Now people can be assured that the donations are properly used. This reassurance is the main reason for forming the trust," says B.L. Shrestha, 51, Lumbini project manager.

Shrestha admits that the 10-year-old project is behind schedule by three years. They had to first acquire 774 hectares of land and relocate eight or nine villages outside the project area. "This kind of work is more problematic than putting up a building, but unless there is a building some people say no work is being done", he says. Another reason for the delay was soil instability in the area where the buildings of the cultural centre are to come up. An international meeting took stock of this problem in June 1984 and since Lumbini is in the earthquake zone and the buildings are expected to last at least 500 years, it was decided not to take any risks. Extensive soil densification and foundation work is expected to be completed this year, after which construction of the buildings in the cultural centre will start.

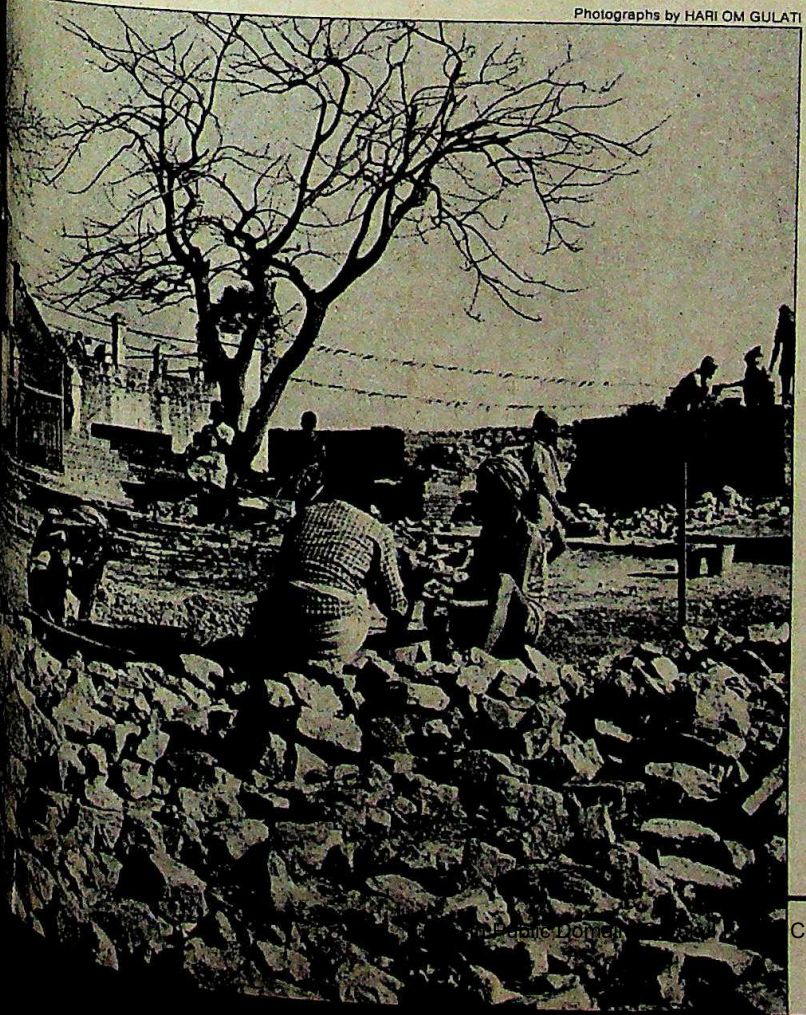
The work would have progressed faster had differences not arisen between archaeologists and engineers over the design of the sacred garden and the fate of the ancient ruins within it. When the master plan was being finalised it was not realised that the archaeological digs around the pillar would yield such a priceless horde of antiquities. Archaeologists oppose the plan to surround the sacred garden by a pond of water till all digging work has been completed. Otherwise, they argue, the ruins and relics that could still be below the soil would get submerged and lost to posterity. Dr Prayag Raj Sharma, 46, professor of Nepali history in the Centre for Nepali and Asian Studies at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University says he is "not happy" with the water pond. "Submerging part of the site before finishing proper excavation would be like committing a crime against archaeology. Excavation is a major component of the project, but it is not being done with desirable speed. One gets the impression they are more involved in setting up a five star hotel and recreational facilities for pilgrims," he complains.

The chief archaeologist of Lumbini, Tara Nanda Misra, is equally vehement: "Lumbini is still not in the hands of archaeologists; the engineers do what they want. We are being heard now. The trust has been formed because the King wants to put the area under the control of the archaeologists." Shrestha hastens to allay the archaeologists' fears. "If archaeological remains are found we will again consult Tange and remove the ponds from the design. Tange himself has said he is not rigid about the design," he says. The pond would in fact help to drain

Drawing by B.K. SHARMA



Photographs by HARI OM GULATI



Rebuilding monuments with excavated bricks: reason for protest

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subsoil water from under the ruins.

Further problems arose when a Japanese landscaper working at the site complained about the conservation techniques being used by Nepalese archaeologists who were virtually rebuilding some of the old monuments using old bricks excavated from the site. Misgivings were also expressed about the way deep trenches had been dug near the pillar, damaging layers of ancient bricks visible underneath. The apprehension that the old ruins might be damaged has prompted some member countries of the international committee to suggest that outside archaeologists be brought in to supervise the work. Shreshta disclosed that it had now been decided to get archaeologists from neighbouring countries to advise and guide the archaeology work.

But these are minor controversies, the kind that are inevitable in a project of this magnitude where so many agencies and countries are involved. The final completion may be delayed, but when it is ready, there is no doubt it will restore to Lumbini the position it deserves as one of the world's prime pilgrimage centres.

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Lumbini

KAPILAVASTU

Site Strife

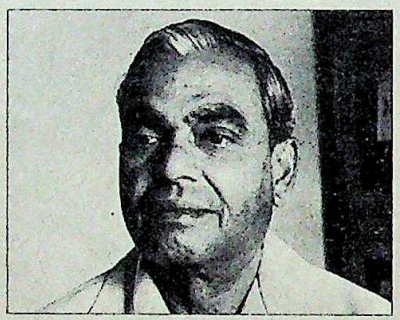
WHERE exactly is the ancient city of Kapilavastu, capital of the Sakya kingdom of Sudhodhana where Buddha spent the first 29 years of his life? Is it at Tilaurakot in Nepal, 20 km west of Lumbini, as Nepalese archaeologists and some British scholars have insisted, or is Kapilavastu really in India at Piprahwa in Uttar Pradesh's Basti district, 11 km south-west of Lumbini?

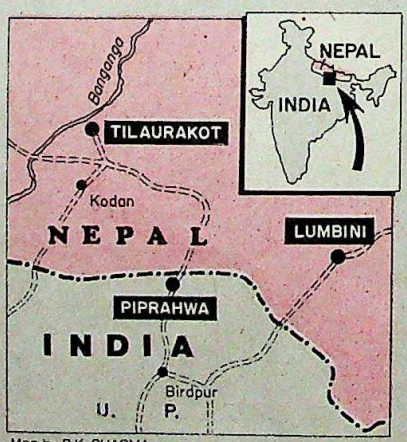
Lack of agreement on this vital question has been a source of friction between Indian and Nepalese archaeologists and historians since 1972 when the claim was first made that Piprahwa was Kapilavastu. With Lumbini now being developed as an international pilgrimage centre, the controversy threatens to erupt once again with fierce intensity. This is primarily because the site which is established as being the real location of Kapilavastu will eventually become part of the Lumbini pilgrimage circuit.

The differences over the identity of the real Kapilavastu arise more out of attitude and interpretation rather than actual fact. Ancient Chinese pilgrims Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang differed about the distance of Kapilavastu from Lumbini and on their varying accounts rests, partly, the case of the two sides. Hiuen Tsang wrote that Kapilavastu was 16 miles from Lumbini while Fa Hien put it at nine miles. The Nepalese vouch for Hiuen Tsang's account because the distance he mentioned corresponds with the distance from Lumbini to Tilaurakot. Indian scholars insist that Kapilavastu was actually nine miles from Lumbini and the difference in the two versions arose because Fa Hien went straight from Piprahwa to Lumbini while Hiuen Tsang took a roundabout route.

Nepalese historians and scholars like Dr Prayag Raj Sharma of the Tribhuvan University base their claim for Tilaurakot on the descriptions of Kapilavastu in Buddhist texts and

Srivastava: wasted effort





Map by B.K. SHARMA

scriptures which said that Kapilavastu was on the banks of the Ganga river. The city gates, ramparts and fortifications excavated at Tilaurakot overlook the Banaganga river. "It is a more extensive site, a defended settlement and has mud ramparts, a trait of ancient capitals," says Sharma. "Piprahwa does not have defence walls which a capital city must have. There is no housing at Piprahwa, only monasteries and a big stupa," adds Tara Nanda Misra.

In spite of this Sharma admits that no "concrete evidence" has come up to substantiate Tilaurakot's claim. Such evidence does exist for Piprahwa. As far back as 1898 a stone coffer was excavated from a stupa at Piprahwa with an inscription that "this receptacle of relics of the blessed Buddha (is the pious gift) of the Sakyas". In 1972, K.M. Srivastava of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) dug deeper and came across a soapstone casket containing bones and ashes, which have since been accepted by scholars and historians as the corporal relics of the Buddha. It is obvious that the Buddha's clansmen would have brought his relics back to the capital, argues Srivastava. Excavations at Piprahwa after this momentous find yielded terracotta seals and the lid of a pot carrying the inscription "Kapilavastu Bhikshu Sangha" and as far as Srivastava is concerned "this conclusively clinched the long-standing controversy about the identification of Kapilavastu".

But much heartburn was in store for Srivastava. The Nepal Government protested to India about the claim and the ASI and the Central Government shied away from pronouncing officially on the subject. Unofficially both admit that they are convinced Piprahwa is Kapilavastu, but their silence intrigues and angers Srivastava. "I don't know why the Government is so weak. Nepal may be a neighbour, but can we ignore facts?" he asks. His colleagues say he should have been hailed and honoured for his find, but lack of official backing has soured his achievements. He took recourse to writing and published several accounts of his discovery which he says has become the victim of political boundaries. Abroad at least he is recognised but this is small comfort to Srivastava who was superceded and retired from the ASI last year, disillusioned and unsung.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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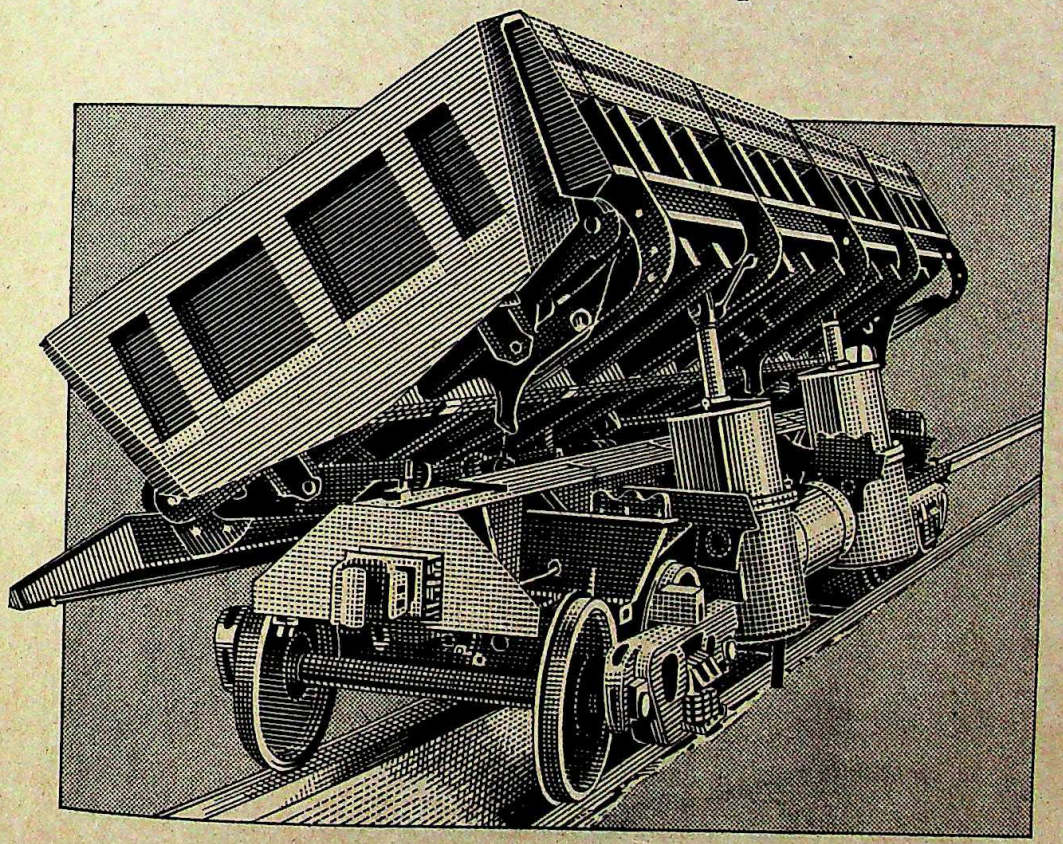
Burn's Auto Dump Cars– Technological innovation for the service of steel plants



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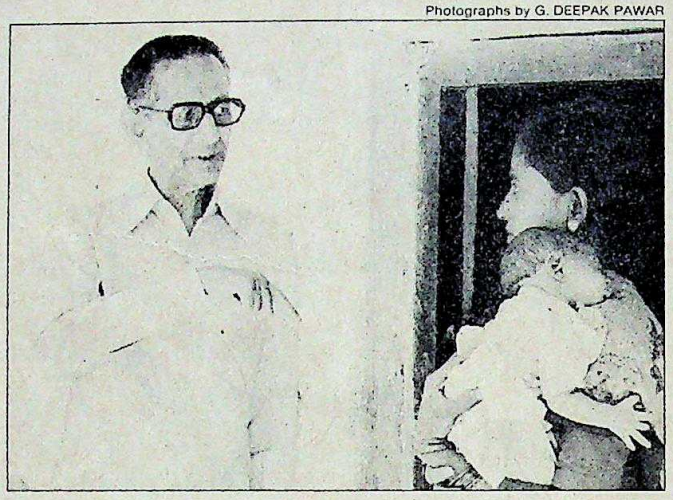
FAMILY PLANNING

Achieving the Impossible

Photographs by G. DEEPAK PAWAR



Project director Rao with villager

THE STATISTICS are dream-like. Of the 42 eligible couples in Gangasandra (pop: 330), 38 have adopted family planning of their own volition. Of the remaining four couples, three have one child each and plan to have another before they go in for family planning. The remaining couple have two daughters and are waiting for a son. The quiet revolution in this nondescript village offers India's harassed family planning experts a shining ray of hope.

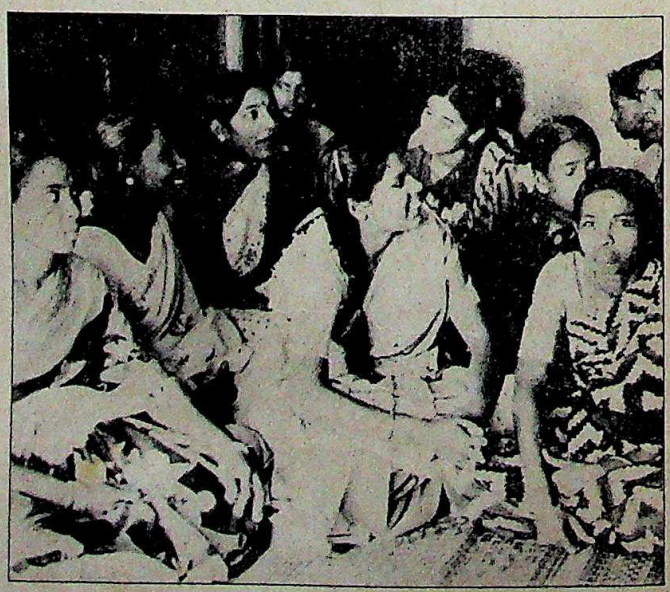
Gangasandra, a tiny village 60 km from Bangalore, is one of the 334 villages in the Malur taluk of Karnataka's Kolar district which were handed over by the Government to the Family Planning Association of India (FPAI) in 1976, as an experiment—the first of its kind. Never before had a single village been handed over to a non-government agency for promoting family planning and, as in this case, given *carte blanche*.

The arrangement officially ended in 1979 with district authorities satisfied with the "significant results". But the FPAI's job was far from over: it stayed on to follow up and consolidate the work it had done. Eventually satisfied with the long-term results, the FPAI is now planning to move out of Malur to other villages with the intention of achieving similar results.

The success story began when the Central Government's India Population Project (IPP) decided, as an experiment, to entrust the task of family planning promotion to an autonomous voluntary organisation because "they have a greater flexibility in management and supervision, a wider choice in the selection of personnel and deeper dedication to the cause". Said FPAI's K. Rama Rao, the director of the project: "It was an experiment which confirmed a hypothesis."

Initially, the FPAI was not sure how it should go about the job of convincing villagers to take to family planning. But it stumbled on the right approach: community participation. Since village folk would not open up to strangers on a subject as private as family planning, the FPAI realised that the volunteers and the motivators had to come from the villages. The next step was to organise youth clubs and *mahila mandals* (women's groups) and involve them in propaganda and motivation campaigns. The FPAI organised 188 such bodies with 6,125 members, besides 55 health and family planning committees.

Women at a mahila mandal meet



The going, however, was not all that easy. Says Rao: "It was initially tough bringing these men and women together under village-level organisations. The women especially were too shy." The volunteers also had to dispel the fear that a vasectomy or tubectomy leaves one bed-ridden for days. The change was gradual and took a lot of motivation and incentive. Condoms were distributed free, select villagers were given cows, sewing machines, agricultural implements and funds for setting up petty businesses as part of the "integration of family planning with developmental and income-generating activities".

In Huldenahalli, the village youth club chief Chandrashekhara Gowda promised couples green cards (issued by the state Government for the supply of subsidised rice) in return for practising family planning. In other villages, old-age pensions for the couple's parents are added to sweeten the incentive. The Janata MLA from Malur, H.B. Dyavarappa promised a community TV set to people in his native village of Hangenahalli if every eligible couple adopted family planning.

According to the FPAI survey, the project succeeded in taking the percentage of family planning acceptors among eligible couples from 11.75 to 55.54. By any yardstick, a remarkable achievement, considering the national average is only 32 per cent. The population centre of the state Government has undertaken a survey to assess the project's success.

The FPAI is positive that still more couples would take to family planning even after it leaves the village. The local volunteers would continue to motivate couples, and to ensure this, a taluk-level committee would be appointed soon, says Rao, and with justifiable pride. After all, it has been his baby.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD

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PROGRESSIVE WRITERS' ASSOCIATION

Bleak House

FIFTY years ago, Lucknow was the venue for the first conference of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). Last month, Lucknow again played host to a gathering of progressive writers, this time in commemoration of the 1936 conference. As some 500 delegates descended on the historic city to take stock of the movement and chew the cud of reminiscences, it turned out that the 50 years had not been very kind to the PWA and the movement had lost much of its initial zeal and thunder.

For an association that spearheaded the whole progressive movement in Indian literature, the PWA stands a much weakened force today. There was a time when almost every senior writer was associated with it and the movement gave the subcontinent some of its most significant literature.

Today, however, the active participation of its senior members has dwindled to mere patronage, while most young writers are either members of the rival CPI(M)-aligned Janvadi Lekhak Sangh or of the CPI(M-L)-led Jan Sanskriti Manch. Says Hindi writer Rajendra Yadav, who was an active PWA member in his youth and is now vice-president of the Janvadi Lekhak Sangh: "It has become more and more aligned with the establishment. The progressives, on the pretext of infiltrating the system to fight it from within, have become a part of it."

Admitted Hindi writer Bhisham Sahni, the outgoing general secretary of the National Federation of Progressive Writers (NFPW)—the new name adopted by PWA in 1975: "Yes we have become weak organisationally. After Independence the PWA became a bit scattered and the initiative towards socially oriented writing became weak." PWA's only living founder-member Mulk Raj Anand, who formed the nucleus in 1935 in London along with Sajjad Zaheer and Muhammad Deen Taseer, added sadly: "It's not only the association that has become weak. The progressive movement itself has lost momentum, largely due to sectionalism and the dispersal of the intelligentsia." Pakistani critic Sibte Hassan, one of the oldest members (who ironically died in Delhi of a heart attack soon after the conference), felt that the PWA was frittering itself away on inconsequential issues like linguistic prejudices and ideological hair-splitting.

Hindi writer Asghar Wajahat says in his book *Hindi-Urdu ki Pragatisheel Kavita* (progressive poetry in Hindi and Urdu) that the PWA began as a broad-based group of nationalists, secularists and communists. With Independence, the nationalists became content that their goal had been achieved and left the PWA. On the other hand were those who felt that this freedom was not real and that imperialists of one kind had merely been replaced by another. Then, during the Telengana and Bengal movements, several writers were arrested and the movement started falling apart.

As a result the PWA came increasingly under the control of the Marxists, and its policies and stands became more and more left-oriented. The cracks in the PWA became deeper after the Communist Party split in 1964. The decline was precipitated in 1975 when the PWA decided to support the Emergency.

PWA meetings then and now: weakened force

"It was a mistake," admits Bhisham Sahni, "and we regretted it. We supported the Emergency because we thought that it would suppress the rightist reactionary forces like the Jan Sangh and JP's movement." Another negative factor was that it distanced itself from other literary movements, isolating itself in the process.

Urdu poet and Chairman of the NFPW Presidium Ghulam Rabbani Taban, however, insists that the movement is in fact going strong. "Contrary to what people say," he says, "the movement in fact is growing. Organisationally too, it's strong. Three units—Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar—are quite active while others are doing good work in their own limited spheres."

This is true but only in a small way. While some writers feel that the association should be made more broadbased, others believe that all it needs are catalystic circumstances. As Hindi critic Namvar Singh, an active NFPW executive committee member, says: "The movement began with a sense of crisis. This sense of crisis doesn't arise often. But now it's building up, what with the threat of nuclear warfare on the international front and the increasing regionalism, communalism and sectarianism on the national front. I guess this might give the movement fresh impetus and a new lease of life."

—MOHAMMED ASLAM

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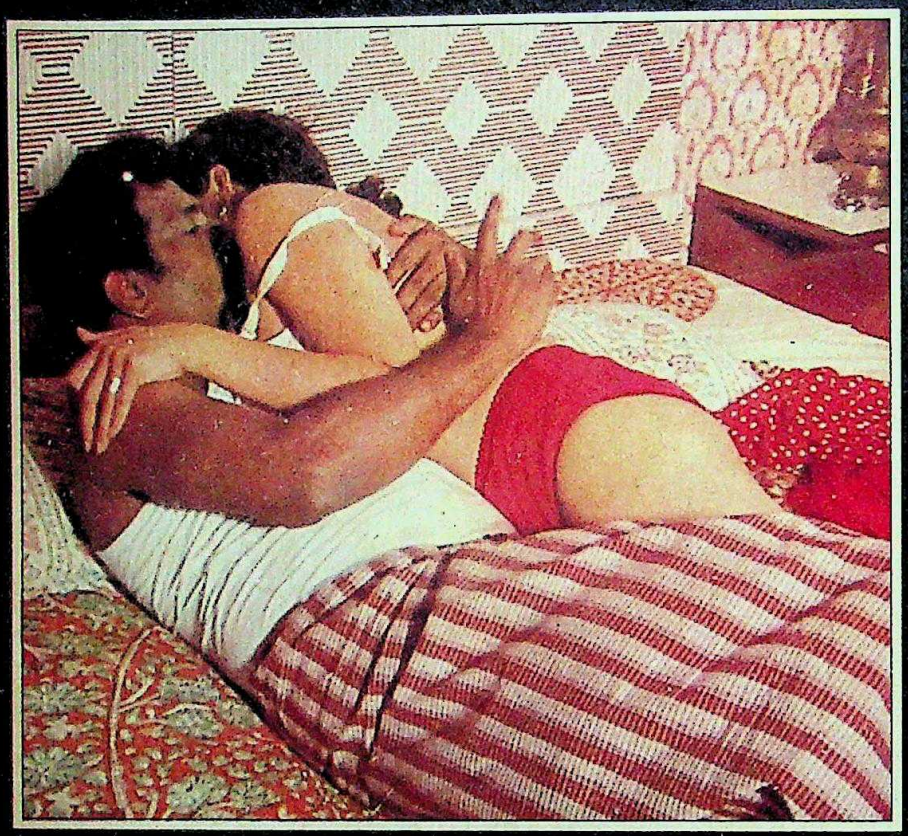
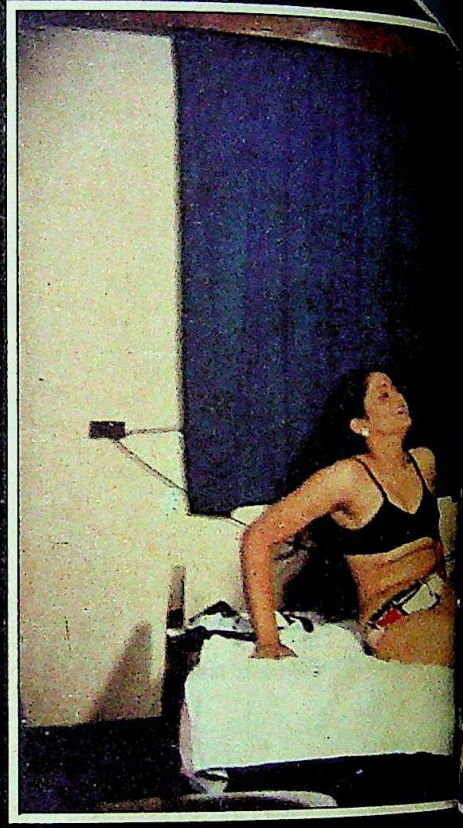
Showing soft-porn films in mofussil areas and even in so





... Of the 32-odd films released this year, 14 have 'blue' scenes wh not sh

MALAYALAM FILMS

The Smut Glut

KERALA is steaming, and the reasons have nothing to do with the onset of summer. Bare breasts, hairy chests and various other parts of the human anatomy are erupting like a rash across the state's cinema screens and the audience is literally lapping it all up in lascivious delight, unmindful of censors and other sundry guardians of public morality. The soft porn plague is here and getting harder with every lustful scene.

The recipe is simple. Take one 'masala' Malayalam film. Interpolate it with uncensored 'blue' scenes. And Erotica! The cash register goes haywire. The floodgates opened last year following the stupendous success of *Ottayan* (lone tusker). *Ottayan* had a half a dozen interpolated rape and nude scenes which were subsequently spotted and banned by the censors for a period of six months. Now, suddenly, an avalanche of semi-pornographic movies churned out from Kodambakkam in Madras has flooded the mofussil areas of Kerala.

Directors like K.S. Gopalakrishnan, embolden by runaway successes, are getting bolder by making films like *Pidikitapulli* (wanted man) and *Karinagam* (king cobra) replete with steamy sex scenes which were never shown to the censors. When censors confiscated a print of *Pidikitapulli*, the sex scenes were missing, but two weeks later the same film was running to packed houses in a suburban Trivandrum theatre, with the scenes reinserted.

The soft-porn boom has hit the commercial cinema like a bolt from the blue. Recently, at Attingal, 40 km from Trivandrum, the year's biggest box-office hit, *Vaartha* was running to empty houses. As P.V. Gangadharan, president of the Kerala film chamber and also producer of *Vaartha*, says sorrowfully: "Super-hit family dramas in the cities are flopping in mofussil areas because the average mofussil cine-goer in these areas is lured by these soft-porn films with interpolated sex scenes." Gangadharan claims that the very existence of good clean commercial

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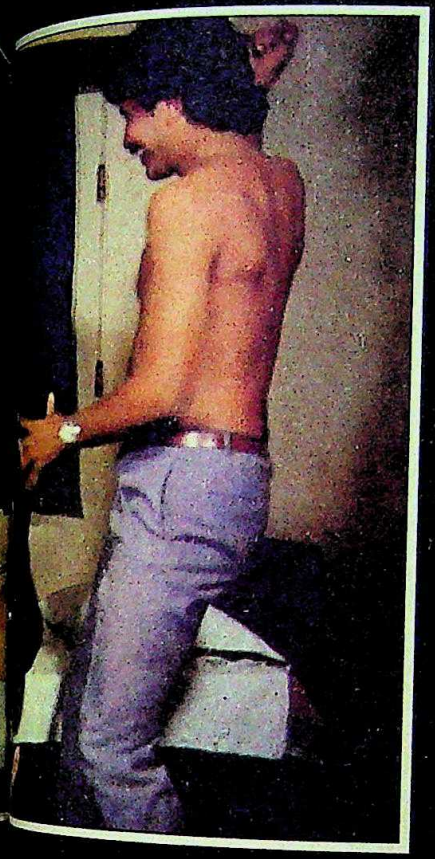
...now become the biggest organised racket in Kerala...



...es wh...not shown to the censors but later interpolated into the picture.

...ema is threatened by the smut glut. Kerala cinema has had a long-time ...with soft-porn, but the trend had ...ed to show a downturn. Undaunted ...e setbacks, local producers then hit ...e idea of introducing uncensored ...polated scenes with the main picture. ...last year, Mani, a veteran director ...had fallen on hard times, made the ...*Ottayan* with a rape and revenge ...e, added interpolated scenes and ...ased it in all the main centres in ...ala. The six-minute rape scene show- ...e heroine's blouse ripped off and the ...n massaging her ponderous breasts. ...lm, made at a cost of Rs 10 lakh, ...ed Rs 12 lakh in two weeks before the ...rs caught on and banned it. ...er the ban, producers and distribu- ...f smut films shifted from the cities to ...llages. Car-loads of students from ...edrum make daily pilgrimages to ...vayoor or Attingal to see soft-porn. ...ree Krishna' theatre named after the deity at Guruvayoor and situated about 100 yards from the main temple entrance, regularly shows soft-porn. In Vattiyoorkavu, a suburb of Trivandrum, *Pidikitapulli* was shown under the noses of the censors, creating traffic jams as people flocked to the theatre.

SHOWING soft-porn in mofussil areas and even in some towns has now become the biggest organised racket in Kerala, with the obvious complicity of the police. Said an exasperated censor chief R. Ranganathan: "The soft-porn films with interpolated scenes are shown with police assistance. Even after confiscating a print of *Pidikitapulli*, by the time it reached us the prints were whitewashed and we could do nothing to stop the film."

Ranganathan finds it almost impossible to stop the soft-porn plague as he is the only censor officer in Kerala and gets absolutely no help from the police. He is further hampered by the fact that the censors have to pounce while the interpolated 'blue' scenes are being shown in the theatre and most of the shows are being held in the villages. In the case of *Ottayan* he himself saw the uncensored scenes in a Trivandrum theatre and due to immediate police help, was able to seize the print.

This year, out of the 32-odd films released so far, nearly 14 have 'blue' scenes which were shot separately and never shown to the censors but later interpolated into the picture for mofussil viewing. K.S. Gopalakrishnan's *Gorilla* tells the story of a maniac killer who rapes and kills different women. The film was passed by the revising committee of the censors in Trivandrum with several cuts, but when released not only were the censored scenes intact but additional scenes as well had been inserted. Gopalakrishnan repeated the same story with some minor changes in *Pidikitapulli*, which again grossed more than its pro-

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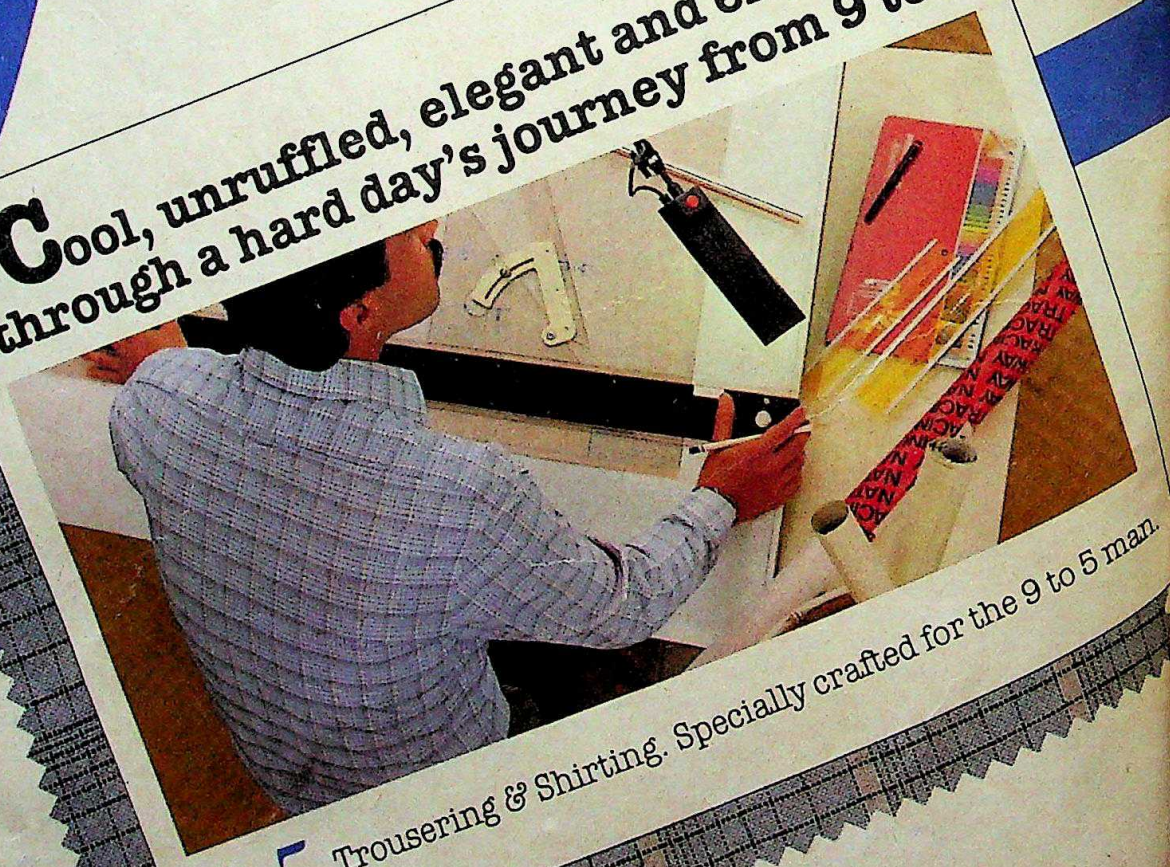
9 to 5

Cool, unruffled, elegant and enduring through a hard day's journey from 9 to 5



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A quality product from Madura Co

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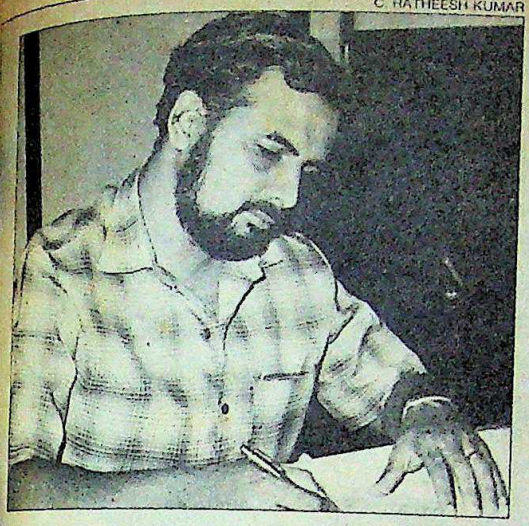
C. RATHEESH KUMAR



"Soft-porn films with interpolated scenes are shown with police assistance. A confiscated print, by the time it reached us, was white-washed and we could do nothing."

R. RANGANATHAN
Censor Chief

C. RATHEESH KUMAR

"If I don't strip, there are thousands of girls in Kodambakkam waiting to undress on the screen. If the story line demands it, I don't mind showing my body."

PRAMELA
veteran actress

...ction cost in the first few weeks. Encouraged by the success of these ..., hordes of amateurs have teamed ... with out-of-work stars and techni... and signed up amenable 'extras' to ...ture in the new soft-porn sequences. ...n established producers have been ...ed to jump onto the 'blue' band-...on. S. Kumar, maker of mythologi... films, has switched to soft-porn and is ...w known in the industry as 'Sex' ...ar. His film *Evils of Wine and Woman* ...labelled as an 'educational' film but ...ality it was soft-porn which titillated ...ewers and duped the censors since ...s even exempt from entertainment ...Kumar's latest, *Cabaret Dancer*, is the ...y of a girl raped by villains and forced ...p on the cabaret circuit.

Chandrasekharan Thampi is an... soft-porn pioneer who has hit the ... with the highly successful ...ram. The film started off as a black ... white art movie that got canned ...g to lack of finance. Later, he added ...e steamy bits including a scene of ...al intercourse shown in its entirety ...distributed the film through his own ...pany, though only in small towns ...villages, and without any publicity. ... boasts proudly: "It became a hit ...e of word-of-mouth publicity." ...gunathan, however, says that, ...ram is a film for which we have received the maximum complaints. It had been recalled once even by the chairman but they had sent us a clean print. One of our main objectives is to catch *Dhumam* red-handed." Or, in this case, blue-handed. Almost 18 months after its release, *Dhumam* is still to be shown in Trivandrum and Cochin since it fears the censors, but has covered almost 200 small stations.

THE PORN proliferation has come as a blessing in disguise to many ex-stars. Rathish was a leading star of Malayalam films two years ago before he went into decline. Mani fished him out from imminent obscurity by hiring him for soft-porn films, including *Ottayan*. In six months, Rathish has acted in about 30 films and even produced two of them with Mani as the director, and he is now the most sought-after 'blue' film star. Said Rathish: "I would have starved but for this soft-pron wave. There is nothing wrong with it because people love it and sex is a bigger star than anybody."

Pramela, a veteran actress, is another who has benefited from the boom, having acted in more than 100 soft-porn movies. As she unabashedly says: "If I don't strip, there are thousands of girls in Kodambakkam waiting to undress on the screen. If the story line demands it, I don't mind showing my body." There are other reasons as well. For a day's work, a female extra gets about Rs 2,000, compared to Rs 75 for an ordinary film.

The economics of soft-porn works in its favour. A Gopalakrishnan film can be made for less than Rs 7 lakh. For a three to six minute 'blue scene' for interpolation, the cost works out to around Rs 30,000. After shooting with the bare minimum of equipment—sometimes even a hand-held camera is used—the film is processed in a Madras studio laboratory. K.S. Gopalakrishnan charges Rs 75,000 per film while the rest of the artists and technicians put together would cost another Rs 75,000. There are no re-takes and dialogues are written on the sets.

Meanwhile, the state Government seems equally powerless to stem the tide. According to state Home Minister Vayalar Ravi: "Blue films are a cancer that has hit the commercial cinema in Kerala. We have cancelled the licence of a couple of theatres, but due to lack of manpower we are unable to stem the tide." Faced with this kind of an admission, Kerala's smut boom threatens to expand to proportions as uncontrollable as the actions of its purveyors on the screen.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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AUSTRALASIA CUP

Drama in the Desert

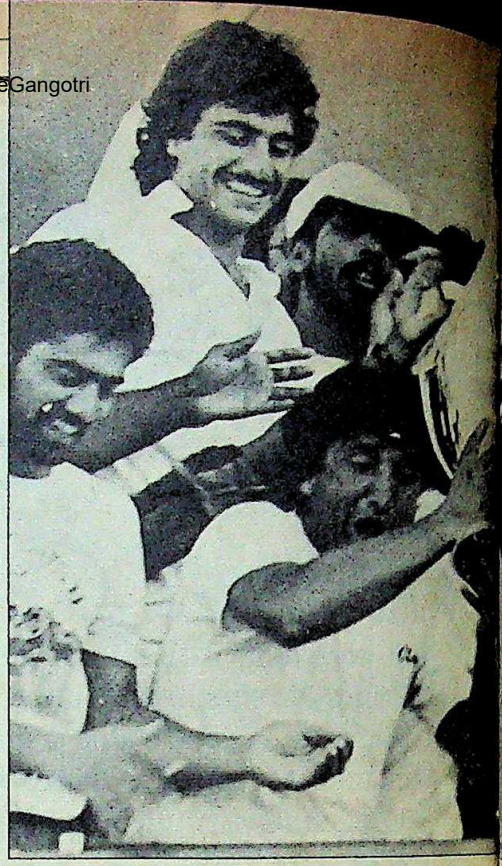
THE SETTING was right out of some book on the great moments in cricket history. One ball to go, four runs to get, one wicket in hand. As Chetan Sharma ran up to bowl the last ball in the final of the inaugural Australasia Cup in Sharjah, captain Kapil Dev and vice-captain Ravi Shastri walked up to counsel him. The advice: bowl a yorker. Facing him was one of the world's most competitive cricketers, Pakistan's Javed Miandad. Normally cocky, he was now fidgeting in his crease, his face betraying little emotion but his eyes gleaming in challenge. Back in the stands, the tension finally got too much for Indian manager Raj Singh Dungarpur, who left his seat in the players' enclosure to watch the match from a less conspicuous position. Rarely, even in one-day cricket, has one ball meant the difference between the heights of victory and the depths of defeat.

And for a long time after Miandad swung Sharma's full toss high over the mid-wicket fence, to give Pakistan its first major title in international one-day cricket, the finality of the result took time to register on the vanquished Indians. For a full 10 minutes not a man spoke in the Indian dressing-room. The door to the room stayed shut as alsatians and doberman pinschers of the Sharjah police, posted on guard outside, kept outsiders away. Chetan Sharma was almost disconsolate in grief, convinced that he had single-handedly lost the match. Even Raj Singh shed tears.

Emotion ran high among the Pakistanis also, for whom no victory in the field of sport is sweeter than one at the cost of India. Delirious Pakistani supporters in the full-to-20,000-capacity Sharjah Stadium waved flags and danced in abandon, chanting *Ganpati Bappa So Gaya* (in a response to the Indian supporters' earlier chant of *Ganpati Bappa Morya* when Sunil Gavaskar and Dilip Vengsarkar were on the rampage). Medium pacer Mohsin Kamal sobbed unashamedly, stopping only when the team was called for the prize-giving ceremony. In the fitness of things, Pakistani captain Imran Khan asked Miandad to receive the cup for the team. Pakistani supporters continued to crowd the streets outside the stadium, waiting to greet their heroes. By the evening, Sharjah's sweetmeat shops had run out of sweets as celebrating Pakistanis bought up every single item on the shelves.

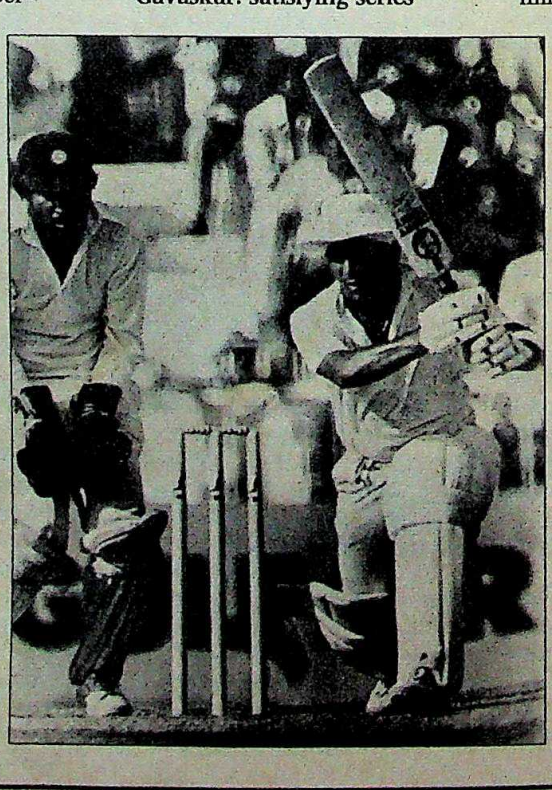
Outplayed for most of the match, for Pakistan the victory was as unexpected as it was welcome. As former Indian spinner Dilip Doshi, who was present at Sharjah along with an amazingly high number of Indian board officials and former players, put it: "Pakistan are often too keen to do well against us, their arch-rivals. This builds up too much pressure on them which they cannot handle." As India built up a formidable total of 245 and Pakistan slid to 61 for three, Doshi's words were beginning to sound prophetic. Admitted Imran later: "At no stage did I think that we had a chance to win. When I and Manzoor (Elahi) got out, I gave up all hope."

There is an old Arab saying that



Pakistanis celebrating in Sharjah: suspenseful success

Gavaskar: satisfying series



miracles occur only in the desert. The day, 29-year-old Miandad, a veteran of one-day internationals and the higher run-getter in this form of cricket in the Indian sub continent, decided to be miracle worker. Others have scored mo runs in one-day games—Vivian Richards holds the record for 18 against England—and Kapil Dev's 175 against Zimbabwe must rate the greatest with Indian fans. But, Imran said, Miandad's 116 off 11 balls seen, "in the context of the match, was one of the greatest knocks ever played". Said former England captain Tony Lewis "Miandad's innings was one of an mal intelligence and savage butch ery. Chetan Sharma just sort melted at the challenge."

Miandad not only single handedly won the match for Pak stan, but in doing so also proved th Pakistan can handle pressure. Th win is just the shot in the arm th Pakistan, a collection of brilliant individuals who have rarely play as a team, needed. Said Imran: "W have got over one of the bigge psychological barriers. It is the be thing that could have happened Pakistan cricket."

For India the match should ha

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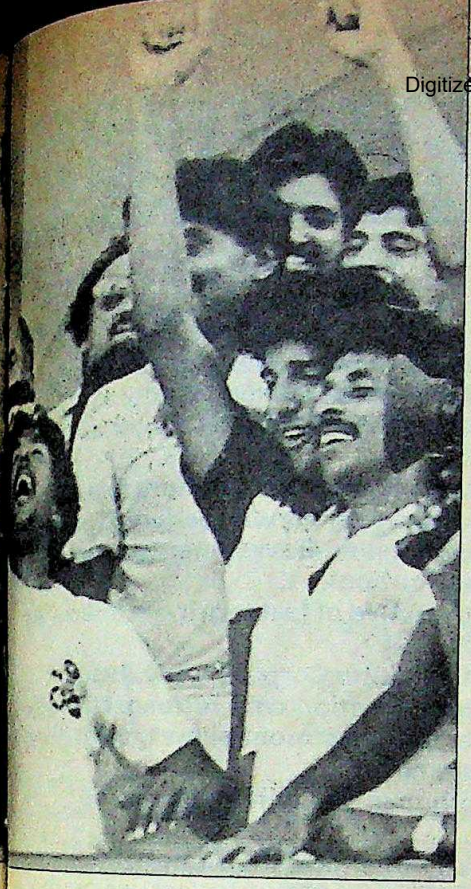

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e as a welcome climax to an indiffer-
son, a reaffirmation of its status as a
champion; instead, India lost a
it never should have. For Kapil,
under a shadow for his inability to
Test in the 20 he has captained, the
h loss, which was preceded by the
team's failure to win the Benson
dges triangular series in Australia,
engthened doubts about his
s as a captain even in the
cricket in which he led India
top. Add to that several
cable selection blunders, the
l failure of the Indian bat-
e-up till the final, and the
of the bowlers to restrict the
ion save on a pitch that offers
nce, and the grim picture of
cricket, post-Sharjah, is
ee.

IA'S problems began in real-
even before the team left the
ores. In a split decision, the
mber selection committee
ded to reinstate Bombay's dash-
sman Sandeep Patil into the
without quite realising that
as been known to flourish
n wickets where the ball
s on to the bat while the
pitch is known to be a low
w turner. According to for-
dia captain 'Tiger' Pataudi:
y should never have taken
Patil for this tournament."

But having taken him into the 14-member squad, the three-member tour selection committee, which constituted of captain Kapil, team Manager Raj Singh and vice-captain Shastri, compounded their error by playing him in the first two matches at the cost of Dilip Vengsarkar, among the highest Indian run-getters in one-day cricket. Vengsarkar, ironically enough, was one of the two $50,000 beneficiaries of the tournament. Raj Singh, known to have been keen on Patil's inclusion in the squad, admitted on the eve of the first match against New Zealand: "Our problem is whom to drop." Patil, expectedly, flopped in the match but since he could not be dropped on the basis of only one poor performance was perforce also played against Sri Lanka, where again, he failed to make a mark for himself.

With Azharuddin also failing—former Pakistan captain Mushtaq Mohammed points out that one reason for Azharuddin's low scores is a tendency to play across the line too often—India's middle-order line-up, which let it down in the Benson and Hedges Cup, continued its slide. Set to score 133 to win against New Zealand, India was tottering at 25 for 4 against a side which did not have four of its main stars, including all rounder Richard Hadlee.

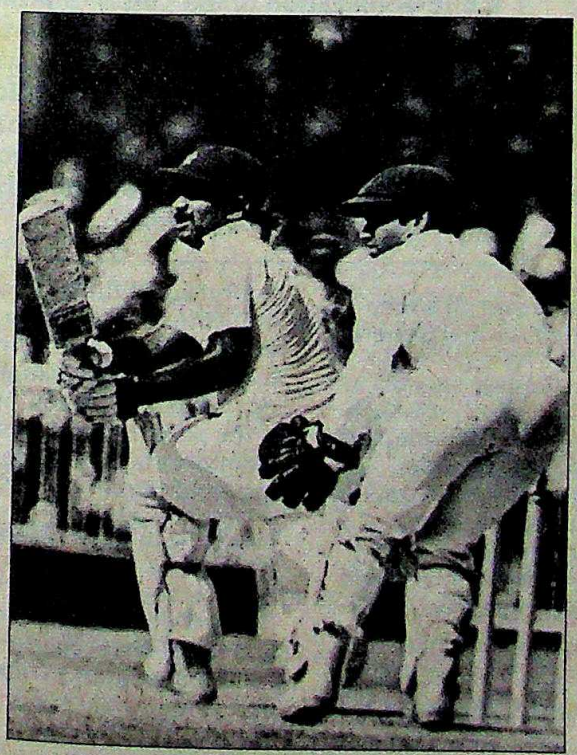
In the next match, against Sri Lanka, India were cruising to what seemed an easy victory till the team simply collapsed from 165 for one to 194 for 7. A certain win—and with it, India's chance of going into the final—now hung in the balance, and it was left to the cool-headed Ravi Shastri to get the runs for victory in the very last over. Admitted Chandu Borde, chairman of the selection committee, after the match: "Our middle-order batting has been pathetic." Even in the final, despite an exhilarating start by openers Krishnamachari Srikkanth and Sunil Gavaskar, the middle order failed to deliver in the final eight 'slog-overs', managing only 38 runs when another 20 might well have put more pressure on Pakistan than it could have handled.

Kapil's captaincy, right from the first match, was uninspired. Despite having three of his own overs in hand, he bowled Kirti Azad in the last two overs of the New Zealand innings. Azad gave away 26 runs in those 12 balls in a total of 132. Azad was similarly favoured in the batting order, being sent in as number five, ahead of better bats Shastri and Kapil himself. But Kapil's most glaring error, for which the legion of Indian cricket fans will never forgive him, was in not keeping the last over against Pakistan for himself. Says Mushtaq Mohammed: "The captain has to bring something out of his hat. Kapil lacks in positive thinking and imagination and his captaincy also lacks aggressiveness."

India's only gain from the tournament was a confirmation of the remarkable progress that Maninder Singh has made. Maninder has not been a regular in the one-day side but after his tight bowling at Sharjah, coupled with his brilliant fielding, he should be around for some time to come. Srikkant's welcome return to form and Gavaskar's 'Man of the Series' award were the other consolations for India. But that was a poor take from the richest-ever prize money tournament. Sharma's final ball alone cost the Indian team Rs 1.2 lakh, making it by far the costliest delivery in cricketing history.

—NAROTTAM PURI in Sharjah

Miandad: the lone ranger



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modipon limited

COMPANY MEETING

SPEECH DELIVERED BY Shri K.N. Modi, Chairman, at the 20th Annual General Meeting of Modipon Ltd. on Monday the 31st March, 1986

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Hon'ble Shri Rajiv Gandhi has made welcome thrusts towards modernising through advanced technology.**
- **Thrust of the industry should be on import substitution and larger exports.**
- **The Government has recognised need for more liberal legislations in various areas of economic activities as well as to have open dialogues between Government and Industry to evolve more progressive outlook.**
- **To achieve the above objective of faster growth, following measures are essential:**
  - **a. Continued tax rebate on Inter Corporate Dividend.**
  - **b. Review of interest capitalisation with retrospective effect.**
  - **c. Continued tax rebate for investment allowance to have growth of new Companies.**
  - **d. There should be one union in one unit for increased productivity.**
- **The business of Fibre and Chemical Divisions of the Company have shown growth of 17% and 25% over last year with improved profitability.**
- **Dividend of 20% on Equity Share Capital.**
- **With merger of Indofil Chemicals Ltd., Bombay, having been completed, Company has now a broad operational base.**
- **Company is in process of expanding its Nylon and Polyester capacity to 6000 and 3500 tonnes per annum respectively with latest technology of Spin Draw and Spun Dye from Snia Fibre, Italy.**
- **Implementation of the Letter of Intent to manufacture 4000 tonnes of Nylon Industrial Yarn/Tyre Cord as well as 3400 tonnes of Nylon Tyre/Industrial fabrics is underway. Company has entered into foreign collaboration with Unitika Japan.**
- **Industrial relations continue to remain harmonious and cordial. Continuous inter-action between managers and workforce. Workforce undergoing LENS programme on participative management.**

Dear Shareholders,

I have great pleasure in extending to you all a very warm and cordial welcome to the 20th Annual General Meeting of your Company.

MODERN ERA

Our dynamic and young Prime Minister Hon'ble Shri Rajiv Gandhi has made welcome thrusts towards Modernizing through advanced technology and thus ushering in a Dynamic Era leading us to the 21st century. I take this opportunity to congratulate, on my own and on behalf of all of you, the Prime Minister and his Government on its dynamic and progressive policies and outlook.

EXPORT FRONT

One of the main thrusts of the industry should be import substitution and larger exports. The aim of industries should be to attain international standards in the quality of goods produced, its design and the technology used in manufacturing. This would enable our industry to enter the competitive global markets. It is the only solution for achieving favourable balance of payment status after repayment of IMF loan instalments.

LIBERAL LEGISLATION—OPEN GOVERNMENT—INDUSTRY DIALOGUE

It has been very heartening to note that Hon'ble Prime Minister, Finance Minister, Industry Minister and Labour Minister have in recent meetings with people from Industry and Trade consistently called for more liberal legislations in the various areas of economic

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ctivities as well as to have open dialogues between the overnment and the Industry to evolve more ogressive outlook.

MPORT OF TECHNOLOGY—STIMULUS TO LOCAL R & D

The Government has rightly been encouraging the port of technology for faster growth. However, lection of technology should be such that the local search and Development efforts are stimulated by e induction of new technology. Your Company with a od Research and Development base is in consent uch with the world leaders of technology for adoption d absorption of the best.

ERATIONS

I am happy to inform you that the turnover and ofits of the Company during the year have shown an cellent growth.

	This Year	Last Year
	(Rs. in Crores)	
rnover	162.78	118.25
oss Profit	13.89	5.38
Profit after Tax	5.17	0.54

The business of the Fibre and the Chemical Divisions your Company have shown a growth of17% and 25% pectively over the last year with improved plant rformance and profitability.

IDEND

Your Directors are pleased to recommend for your proval a dividend of 20% on the Equity Share Capital against 12% last year.

ALGAMATION OF INDOFIL CHEMICALS LTD.

The merger of Indofil Chemicals Ltd., Bombay, with Company in terms to the Scheme of Amalgamation s been successfully completed during the year. The business of your Company shall now be sacted through two business divisions in the name Modipon Fibres Company' and 'Indofil Chemicals'. virtue of this merger, your Company has now a ed operational base.

ODIPON FIBRES COMPANY

This Division has two business, namely, Polyester ament Yarn and Nylon Filament Yarn. The business now divided into two business units:

Polyester Yarn Business

Polyester Filament Yarn has shown spectacular mpound rate of growth of 43% per annum during the five years and it is expected that its overall nsumption shall touch 1,15,000 tonnes by 1990. In dition to our endeavour to increase further the mpany's current market share of 5%, with market turing, our strategy calls for concentration on owing segment of speciality products which are far re remunerative and most of which are currently ng imported.

You will be happy to know that your Company has eady started manufacturing some of the varieties of eciality products which have been well accepted in market.

Company has entered into a long term technical collaboration agreement with Snia Fibre, Italy, for the transfer of most modern and latest technology in Spin Draw and Spun Dye for the manufacture of high quality speciality yarns with lower manufacturing costs as a result of reduction in multi-steps processes in conventional technology to a single/double step process, resulting in savings in energy, utilities and labour and increased production of quality yarns with lower waste. Many of such speciality yarns would be produced for the first time in India. Snia Fibre, Italy, are world leaders in development of technology and manufacture of wide range of synthetic fibre and are foremost in production of Spin Draw and Spun yarns. The Spun Dyed yarn would find a big market such as Luggage and Upholstery for Cars and Furniture.

Apart from manufacturing of Spun Dye and Spin Draw yarns, Company would continue to manufacture POY. The Company is further equipping itself for manufacture of various Lustures at the same time by installing several small reactors rather than having one large reactor which some of our competitors have.

(b) Nylon Yarn Business

The compound rate of growth of Nylon Filament Yarn business has been 13.5% during the last five years. The Company is the third largest producer of Nylon in the country and is further proposing to induct high technology by replacing many of its old conventional machines with high speed spinning machines so as to improve the quality. Like Polyester, in Nylon area also, the Spin Draw and the Spun Dye technology of Snia Fibre, Italy, will be extended thereby reaping the benefits of reduced manufacturing costs and improved product quality. Your company will be able to supply economically large sized packages to its consumers. Thus in Nylon business, the Company will become a leader in quality and cost efficiency.

INDOFIL CHEMICALS COMPANY

With the know-how from Rohm and Haas Co., U.S.A., the Company manufactures and markets wide range of Agricultural and Industrial Chemicals which are organised into two businesses.

(a) Agricultural Chemicals Business

Indofil is a leader in Fungicide marketed in India. Its brand name 'Dithane' is well known throughout India amongst the farmers. Dithane has experienced 15% compound growth per year during the last five years. The Dithane Plant is proposed to be completely modernised to adopt the latest and most modern production technology with excellent safety equipment. The first stage of modernisation of the Dithane Plant with this objective has already been completed during the year.

'Kelthane', the other successful product is also expected to have 15% growth in volume.

Company has applied for registration of some new chemicals of Rohm and Haas Co., U.S.A. for introduction in India.

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(b) Industrial Chemicals Business

In this area, a wide range of industrial chemicals are produced which are primarily used by Leather, Plastic, Textile, Paints, Paper and PVC industries. Your Company's Leather chemicals enjoy excellent brand loyalty amongst tanners for the finishing leather for export and home market. The other chemicals also command a major market share which will be further enhanced by introduction of new products, such as speciality binders and the Viscosity flow improver, currently under development at Company's R & D centre. The Company expects a growth of 10% in the Industrial chemicals field.

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

The Company is conscious of ensuring safety and health of the employees and society in general as well as for protection of the environment. Both the Fibre and Chemical Divisions of the Company are constantly working towards achieving this objective by spending a substantial amount on equipment and training.

MODERNISATION, EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION

Your Company is now in the process of expanding its Nylon and Polyester capacity to 6000 tonnes and 3500 tonnes per annum respectively, with the latest technology of Spin Draw and Spun Dye from Snia Fibre, Italy. The Company is also taking necessary action for modernisation of the utilities and existing Nylon and Polyester production facilities.

Company has taken concrete steps for the implementation of the Letter of Intent to manufacture 4000 tonnes of Nylon Industrial Yarn/Tyre Cord and 3400 tonnes of Nylon Tyre/Industrial fabrics. For this Company has entered into a foreign collaboration agreement with Unifika, Japan, for latest Spin Draw technology. The modified agreement is under the active consideration of the Government.

The total capital outlay of Modernisation-cum-Expansion and Diversification projects is estimated at Rs. 119 crores, which your Company proposes to meet through Debentures, Long Term Loans and through its Own Contributions. Applications for financial assistance are under active consideration of the All India Financial Institutions.

In accordance with the Government's liberalised licensing policy for synthetic yarn, representations are being made to the Government to grant permission for expansion of Nylon capacity to 12,000 TPA and of Polyester to 15,000 TPA. These expanded and diversified manufacturing facilities will enable the Company to take advantage of the broad-banding policy of the Government and will provide flexibility and manoeuvrability to respond to changing market trends and consumer preference for synthetic filament yarn.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Industrial relations continue to remain harmonious and cordial. Fibre Division of the Company entered into a novel three years wage settlement with its workforce which would be valid upto June, 1988. Under the said settlement, rationalisation of man power has been achieved and the man power so saved shall be gainfully utilised in expansion and modernisation after proper reorientation.

In the Chemical Division also, relations with union were cordial.

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

People are most important resources we have in Modipon family. With a view to equip ourselves to meet the needs for high technology products, it is essential to train, retrain and redeploy our workforce. With that objective, intensive inter-action between Managers and workforce have taken place during the year. Young energetic Managers are getting ready with phased and intensive training imparted to them at prestigious institutions, like Indian Institute of Technology and Management Development Institute, in specifically developed programmes. During 1985, over 70% of our workforce had undergone specially designed time bound training and retraining programmes including Statistical ouality Control techniques to improve productivity and quality.

On participative management, more than 40% of the workforce has undergone the LENS (Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies) training programme wherein the Managers and the workmen collectively identify their problems, analyse them and find solutions themselves and bring in all round improvement at the shop floor. Useful suggestions have been pouring in from all levels to improve the process and production methods.

Our Hon'ble Labour Minister has very recently pointed out that to bring in a more progressive and constructive work environment, it is very necessary to educate the workforce as well as to bring a legislation which will eliminate the current pattern of multiple unions. The education programmes in our company are aimed at creating greater awareness and sense of responsibility and belonging amongst the entire workforce.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The success of your Company has indeed been the result of harmonious labour-management relations and the untiring efforts of staff and workers at all levels which I deeply acknowledge. My sincere thanks are due to my colleagues on the Board of Directors for their valuable guidance. I am also grateful to the Central and State Governments, Financial Institutions, Banks and our collaborators, Messrs Rohm and Haas Co., U.S.A. for their continued support and valuable assistance. Thanks are also due to our dealers and customers. It is our endeavour to always provide them the best products and services. Finally, I offer my heartfelt thanks to our esteemed shareholders and investors for the trust reposed in the management.

Thank you.

K.N. MODI
CHAIRMAN

Note: This does not purport to be a record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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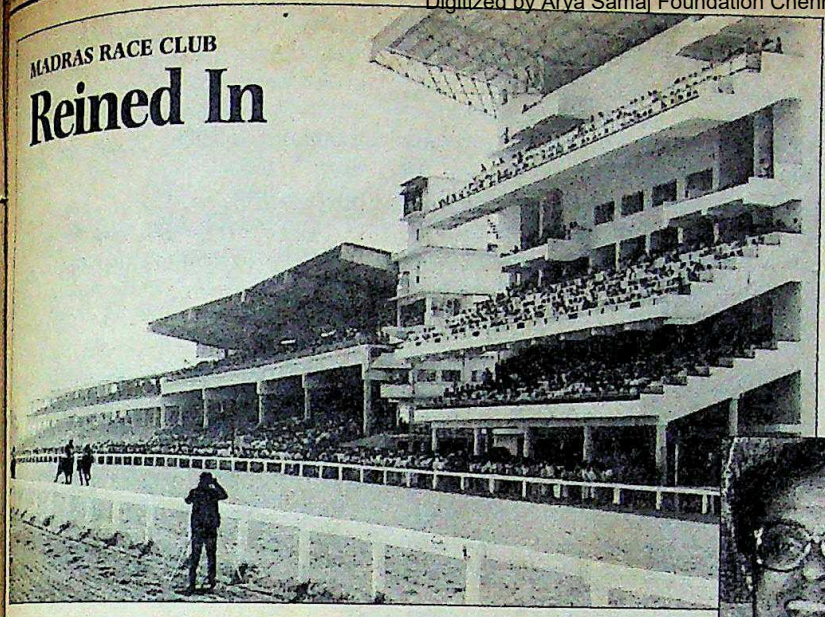
MADRAS RACE CLUB

Reined In



The Madras Race club and (inset) Shankar: takeover trauma

THE ANNUAL horse-racing season in Tamil Nadu opened with traditional fanfare in the hill resort of Ootacamund last fortnight, but all the action and the bedlam seemed to be concentrated in Madras. Or, more precisely, in the Madras Race Club (MRC), which finds itself hobbled following what amounts to virtual nationalisation by the state Government. The Tamil Nadu Government's unprecedented decision—this is the first time that a government has taken over the business of horse-racing in the country—was taken at a furious gallop. The bill proposing the take-over was introduced in the state assembly late last January and passed the following day. The requisite Presidential assent came last fortnight.

What urged the state Government to take the bit between its teeth were its allegations that "the committee of management of the MRC is ridden with factions and that the affairs of the said club are not conducted properly," and that there were "instances of irregularities and malpractices in the conduct of horse-racing...causing substantial loss of revenue to the Government." And though it is business as usual at the MRC, which is now a public limited company and the reins of the racing business (MRC's last profit was Rs 30 lakh in the 1985-86 season) are now in the hands of a new factory—P. Shankar, an IAS officer, formerly general manager of the Handicrafts and Handloom Export Corporation, who has been appointed for one year to the temporary post of custodian of the Department of Racing. The eventual plan is to set up a racing corporation to supervise the operations of the 208-year-old club, the oldest in the country.

But the Government's proposed plans will hardly be smooth running. Already, the move has sparked off serious objections from the powerful lobby of race horse owners and club members. Charged a prominent horse owner who has been a steward with the club for nearly 15 years: "This legislation has been rushed through. There was no proper debate in the Assembly and the reasons the Government has advanced for taking this step are not at all tenable." An incensed Dr K.R. Lakshmanan, a managing committee member of the club, promptly filed a writ petition before the Supreme Court challenging the take-over and seeking that it be declared null and void. The basic question his petition raised was whether it was proper for a state government to conduct gambling—after all, the DMK government of M. Karunanidhi had promulgated an ordinance abolishing racing, terming it one of the "five great sins" and Law Minister C.Ponnaiyan, who jockeyed the take-over bill in the assembly, told the House that the Government would abolish racing. The Supreme Court had issued a stay order but the AIADMK Government filed a petition in October 1985 asking for speedy disposal of the case.

The charge of factionalism that the managing committee of the MRC has been saddled with is refuted by critics who point out that the Government has not specified instances of mismanagement and irregularities nor does it show evidence of having conducted a proper inquiry into complaints. Lakshmanan has claimed that the club's own profits would have been affected if it had encouraged illegal betting. The state Government gets a fixed 20 per cent betting tax but the club gets a 5 per cent commission on the betting amounts.

The petition also makes the telling legal point that "the Government's power to acquire property cannot be used to raise revenue." Interestingly enough, officials of the Commercial Taxes Department, who are present during race meetings, have not made any complaints about illegal (coded) betting.

Strangely enough, neither of the four government nominees on the managing committee has ever voiced complaints. Even more oddly, none of them has ever been known to attend committee meetings except to vote in a new chairman. And this is perhaps where the rub lies. The 12 elected members of the committee are evenly divided into two camps—for and against the uncrowned racing czar of Tamil Nadu, M.A.M. Ramaswamy, owner of the largest stable of 150 horses and winner of 100 classics. Right from 1978, Chief Minister M.G.Ramachandran has consistently directed official nominees to vote against Ramaswamy, thus preventing him from being elected chairman since then. But the latter has used his enormous influence in the committee, which, in the absence of government nominees, has enabled him to get his way. Insiders believe MGR's move is a last ditch attempt at breaking Ramaswamy's hold.

If it is, consequently, a case of jockeying for power, the only loser will be the MRC. Shankar claims that "the race-going public are happy that we are conducting the races in a fair manner." G. Ganapathy, managing committee member, adds that: "It is true there were a lot of malpractices in the administration of the club earlier." But the main doubts revolve around the propriety of the Government's action and whether its officials, untrained in the complex world of the horse-racing business, will be able to effectively supervise the affairs of the club or, for that matter, put the brakes on malpractices. Racing's reins may have changed hands but nobody is betting on the eventual winner.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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The Last Roar

AATISH-E-CHINAR
by SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH
Ali Mohammed & Sons, Srinagar
Pages: 961; Price: Rs 125

NO OTHER Kashmiri leader so completely dominated the political scene in the state and for so long as did Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. For nearly five decades, he was at the centre of some of the most significant developments in Kashmir. Even today—four years after his death—the very mention of his name inspires awe and reverence among Kashmiris.

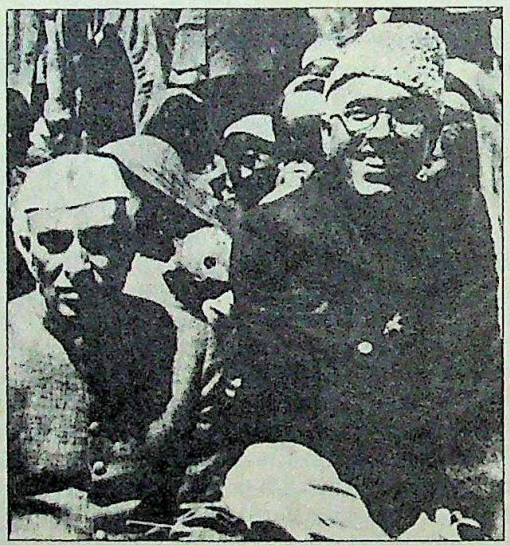
His fearlessness earned him the title of "Sher-e-Kashmir". He devoted his life to the preservation of the Kashmiri identity, and paid a heavy price for it, spending half his life in jail. It is one of the ironies of history that the man who was instrumental in mobilising Muslim opinion in the valley in favour of India after Partition was later accused of being anti-national and jailed, first by his friend and fellow Kashmiri Jawaharlal Nehru, and then by Indira Gandhi.

In his autobiography written in Urdu, *Aatish-e-Chinar* (The Fire of the Chinar), which he finished shortly before his death and which was published posthumously last month, he notes more in anguish than anger that when the Kashmir Assembly first met in 1951, it was he who strongly advocated that the people of Kashmir should cast their lot with India; yet he was later accused of anti-national activities. "Thirty years have passed since then and we have gone through hell. We have been subjected to all kinds of sufferings and humiliation, and yet I stand by what I said then: the solution that I offered then (union with India) is still valid."

He told the people that there were three options open to them: go over to Pakistan, remain an independent state, or become part of the Indian union. "I told them that they can choose any of the three options, but they must remember that the need of the moment was to get liberation from the oppressive Dogra rule and that could be more effectively achieved while maintaining the status quo...that is, remain with India."

A three-member delegation from Pakistan was sent to Kashmir to persuade him to cast his lot with Pakistan. Dr Mohammad Deen Taseer, was the most eloquent and aggressive member of the delegation, and when he suggested that Kashmir should opt for Pakistan, an indignant Sheikh told him: "It is none of your business to tell us what to do." During the heated argument, Taseer said that if the Sheikh did not agree, Pakistan would have to use "other means". Retorted the Sheikh: "Do whatever you like, but to enter Kashmir you will have to walk over our dead bodies."

It was the same Sheikh whom the Centre later accused of being in collusion with Pakistan and the US. The Sheikh describes how he was detained without being served a formal charge-sheet, and the embarrassment this caused to Nehru when the issue was repeatedly raised at international forums. Yet Sheikh Abdullah does not allow political differences to come in the way of his relations with Nehru, and in a moving chapter, he describes his last meeting with the man who had been his friend as well as his "persecutor". He writes: "From the (Delhi) airport I drove straight to Teen Murti House with Indiraji, and Panditji received me with great warmth. But he was not the same person. I was meeting him after 11 years. When I had met him 11 years ago, he was as fresh as a rose and now he looked like a withered flower. His back was bent, his face was wrinkled and the effects of the stroke he had suffered were all too evident. And he seemed to say: '*Koi dam ka mahman hoon, ai ahle mehfil, chiragh-ee sehar hoon bujah chahta hoon*' (I am a guest here for a few moments, and like a candle I am about to burn myself as the morning approaches).



Sheikh Abdullah with Nehru

The Sheikh says that he regarded Nehru as his brother and what the latter did to him as part of the political game came to him as a shock. And he was convinced that had Mahatma Gandhi not been killed by Godse, "the Kashmiri people would have realised their dream of a really autonomous Kashmir".

He also talks about the Kashmir accord which he signed with the Indira Gandhi government. He points out that the way All India Radio reported the accord created doubts in his mind—doubts which would later prove true. The Sheikh does not mince words in condemning Congressmen for "betraying" the accord.

He also comes down heavily on Dr Karan Singh and his family, which he says ruled Kashmir with ruthlessness. About Dr Karan Singh's own appointment as Sadar-e-Riyasat, he says that this was done against his (Sheikh's) wishes. And Singh's performance vindicated the Sheikh.

If the Sheikh's tone throughout his autobiography sounds self-righteous, arrogant and often irreverent, one has to take into account that he, by far the tallest among Kashmiris in this century, felt betrayed by some of his closest friends, be it Nehru, Bakshi, Sadiq or his inquisitors Maulana Azad and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, who resented him as a leader with a genuine mass base among Muslims. The only other nationalist Muslim leader with such a powerful base was Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan who, not surprisingly, comes out in a better light in the autobiography. All said and done, the Sheikh's autobiography is a fairly truthful account of a life spent in upholding the dignity of a long-oppressed people. If it is bitter, the blame lies not with the Sheikh, but the Sheikh-baiters who should have remembered that he was a proud, almost vain, individual.

One wishes though that an English version of the autobiography had been attempted simultaneously. The Sheikh's Master's in Science notwithstanding, was not much of a wordsmith and one has the feeling that even the Urdu version has been doctored.

—M.L. KOTRU

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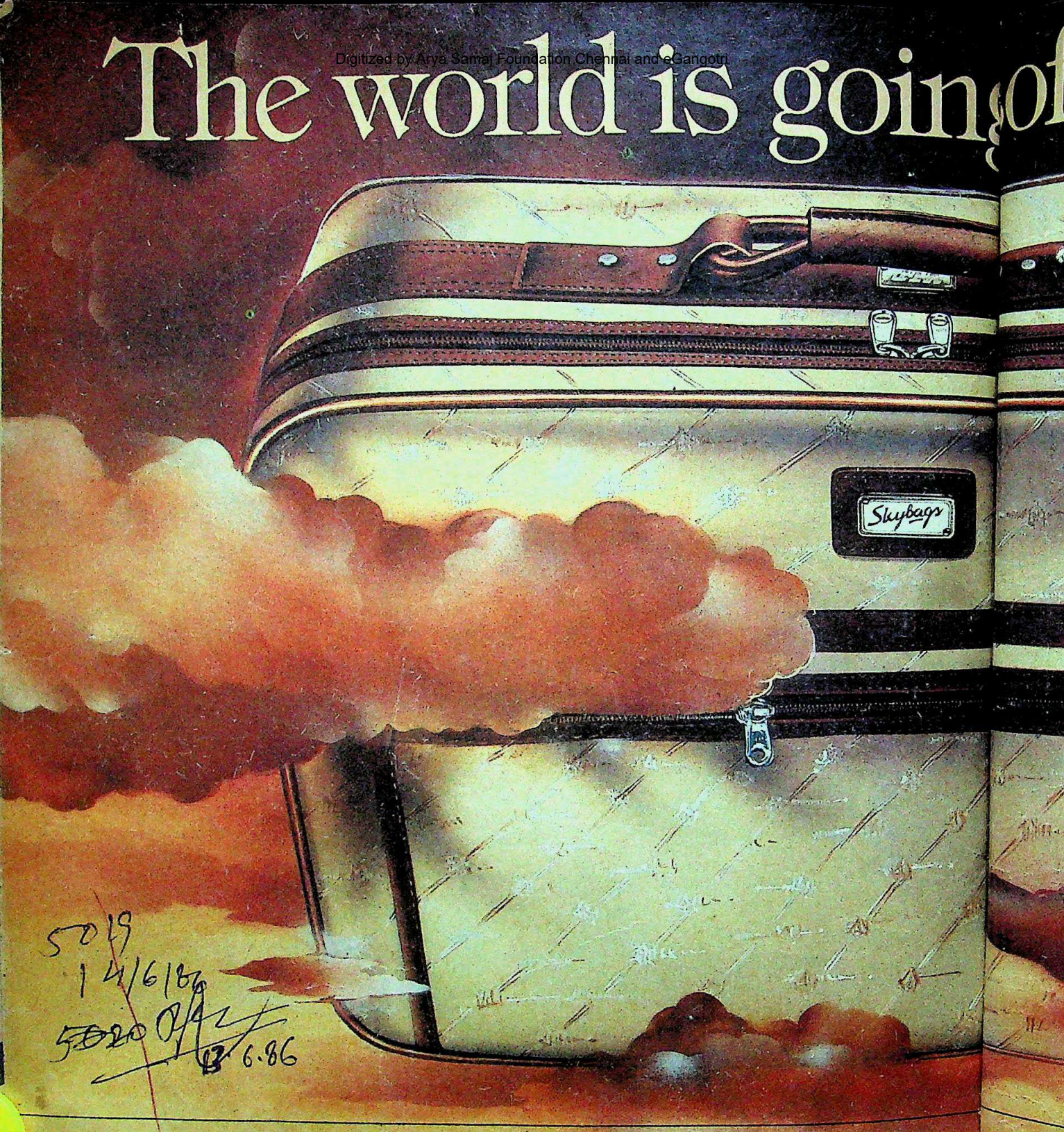

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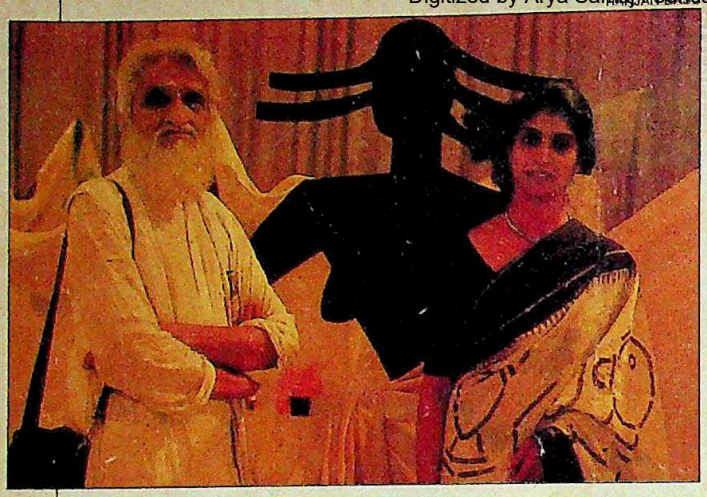
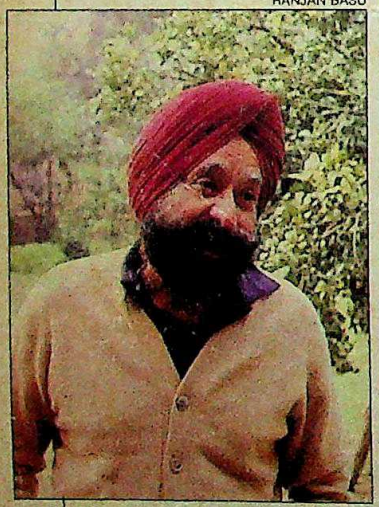


Husain with daughter Raeesa: a master stroke

◆ If there was a Pulitzer prize for bad taste, the current and former editors of *The Hindustan Times* would be leading contendors. The two have been involved in an unseemly slanging match which began when **Khushwant Singh** charged in a magazine interview that the HT staff was

RANJAN BASU



Khushwant: in bad taste

illiterate or semi-literate. Current editor **N.C. Menon** hit back in an editorial, accusing Singh of being "an over-ardent devotee of Bacchus who has...an obsession with buttocks and bosoms" and "cadged" free trips for himself and his family members. Menon's childish outburst brought the squabble home to lakhs of readers; the main casualty was the prestige of *The Hindustan Times*.

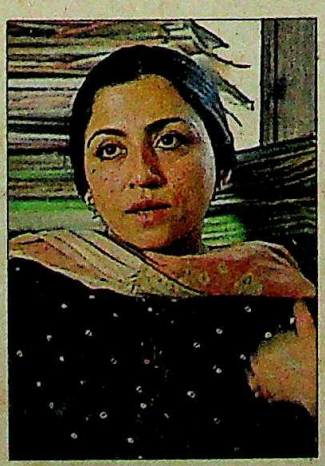
◆ The next time you see a woman wearing a sari like an M.F. Husain painting, don't be surprised: it is an M.F. Husain painting. Or, to be precise, Husain fabricated. By none other than petite and dusky daughter **Raeesa Husain**, 33. After dabbling in painting, poetry and garment export, she has now begun woodcut prints and hand-paints of her father's works. Last fortnight, she displayed her exorbitantly-priced saris, scarves and dupattas with the familiar horses and Durgas in Delhi. Said Raeesa: "He had never touched fabrics. So I thought I'd beat him to it." And the master added: "After being hung, it makes me feel nice to be worn. It gives movement to my figures. It also brings me closer to people." Close enough for commerce too.

◆ Her strength defies her frail 5 feet some inches. It's all too apparent: in her blunt statements, her wry humour and her inscrutable, almost opaque brown eyes. And if **Madhu Kishwar**, 35, is no usual bra-burning feminist, but women and their problems remain her prime concern. Her constant, nagging preoccupation is how to make *Manushi*, her Delhi-based women's group and magazine, grow without making any compromises. So when the Media Foundation announced her name for this year's Chameli Devi Jain award last fortnight for "editorial versatility of a high order", she accepted it after deliberation. Said Kishwar: "I see it as an extension of the love and care that so many people have poured into *Manushi* ev since it started in 1979."

◆ His dance extravaganzas still open to full houses. His lavish sets, loud costumes and theatrical characters still hold a quaint, old-world appeal for movie-goers. Last fortnight, **V. Shantaram**, 85, the grand old man of Indian cinema released his autobiography. A veritable tome in Marathi, it traces his eventful life, his three marriages, and career of 66 years. After directing 55 films and acting in 23, he is not finished with the medium yet. Says Shantaram: "I want to make a film on how man has developed in the 5,000 years since the Mahabharata was written and how he will develop in the next 100."

◆ He is better known for crafting successful films with partner James Ivory. But there is another deliciously secret side to **Ismail Merchant**, Bombay-born producer of films like *Heat and Dust*, *The Bostonians* and his latest, *A Room with a View*. Merchant is also a gourmet cook with a talent for turning out unique Indian

Kishwar: staunch feminist



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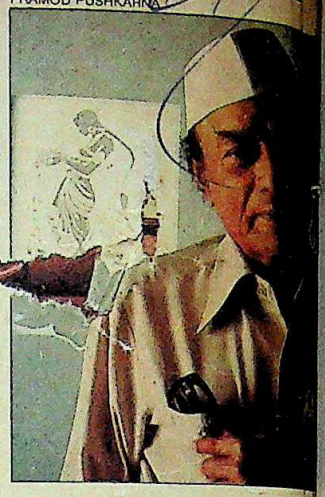
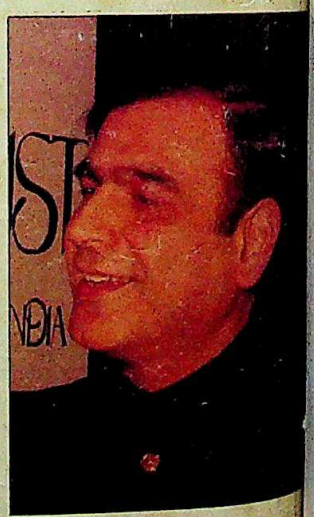


Shantaram: omnipresent patriarch

cuisine at legendary Sunday lunches where the guest list includes the like of Ingrid Bergman and Christopher Reeves. His epicurean efforts include such mouth-watering fantasies as "Ganga Jamuna



Merchant: secrets of the table

sabzi', 'Ismail's stuffed turkey' and 'fasting day potatoes'. Says he: "The old concepts are dead. No longer do you have two boys to grind the *masala*, two to stir and a *khansama* to oversee. You're on your own and you better be good." After concerted urging from satisfied guests, Merchant has put his creations into a slickly-produced recipe book certain to increase his pan following.

—Compiled by MOHAMMED ASLAM

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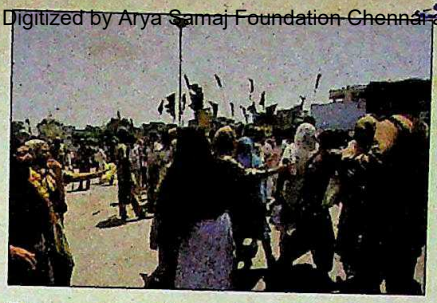
Militant Revivalism

Slowly but surely, a resurgent and increasingly militant movement of Hindu revivalism is sweeping across the country. The message in the new militancy is that the minorities are being pampered while the majority has been restrained from asserting Hindu nationalism.

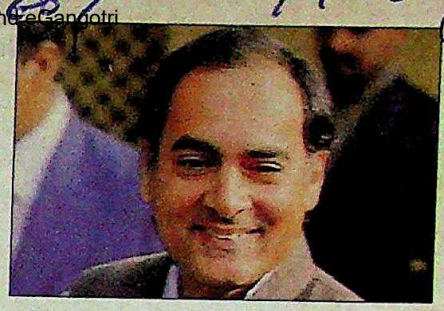
COVER STORY 76



Return to Uncertainty

Punjab edged closer to the brink of yet another crisis as the Surjit Singh Barnala Ministry was reduced to a minority following a split in the ruling Akali Dal Party. The power struggle within the party has dangerous implications for the troubled state.

SPECIAL REPORT 26



"We have to push harder"

In an exclusive interview to INDIA TODAY last fortnight, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi revealed that there has been a significant shift in his thinking. He no longer speaks of the 21st century; instead, there is a repeated harking back to old values and principles.

INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT 68

A Tragic Farce

Last fortnight's parliamentary elections in Bangladesh seem to have ended up a farcical failure. The election was marred by violence and massive rigging and booth-capturing by General Ershad's Jatiya Party. An on-the-spot report.

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The Great Thirst

Despite massive efforts by the Government, the acute water shortage all over the country has acquired catastrophic dimensions, specially in the vast rural belt where the endless struggle for water has become a poignant human tragedy.

SPECIAL FEATURE 126

Opus Magnum

Big is once again beautiful in the Indian cinema industry. A rash of recent movies has signalled a return to a bygone era where gigantic sets captured the sweeping grandeur of mythology and historical romance. The new trend makes a mockery of film budgets.

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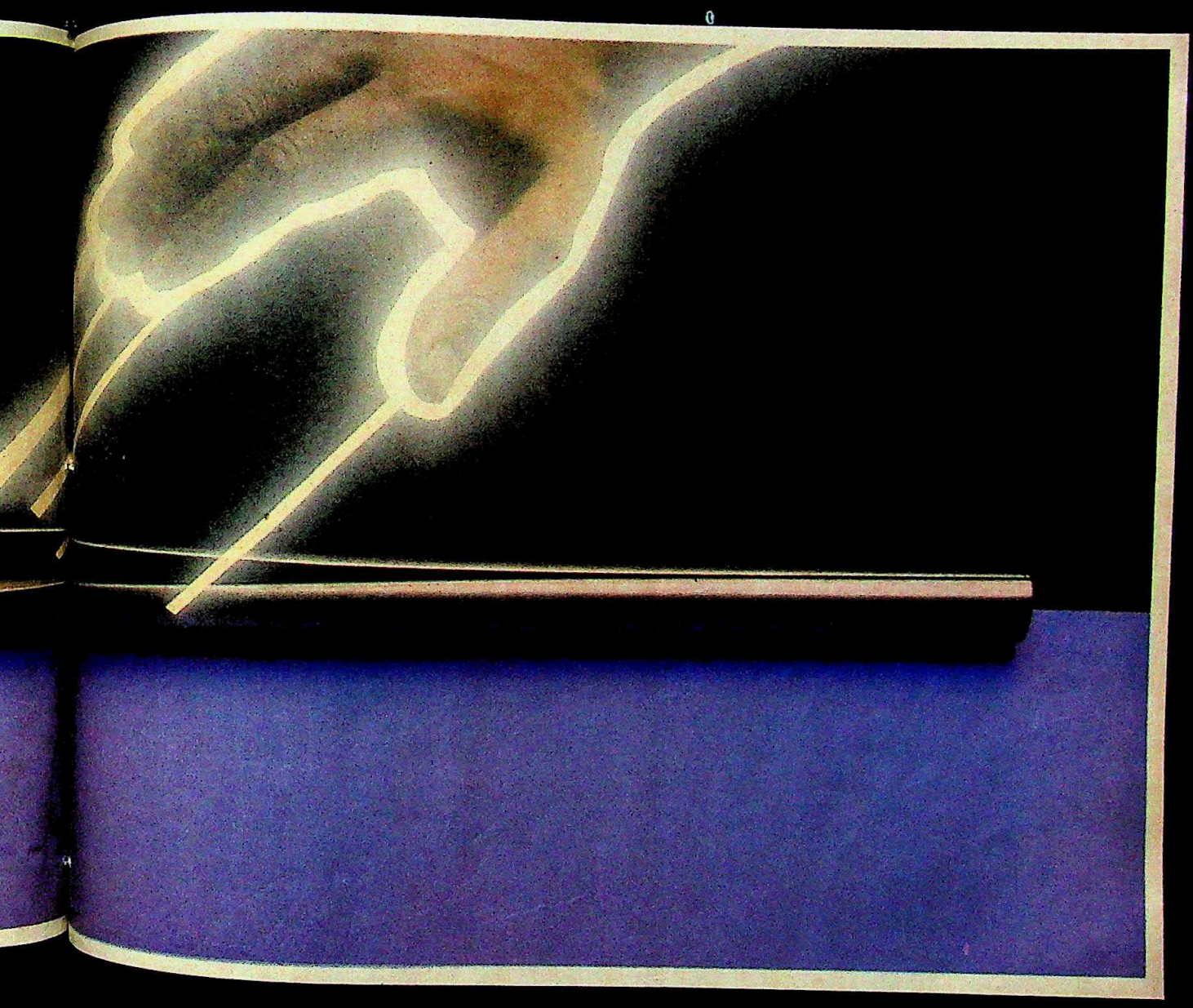

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STORMY CRUSADER

The people of Pakistan ("Storming the Citadel", May 15) have ultimately found a crusader in Benazir Bhutto to resuscitate authentic democracy in their country. This was evident from the spectacular welcome and ovation they gave Miss Sahiba when she arrived in Lahore.

Bangalore — K. CHIDANAND KUMAR

■ General Zia would do well to remember that those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.

Amritsar — KAMAL JIT SINGH AHLUWALIA

■ For a leader who is still in the process of maturing into a world leader, to say that she will be able to do in Pakistan what Cory Aquino did in the Philippines shows how impetuous she can be. She is right in that people want change but to be able to offer the people something concrete she has to still do a lot of spadework.

Arrah — AYYAZ PARVEZ

BABU'S COURAGE

The manner in which Rajiv Gandhi expelled Pranab Mukherjee from the party suggests that he is losing control of himself ("Pre-emptive Strike", May 15). He thought that expulsion would kill dissidence but Pranab babu's is not the voice of dissent but the voice of courage.

Calcutta — PRAHLAD GHOSH

DESERVING WIN

The outcome of the Australasia Tournament ("Drama in the Desert", May 15) need not be seen as a defeat for India. Miandad deserved to win as his performance was simply superb.

Bhatkal — AFTAB HUSAIN KOLA

DEVIL'S BREW

The need of the hour ("A Growing Malaise", April 30) is to create awareness that addiction spoils the health slowly, spends the wealth rapidly, reduces life-span secretly and produces a national loss unknowingly.

Sonepat — K. GOPAKUMAR MENON

■ Alcoholism is sometimes a response to an intolerable situation which can be made more bearable by drinking. Hence the right cure would be to find the root of the problem instead of fighting it with drugs or aversion therapy.

Shimla — VIVEK MOHAN

■ I am a self-confessed alcoholic. Alcoholism is no respector of any human being. I took my first drink thinking it would bring me more pleasure, more friends, more status but this was only a pleasant delusion. The last five years of my sojourn with alcohol were terrible. I pawned and sold everything to buy more alcohol. I made countless resolutions, broke every one, was hospitalised thrice and underwent psychiatric treatment. Nothing made a difference. Only Alcoholics Anonymous did. Their one day at a time rule is indeed a golden rule.

Bombay — GANESH

■ Drinking has become a social necessity and man's social status seems to rise or fall with the quality and quantity of liquor he is able to hand out. A non-drinker finds himself isolated at any function and to be accepted as a civilised individual he begins to drink. Even more distressing is the fact that youngsters have taken to it in a big way simply because it is equated with manliness.

Chandrapur — PRAKASH PRABHARAT

■ I believe that Hindi films contribute largely to the growing popular appeal of drinking in this country. Nearly every film has the hero guzzling booze (generally a bottle of Vat 69) and looking very pleased with himself. The same man is shown young and carefree, dancing with the heroine, fighting all manner of people in the most outrageous situations for his self-respect. And finally comes tragedy. The audience identifies with him and imitates him completely, even throwing back drinks like he did, not bothering to see the bottle for its evil.

Rajkot — D.P. BHATT

■ The cover story did not shock, it only surprised. It is only expected that

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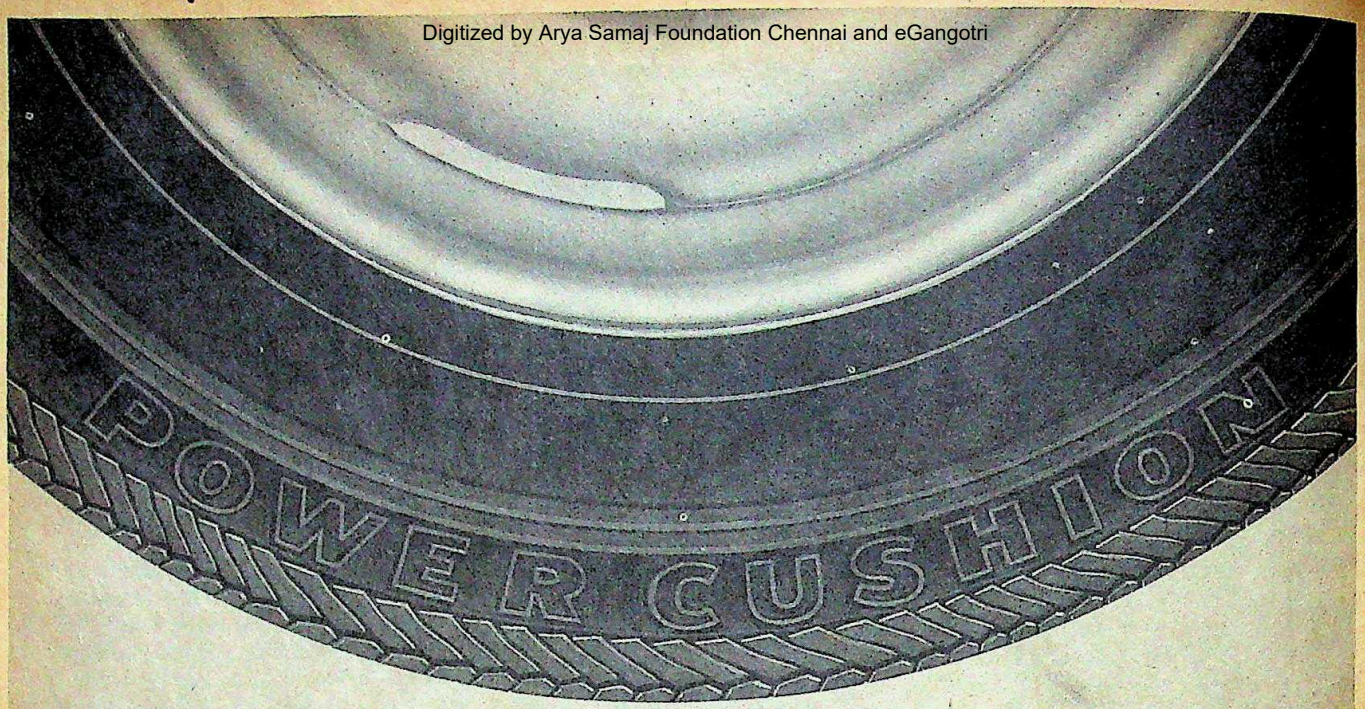

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alcoholism will increase with population. This means that there is more frustration and deterioration of morals. Eradication is impossible.

Bombay — S.E. MEERZA

■ An alcoholic is not just the problem of his family but should also be the concern of the society in general. As he is a public nuisance, neighbours should join together to humiliate him. This method has been successful in Manipur, where the women have got together to deal with the problem.

Nagpur — MANOJ BIRE

■ Alcoholism is a socially accepted evil which has assumed insidious dimensions. Only a mass-based movement, which by its very nature enjoys wide popular backing, can help the people in their battle against the bottle.

Pathankot — RAVI KANT BHATIA

■ Your intention to educate people about alcoholism is well-timed. Arrack sale legalised a few years back in Tamil Nadu has unfortunately increased the number of its consumers. Alcoholics, many of them in a highly inebriated state, can now be seen drinking till the wee hours in arrack shops. The income generated is enormous and all this at the expense of the working class whose women and children suffer.

Nandanam — FRANKLYN STANLEY

■ Considering the climate in this country, alcohol is injurious to drinkers. But the state governments will not bring in total prohibition. The lobby of vested interests argues that prohibition will only be an incentive to illicit distilling and bootlegging, which is a loss to the Government. This is a fallacious argument for the brewing of raw drink is common and uncontrolled. Illicit distillation is mainly on economic grounds and has nothing to do with prohibition.

Bombay — D.P. BIRLA

■ In north-eastern India alcohol has become the root cause of all evil in society. Country liquor is cheaply and freely available and has devastating effects. Facilities for de-addiction should be provided in this part of the country too.

Shillong — J. GONDALIA

ABSURD READING

Reading your story "Communal Cauldron", April 30), one would imagine that the Hindus went on a rampage merely because they were working under the Muslims who controlled the business. That sounds absurd because the losses of the other community have not been considered a loss, and neither has the viewpoint of the oppressing community been taken. Had there been violence on the scale you write about there would have been a retaliatory strike.

Rishra, West Bengal — RAGHURAMAN C.

■ The communal violence in Verawal was impartially handled. But it took place on March 26 and not the day after as mentioned.

Verawal — ANWAR BALOOCH

JUST SOLUTION

Carried away by their ambitious plans to beautify Bombay ("Eviction Problems", April 30), the authorities have unfeelingly tread on the dreams of the slum dwellers. Shabana Azmi's timely intervention has helped in one case. Collectively all sympathetic people can see that justice is done.

Bangalore — ELIEZER S. AMBLER

■ The scientist Homi Sethna mentioned in your story was not the former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and now chairman of the Tata Oil Mills Company. Our chairman did not join the group led by Shabana Azmi protesting the eviction of slum dwellers in Bombay.

New Delhi — M.Z.A. BAIG

BLACK POLITICOS

One hoped that the CBI would move onto politicians after raiding the bureaucracy ("Exposing the Bureaucracy", April 30). Politics in India is the biggest black market business. Politicians with declared incomes of less than Rs 3,000 lead extravagant lives. They shout about black money in public but pocket their share in private.

Patna — MD. EHTESHAM A. USMANI

GIMMICKY RULE

Rama Rao's political style ("Governor Row", April 30) is only an extension of his filmi past. He should pay more attention to the declining law and order situation in the state instead of resorting to filmy gimmicks to divert people's attention from his inadequacies.

Sonepur — G. SUJATA

MONEY MAD

The problem plaguing the Congress(I) ("Conciliatory Moves", April 30) is that many of its leaders live only for power and money. If they don't get their share they begin to grumble.

Cuddalore — R.V. JAYARAMAN

LIVING TREASURE

It was sheer pleasure to watch a legend in multiple facets ("A Lonely Journey", April 30) through the eyes of a connoisseur. Each frame was an experience.

Roorkee — SEEMA ARORA

■ The new photo essay on the living legends of Indian arts and music is a welcome addition. I hope the stalwarts of Carnatic music will be adequately represented.

Madras — J.N. IYER

■ There cannot be a debate about the greatness of Pandit Ravi Shankar. He is a showman but that is what makes him popular and his experimentation is only an extension of his versatility.

Bombay — ANSHUMAN VORA

TIGER PROBLEMS

The problems confronting tigers, particularly those in the Dudhwa National Park ("Conflict in the Wild", April 30) have been highlighted well. But the incident of the burning of tiger carcass actually happened a year ago.

Lucknow — ZAFAR JORDAN

WOMAN'S GROUSE

With reference to your report "Syrian Christians: Women's Victory" (March 31), the Supreme Court struck down the Travancore Christian Succession Act of 1916. The Cochin Christian Succession Act still exists. There never was a Travancore-Cochin Christian succession act. I am not divorced. Twenty years ago I walked out on my alcoholic husband, but have not seriously considered divorce. And I was not thrown out of my father's bungalow. I stayed on and the bungalow now belongs to me.

Kottayam (Kerala) — MARY ROY

Ms Roy had told our correspondent that she had been thrown out of her property at Uthagamadalam. We regret the error in misnaming the relevant law and in describing Ms Roy as a divorcee. —Editor

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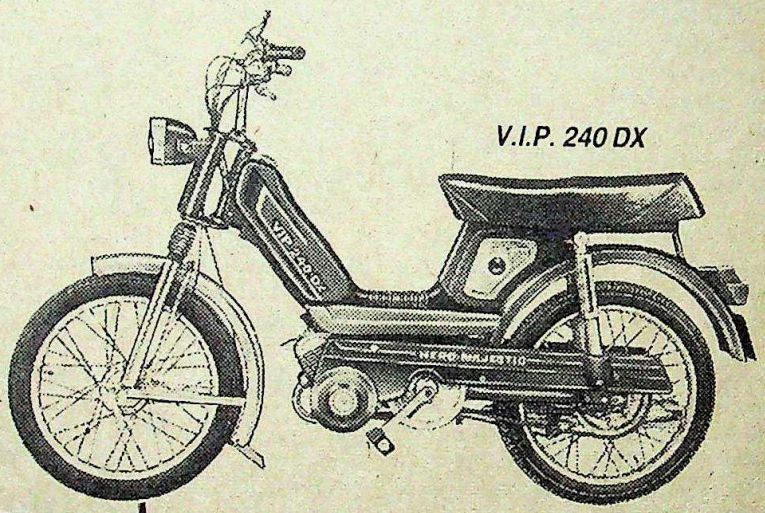

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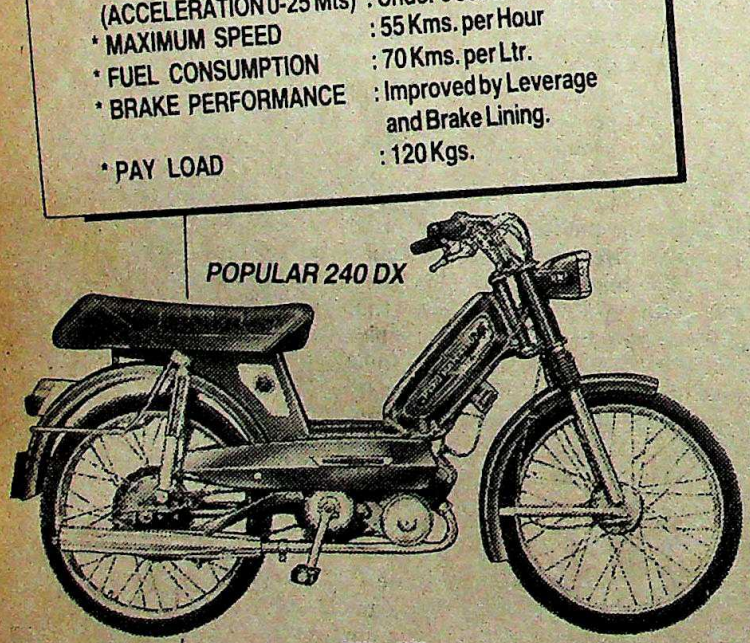

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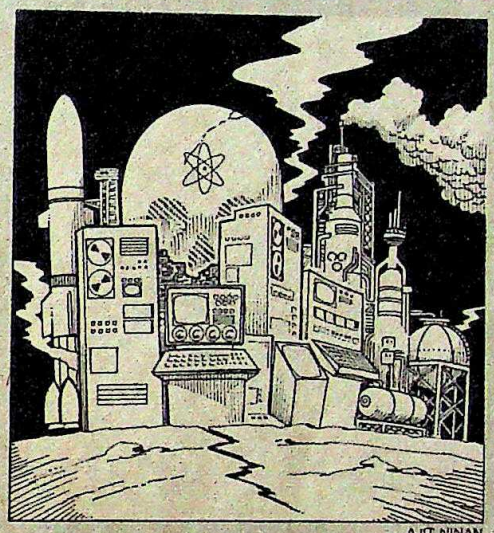
The Chernobyl Lesson

CHERNOBYL in the Soviet Union, the Challenger tragedy in the US, followed by one Delta and two Titan rocket mishaps, on a smaller scale Talcher in India, and of course Bhopal: the perils of advanced technology are once again all too evident and cannot be wished away. These are only the latest incidents. At the Windscale plutonium production plant near Liverpool in England, a fire in the reactor spewed radioactive material over 500 square km, and officials had to ban the sale of milk from cows grazing in the area. Some 33 cancer deaths were expected to result. The Three Mile Island nuclear installation in Pennsylvania saw a partial meltdown in 1979 and a panicky exodus of the local residents. And both before and after Bhopal, people have continued to die and suffer in a variety of ways because of gas leaks and explosions in chemical plants, including one at the Vadodara heavy water unit.



AJIT NINAN

Chernobyl is of course far and away the worst of these, and the consequences are almost too frightening to contemplate. Apart from the immediate danger to thousands of residents for scores of kilometers around Chernobyl as well as in Scandinavia and other parts of Europe, there is the risk of radioactivity affecting the food grown in the Soviet Union's bread basket, of major rivers getting contaminated, and of victims being claimed in the most unlikely spots because of the inherent downstream dangers.

The reassurances from India's atomic energy establishment and from the prime minister have been quickly forthcoming: such a meltdown cannot occur in India because India's atomic power stations use not graphite but water to moderate the atomic reaction, so much radioactivity cannot escape into the environment because these stations have an extra containment structure, and the reactors in India use a technology that does not require the kind of high pressures normal at Chernobyl. These are reassuring, but it would be foolish to believe that any technology is completely failsafe, especially in a country where safety precautions are often observed in the breach. So questions must nag the minds of anyone anywhere in the vicinity of an atomic installation (the one coming up at Narora is barely 150 km from Delhi) or a space launch pad, or indeed any chemical plant. In fact, the peaceful use of atomic energy may be as potentially dangerous as the atom bomb: some experts say there is an even chance of another core meltdown in the next two decades.

It would be equally foolish, of course, to turn one's back on technology because of these tragedies and dangers. Thousands die in the country every year in traffic accidents but no one suggests the banning of motorised transport. And again thousands died last year in air accidents, but aviation remains beyond question. Even in the energy field, more people have died in coal mining accidents in India than from accidents in atomic power stations. Nevertheless, fundamental questions do need answers, questions concerning the uses to which technologies are put (for example, the rocket mishaps in the US have a clear lesson for the Star Wars programme), the arrangements for ensuring that secretive technocrats handling dangerous technologies are subject to independent scrutiny vis-a-vis safety systems and practices, and the effectiveness of laws stipulating safety regulations. Also, as Chernobyl has shown, the safety issues transcend national boundaries. Will the Soviet Union guarantee, for instance, that any food product supplied by that country does not come from near Chernobyl? After all, India has taken wheat from the Soviets in the past.

The questions concerning the technologies themselves are especially relevant to India because it is embarked on a process of development that calls increasingly for the use of potentially dangerous technologies in proliferating industrial units, and because not enough seems to have been done as yet in the aftermath of Bhopal to ensure that such catastrophes do not recur. Factory inspectors are overburdened while being under-paid and under-motivated, the laws themselves are antiquated and not adequate for the purpose in many cases, managements tend to be slipshod about safety practices, and workers are all too often plain ignorant or not made properly conscious of the need for safety. This combination of circumstances is tailor-made for the kind of tragedy that struck Bhopal, and given the series of mishaps that have occurred since then at Chembur, Kanpur and a host of other industrial centres, there is little to guarantee that things will not go wrong again somewhere else.

Advanced technology that is susceptible to glitches also brings with it a vulnerable dependence. The US rocket mishaps have forced on India an unexpected delay in the launching into space of the INSAT 1C satellite, meant to be a back-up to its twin that is already in space. With much of the national television network, vital meteorological data and some telecommunication channels now relying on just one satellite that does not have a stand-by, the consequences of a malfunction could be serious. Problems with heavy water plants, including the Vadodara explosion some years ago, have likewise delayed the country's atomic energy programme. Clearly, technologies need to be made failsafe for reasons other than basic human safety too.

In the final analysis, dangerous technologies are double-edged swords: they can be wielded to improve life immeasurably for people in developed and developing countries, but if they slice the wrong way they cut a wide swathe through much of the superstructure of twentieth century life.

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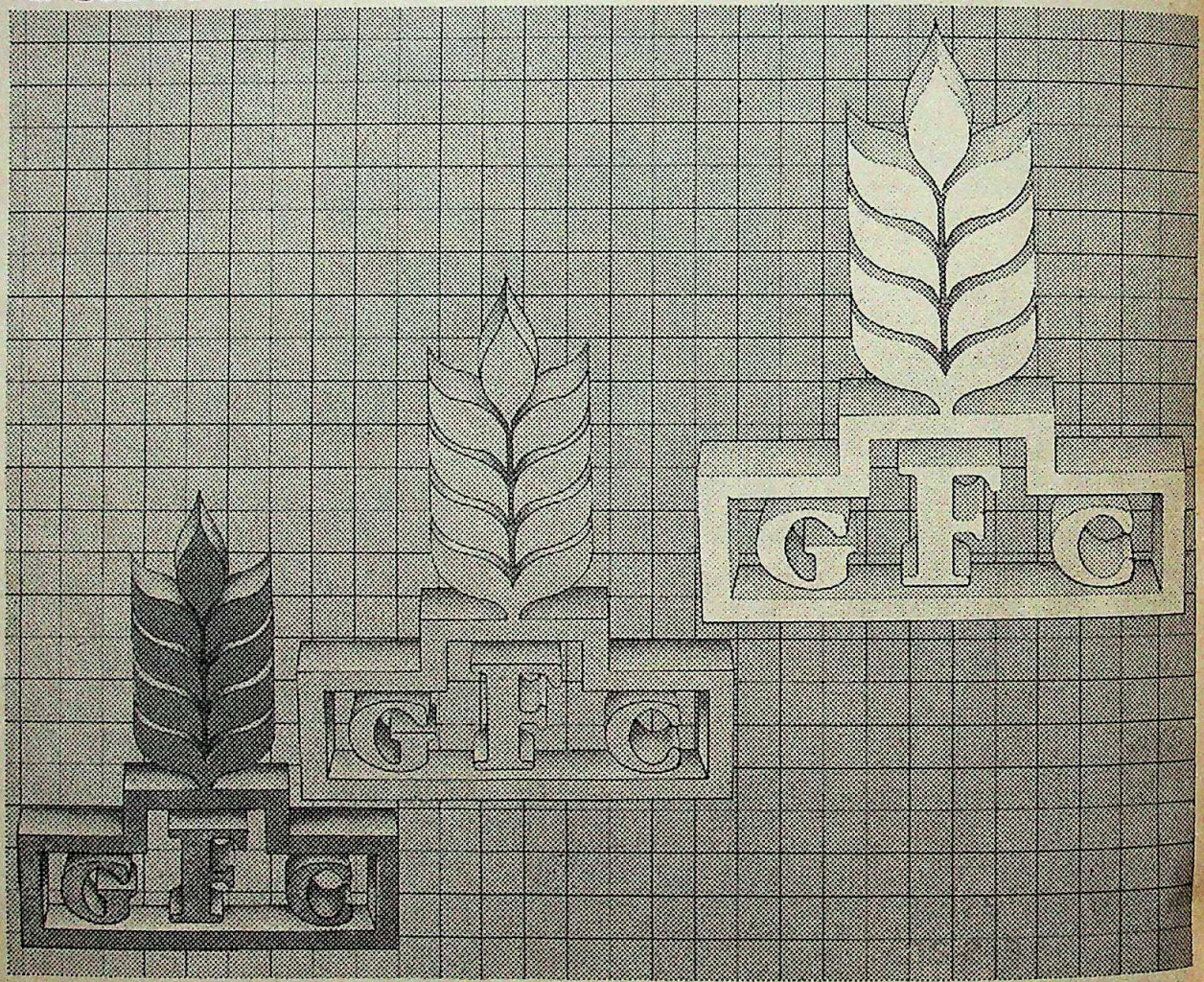

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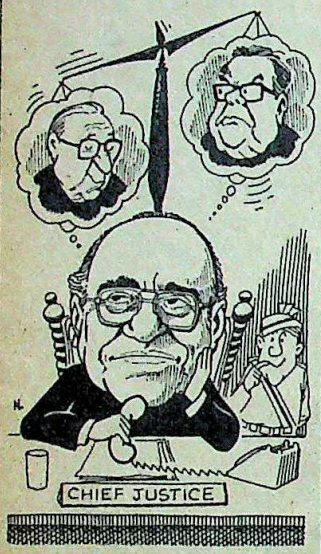
Supreme Choice

● With Supreme Court Chief Justice P.N. Bhagwati due to retire in another four months, the jockeying for succession to the country's highest judicial office has already begun. Normally Bhagwati should be succeeded by Justice R.S. Pathak, next in seniority. But Bhagwati is a judicial liberal who has encouraged public interest litigation, spoken out on behalf of bonded labour and admitted writ petitions to the court on the basis of even post cards mailed by ordinary citizens. Pathak in contrast is a conservative jurist who may reverse the directions set by Bhagwati, an eventuality that Bhagwati may not be very happy about.



The prime minister's office has been informed of this aspect of the succession and has suggested that Bhagwati be succeeded by Attorney-General K. Parasaran, who enjoys the status of a Supreme Court judge. But Parasaran himself is apparently unwilling to stir a hornet's nest by stepping into Bhagwati's shoes, especially in the light of past controversies over the supersession of Supreme Court judges in Mrs Gandhi's time. The choice of Bhagwati's successor is evidently not going to be an easy one.

Well Armed

● Former foreign secretary Romesh Bhandari's role since retirement has been a curious mix of being a Congressman and the prime minister's special envoy. He heads the foreign affairs cell and was part of the team that went recently to Sri Lanka. But he had to again take the oath of secrecy to be part of the delegation.

But whatever confusion may be caused by this unusual double role, there is little doubt that Bhandari has the prime minister's ear—and his arm. At a government bash during the non-aligned foreign ministers' conference in New Delhi, he was seen escorting the prime minister to a corner of the room to meet the Sri Lankan foreign minister. Eyebrows were raised—it is customary for diplomats to be taken to the head of Government, not the other way round—but what the incident firmly established was that the informal relationship between the prime minister and the former foreign secretary is still in evidence.

No Takers

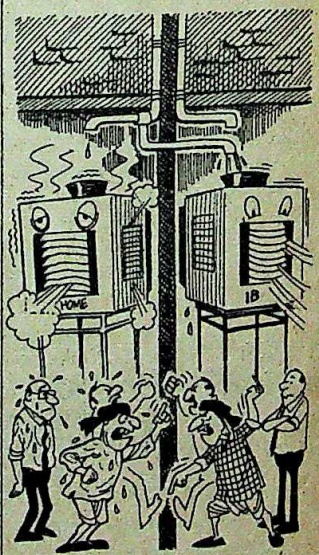
● Doing a job well can sometimes leads to unforeseen complications. Ask Union Minister of State for Personnel, Training and Pensions P. Chidambaram, one of the few ministers inducted last September who have made a mark. Chidambaram was almost an afterthought as an appointee to the ministry, but the Harvard-educated scion of the blue-blooded Sivaganga family has done well with his brief. Perhaps that is why the 40-year-old minister is now tipped as one of the two candidates for the crucial Pradesh Congress(I) chief slot in Tamil Nadu. With MGR's star on the wane, the Congress(I) fancies its chances of coming to power in the post-MGR era, the party chief will be on the inside track for the chief ministership. There is only one problem: Chidambaram does not want to be chief minister.

The other likely incumbent, Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, is also one of the "best and the brightest". Kumaramangalam, who is 10-odd years younger than Chidambaram, has emerged as a major trade unionist and threatens to become a challenge to the Indian National Trade Union Congress, the party's trade union wing. Returning to Tamil Nadu will be a wrench for him too; he and his wife, both lawyers, had come away barely a year ago, leaving behind a flourishing practice, and were just beginning to find their feet in the capital. It remains to be seen which one will get the unwelcome nod from Rajiv Gandhi.

Cold War

● When water is in short supply, temperatures rise. Not only in drought-hit areas but also in the supposedly calm environs of North Block in Delhi's Central Secretariat. Relations between officers of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and other departments of the Home Ministry became very cool as ambient temperatures in offices rose following a disruption in the water supply to air coolers in the IB wing.

Gardeners responsible for the comforts of the IB men tapped pipes supplying water to the adjoining wing. This set the coolers of the IB purring, but those in neighbouring offices dried up. Hot words were exchanged between the gardeners and peons. How could the IB gardeners divert water to the sleuths' coolers and make other bureaucrats sweat? The war nearly led to blows. Finally, officers of the IB sued for peace and status quo ante was restored. The Home Ministry officials retained their cool while the IB men sweated. And the point had been driven home that the IB was only a subsidiary agency of the Home Ministry.



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● *Why should I want to split a party I hold so dear? The weakening of the Congress would be a disaster for the nation.... As a loyal Congressman, I hold this in great importance and would not like to jeopardise the future of the country.*

■ PRANAB MUKHERJEE in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *The difference (between the Congress(I) working president and vice-president) is that when the working president goes to a state on a visit, he has to arrange his own transport, whereas in the case of the vice-president the entire cabinet has to be present at the airport to receive him.*

■ KAMALAPATI TRIPATHI quoted in *The Week*

● *The result of the so-called "conducted opinion poll" must have inflated his (Pranab Mukherjee's) greedy ego like a frog in the well, leading him to the stupid extent of believing that he is the alternative to Mr Rajiv Gandhi.*

■ GHANI KHAN CHOWDHURY in *The Telegraph*

● *A pittance is paid to poor divorced women and the mullahs say Islam is in danger.*

■ HASHMIN ABDUL HALIM, speaker, West Bengal Assembly, quoted in *The Statesman*

● *The Islamic Bill is inhuman, un-Islamic and will lead the Muslims to pre-Islamic era when they were considered to be animals, chattels and private property of men.*

■ ARIF MOHAMMED KHAN in *Patriot.*

● *You should have seen the* FICCI *elections to believe it. People used to come in truckloads with proxy forms and lists of people for whom they should vote.*

■ RAMU PANDIT, secretary-general of the IMC, in *Bombay*

● *It is a privilege to be a friend of the prime minister. But I don't think Rajiv or any member of his family would influence my business.*

■ OTTAVIO QUATROCCHI, Italian businessman, in *Onlooker*

● *Lady, we are playing cricket in Pakistan and all will be well if you follow the rules. But if you move to hockey, that is a rougher business and we shall have to change our game too.*

■ ZIA-UL-HAQ, Pakistan President, in a message to Benazir Bhutto

● *Losing the match at Sharjah has been the greatest disappointment of my career. Our boys played so well; we didn't go wrong anywhere. But I suppose someone has to lose.*

■ KAPIL DEV in *The Sunday Observer*

● *I will never do such revealing scenes (as in* Ram Teri Ganga Maili*) for any producer or director again. Those scenes have given me enough trouble to last me a lifetime.*

■ MANDAKINI quoted in *Sunday*

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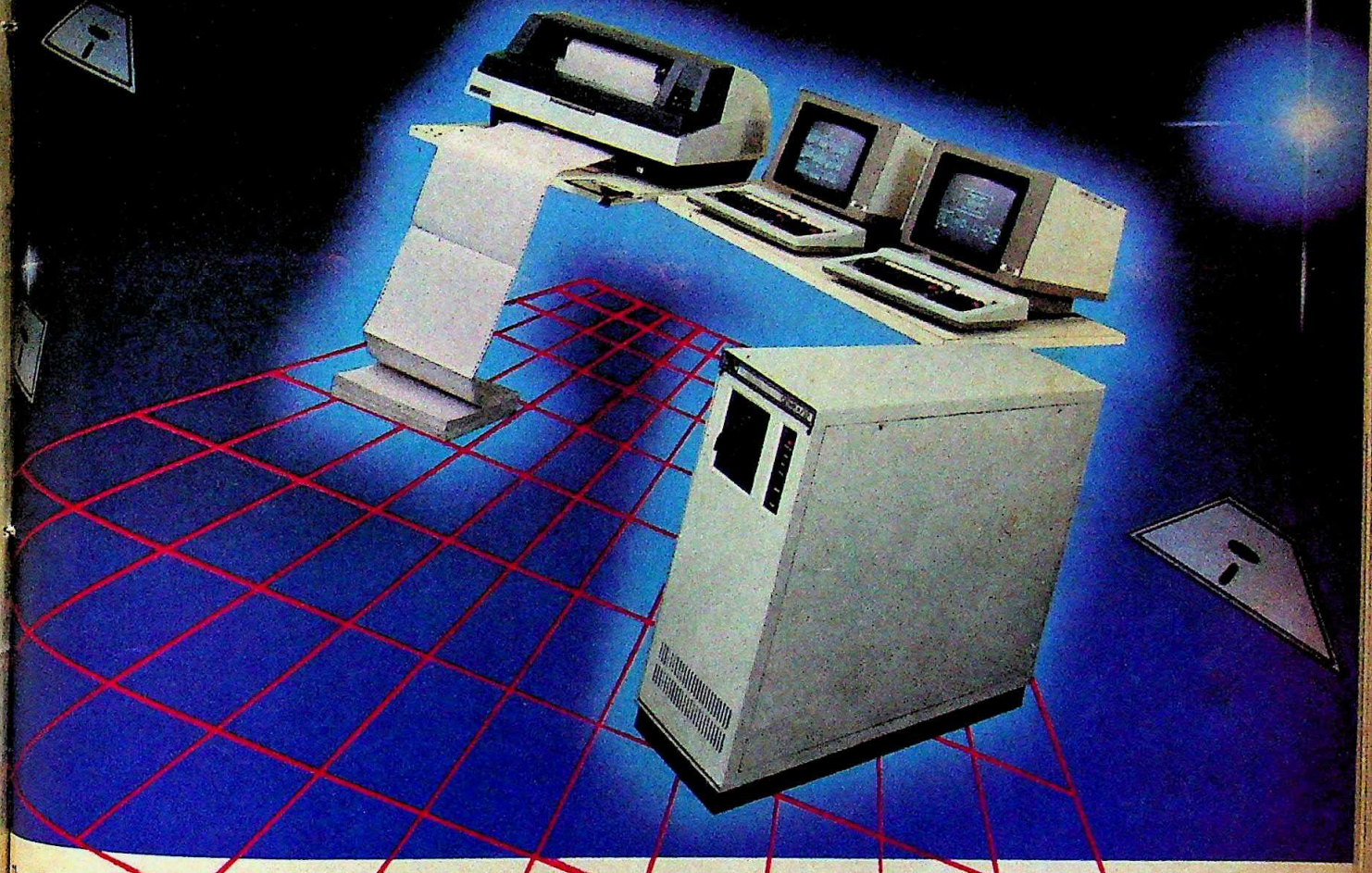

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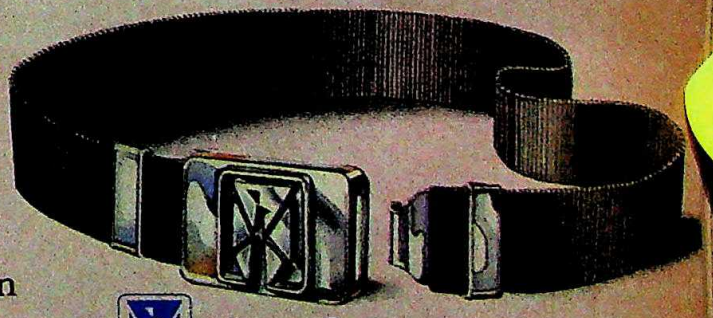

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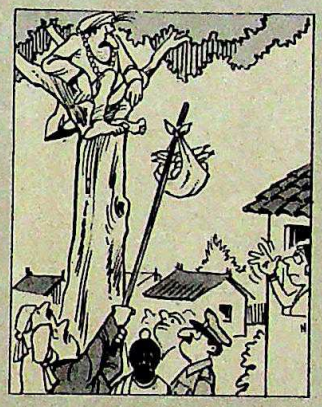
FALSE PREGNANCY

■ Modinagar, on the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border, is a sleepy industrial township where the rare scandal usually revolves around the assembly lines in the cluster of factories belonging to the Modi group. Thus, it was hardly surprising when the township was rocked recently by what appeared to be a sensational scandal involving a 13-year-old schoolgirl. The girl had gone with her parents to a local doctor complaining of a severe pain in her abdomen. After examining her, the doctor made the shocking announcement that the girl was pregnant. The word spread like wildfire in a town where practically everybody knows each other, and the shocked citizenry immediately ostracised the girl's family. To add injury to insult, the resultant scandal forced the school authorities to expel the girl without a second thought.

The distraught parents, refusing to accept the diagnosis, then took the girl to nearby Meerut where they had her examined in a reputed nursing home. There she was operated upon for what turned out to be nothing more than a tumour in her tummy. Modinagar's medical practitioners are now the ones being ostracised.

BRANCHING OUT

■ When wedding bells pealed joyfully in Phalsabahal village, near Sambalpur in Orissa, the only person present who didn't join in the merry-making was the bridegroom, who was, quite literally, out on a limb. For, the unfortunate bridegroom had discovered his wife in what is politely referred to as 'a compromising position' with another man on the night of their wedding. The disillusioned husband promptly registered his protest by clambering up the nearest tree and refusing to come down despite promises by his two-timing bride that she would remain faithful.



But wounded pride obviously takes a long time to heal. When reports last came in, he had been up the tree for exactly one month, firmly spurning all efforts to induce him to return to terra firma. Instead, he has threatened to jump to his death from his perch if anybody attempted to climb up after him. He has been provided food and water attached to the end of a long bamboo pole and gives no sign of coming off his high horse, preferring to learn about the birds and the bees instead by observing them at close quarters.

POLICE PANDAL

■ Policemen are meant to be capturing outlaws and not in-laws. But that is precisely what happened recently at Podili police station in Andhra Pradesh. Ankamma Devi, a petite and pretty local belle, had been pledged by her father in marriage to a boy from a neighbouring village. But there was one hitch in the prospective hitch: namely Ankamma's handsome young lover whom she promptly eloped with to Hyderabad, some distance away from home.

The irate father and his prospective in-laws lodged a complaint with the local police alleging that she had been kidnapped. The police diligently tracked down the lovers to their nest in the bustling city and brought them back to Podili but found there was another hitch: both were majors and were obviously besotten with each other. Adopting the role of match-makers, the police party summoned the parents of the couple to the police station and finally managed to convince them of the suitability of the match. To crown it all, the marriage ceremony was held in the police station where the wedding knot was firmly—and finally—cemented, without even the need for filling out an FIR.

MUSICAL MOOD

■ Gujarat is one state that is currently in the grip of a severe drought and one of the most badly affected communities is the state's large population of cows. Lack of adequate water and grass fodder has reduced them to skeletal proportions, but there is an oasis in the middle of this bovine desert—a *gaushala* on the outskirts of Jamnagar, where by some miracle, the 4,000 cows in residence are sleek and contented-looking.

The miracle is music. But not just any music will do. The cows may not be pedigreed but they are connoisseurs all the same and only respond to the distinctive sounds of maestro Bismillah Khan's *shehnai* which is played to them every morning at dawn through loudspeakers situated all over the *gaushala*. The people in charge of the establishment claim that a dose of Bismillah Khan every morning from their large collection of the mastro's records keeps the cows healthy and their milk output remains high. They also say that they have tried various other types of music and records of other well-known musicians and singers but the cows will respond to no udder.

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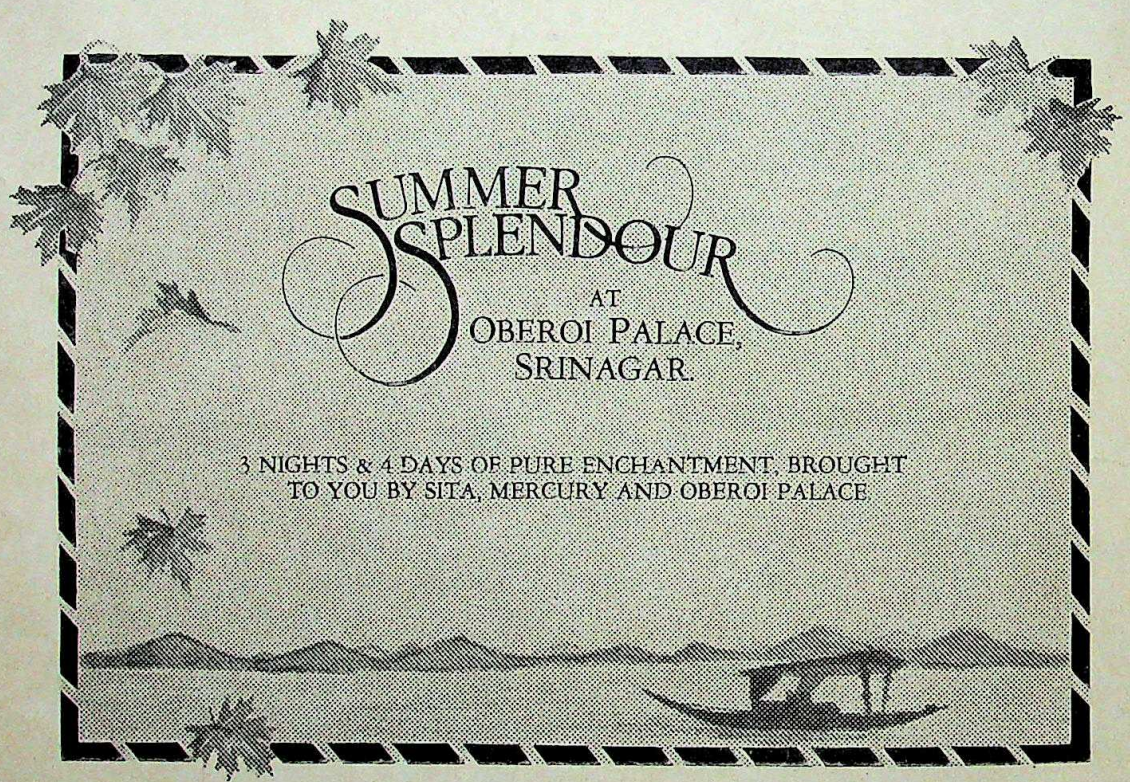

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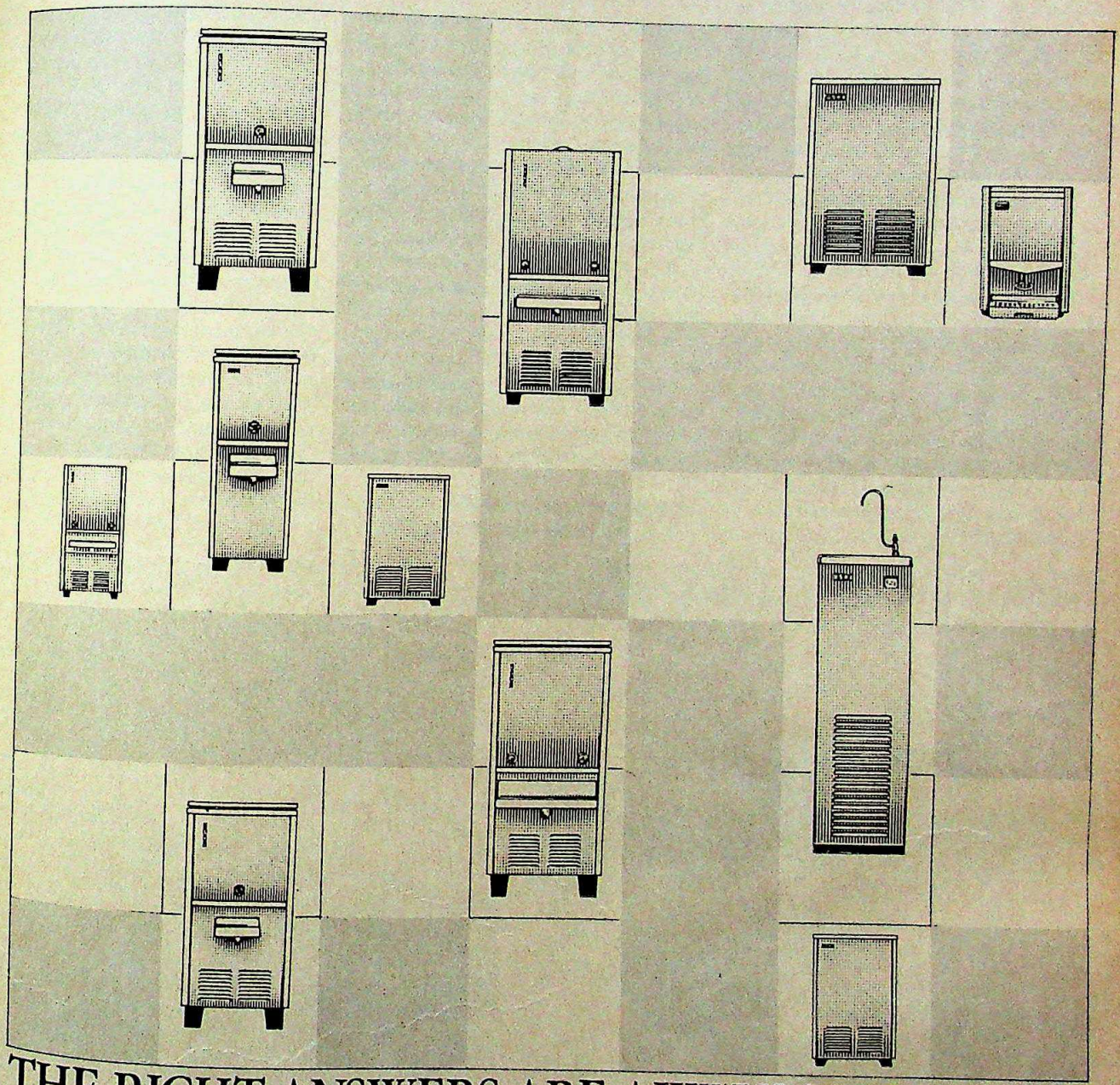

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PUNJAB

Return to U

PUNJAB'S affairs have seen many twists and turns in the last four years. But last week's sustained drama was something special even for that troubled state: desperadoes declaring the birth of Khalistan, yet another commando entry into the Golden Temple, a split in the ruling Akali Dal, MLA's going into hiding in neighbouring Himachal Pradesh, more than half the members of the Barnala faction ending up as ministers. There was all this and more in an action-packed fortnight, including yet another burst of murderous violence, party expulsions and moves for ousting the speaker, and the unique sight of an entire opposition declaring its support for a beleaguered government. But the underlying message was clear: a strife-torn state had been plunged once again into confusion and uncertainty as the Barnala Government's fate hung in the balance.

At one level, the Government's decision to go back into the Golden Temple was probably a mistake since it was well known that the men who made the farcical announcement of the birth of Khalistan had left the temple immediately afterwards. At another, it provided an opportunity to disgruntled politicians in a divided Akali Dal to get their own back on Barnala and make a bid for power themselves. Whatever the case, the political temperature in the state rose quickly to near explosion point.

Indeed, history seemed to be repeating itself in bizarre fashion: if it was amoral politicking by the Congress(I)'s Punjab stalwarts that led to the rise of Bhindranwale and then Operation Bluestar, this time the state's future seemed to have been mortgaged to the machinations of frustrated Akali politicians, in turn playing into extremist hands.

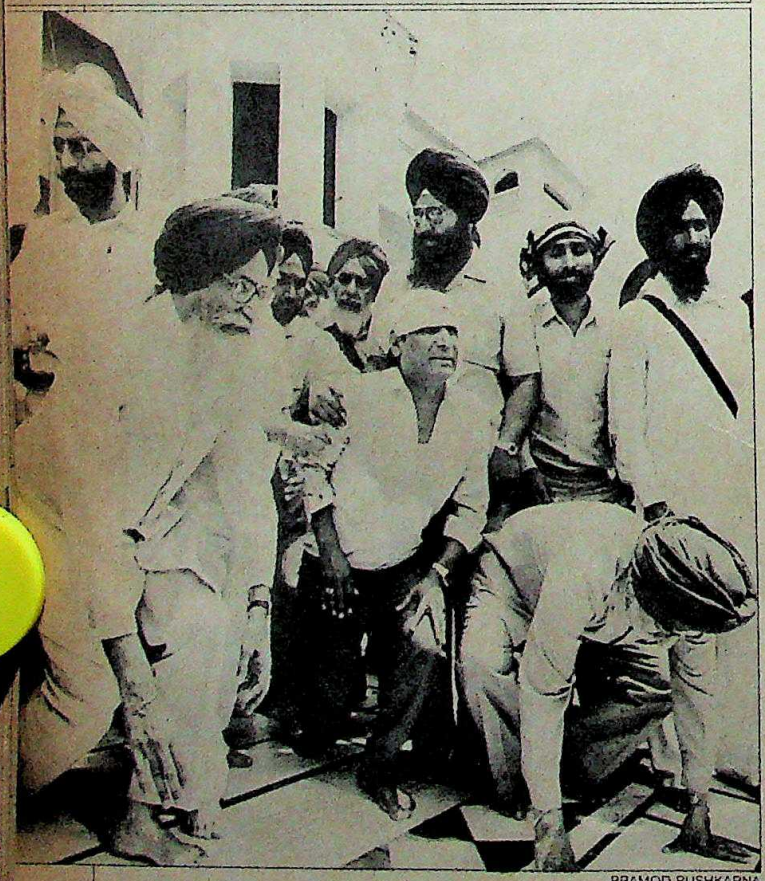
And once again the perceptions in and outside Punjab were sharply different. While the rest of the country welcomed the state Government's decision to go in after the Khalistanis, the mood in Punjab was more uncertain, and opinions still subject to change as political events flowed thick and fast.

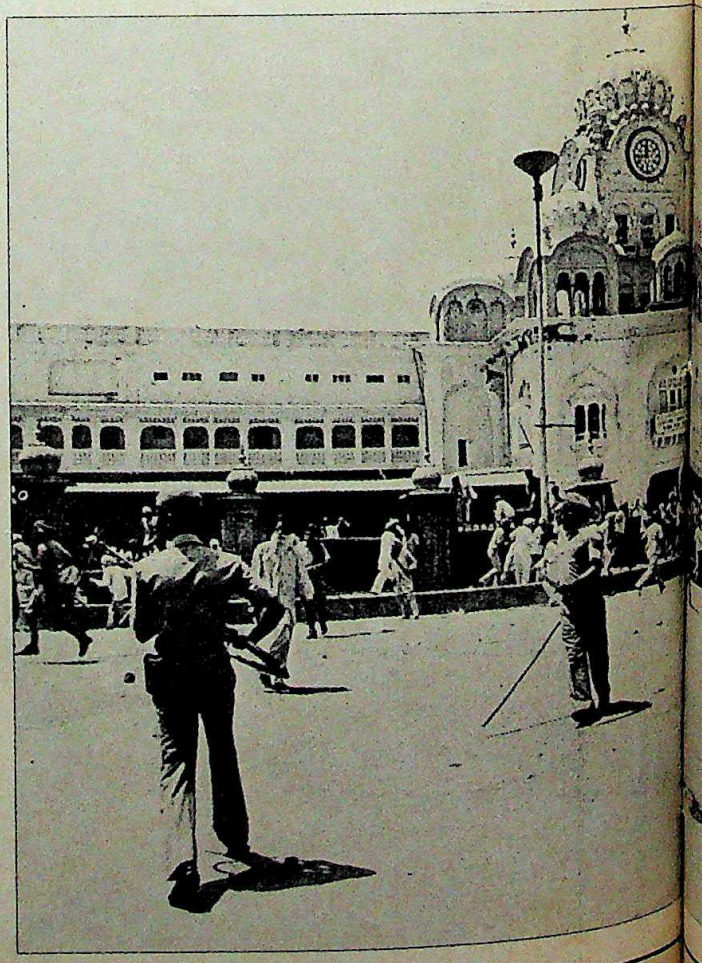
Certainly, no police entry into the Golden Temple is without repercussions. Barnala got a stormy reception at the Golden Temple the morning after the commando action. He was greeted by wailing women shouting "Hai Barnala, Hai Barnala", and an old woman going around the Harmander Sahib sanctum kept mumbling *"Kar paapiyan da naas"* (destroy the sinners). When Governor S.S. Ray visited the temple, he faced an even more hostile crowd. Protestors surrounded his car, shouting angry slogans.

Taking advantage of the confusion, sympathisers of the All-India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) moved back in, broke open the locks on their office door and were back in business. Workers of the

Barnala in the Temple (below left); and Akalis clash outside: turbulent times

Barnala's fate hangs in the balance





PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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Uncertainty

Damdami Taksal and United Akali Dal also trooped back and started the recitation of the Granth Sahib outside the demolished Akal Takht building. While the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), virtually ousted from the temple premises in January, had been able to move back in following the action, it became uncertain once again how long it could retain this control.

In the midst of this frenetic activity, Barnala repeatedly stressed he had only implemented the resolution adopted by the Sarbat Khalsa on February 16 at Anandpur Sahib. Denying that he had acted at the Centre's behest, he said: "I took this painful decision myself. Persuasion had failed and my leniency was misunderstood by the extremists. I had no choice." He lashed out at former SGPC chief G.S. Tohra for "running away after handing the complex over to extremists" and "not daring to visit the temple after that", and said in exasperation: "First they blame me for inaction; now they are blaming me for doing something."

None of this cut any ice with the dissidents. And the storm broke immediately after the temple entry. Some Cabinet ministers protested that they had not been taken into confidence on the decision, and agriculture minister Amarinder Singh suffered the embarrassment of hearing the news the next day from his tailor, who had come to measure him out for new clothes. "And I am supposed to be the No. 3 man in the Cabinet," he scoffed.

Barnala's rejoinder—he did not want word about the operation to leak out—was the most open admission any chief minister has made that some of his colleagues may be extremist sympathisers.

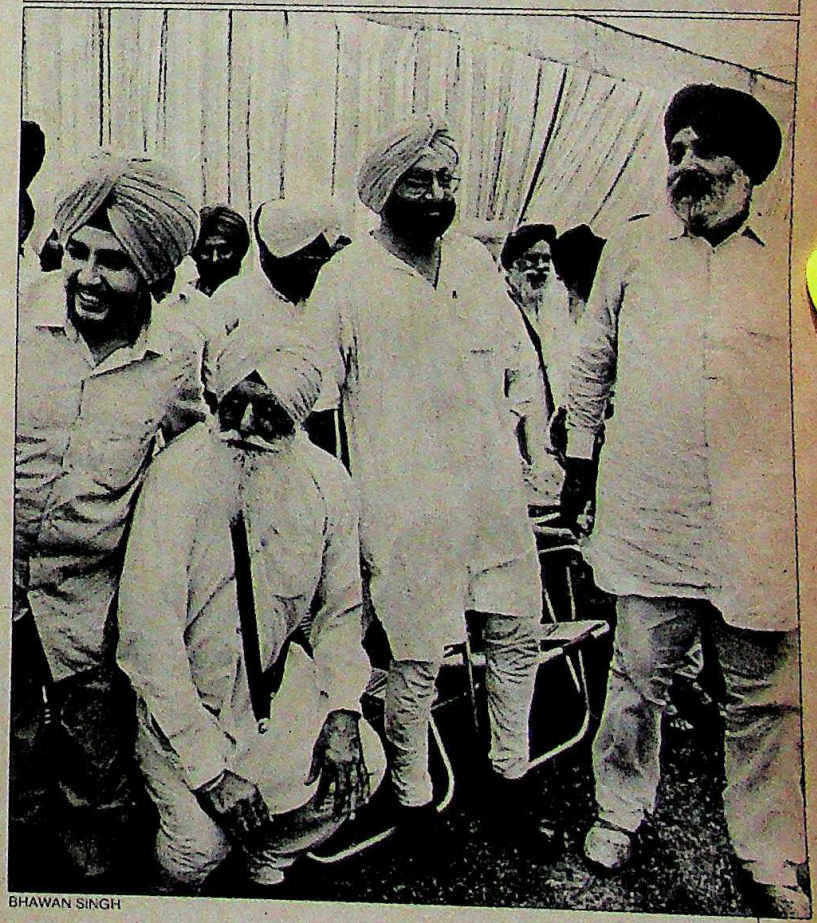
Nevertheless, Amarinder had soon joined the dissidents: the wily Tohra, the sulking former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal and the joker in the pack, Assembly speaker Ravi Inder Singh, at whose house they met. They boycotted the joint meeting of the Akali Dal Working Committee and party MLA's that had been called by Barnala, and the next day Amarinder and education minister Sukhjinder Singh resigned from the Cabinet. They were followed by state tourism minister Sucha Singh Chhotepur.

Badal and Tohra in turn resigned from the party's working committee, along with vice-president Surjan Singh Thekedar, who had held the Akali Dal together in the post-Bluestar period when recognised leaders were in jail. Ravi Inder played a key role in persuading Badal and Tohra to patch up their differences and unite against Barnala. And he took the vital decision to ignore Barnala's expulsion from the party of Amarinder, Sukhjinder and Chhotepur, and recognised the rebels as a separate group in the Assembly, reducing Barnala to a minority. Had he not ignored the expulsions, the 27 rebels

(Below right) Tohra, Ravi Inder Singh and Badal: grim prophecies

BHAWAN SINGH

The rebels were checkmated temporarily



BHAWAN SINGH

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DALMIA RESORTS INTERNATIONAL

It is hereby notified for the information of all applicants who applied for the purchase of property shares/holiday certificates in respect of the Dalmia Resorts International at Goa, Kodaikanal and Delhi and to GTC Industries Ltd, The Sree Meenakshi Mills Ltd and Dalmia Dairy Industries Ltd,that the arrangements and agreements concluded between **American Express Bank Ltd** and GTC Industries Ltd, The Sree Meenakshi Mills Ltd and Dalmia Dairy Industries Ltd for deposit on Escrow Account the purchase consideration received from such applicants with **American Express Bank Ltd** and for the deposit in safe custody with **American Express Bank Ltd** of the title deeds to the land and building relating to the Dalmia Resorts International at Goa, Kodaikanal, Delhi have been terminated by mutual consent.

It is further notified that similar Escrow and Trusteeship arrangement has been entered into by GTC Industries Ltd, The Sree Meenakshi Mills Ltd and Dalmia Dairy Industries Ltd with **Canara Bank** (hereinafter referred to as "the said nationalised Bank").

It is further notified that a sum of Rs. 1,38,08,094.79 (Rupees One crore thirty eight lakhs eight thousand ninety four and seventynine paise only), Rs. 55,45,178.21 (Rupees Fiftyfive lakhs forty five thousand one hundred seventy eight and paise twentyone only) and Rs. 20,43,975.12 (Rupees Twenty lakhs fortythree thousand nine hundred seventy five and paise twelve only) being the balance amount lying in the Escrow Account of the Bank to the credit of GTC Industries Ltd, The Sree Meenakshi Mills Ltd and Dalmia Dairy Industries Ltd respectively has been/will be transferred by **American Express Bank Ltd** to the said nationalised bank.

If any purchaser who has already subscribed to the property shares or holiday certificates in the Dalmia Resorts International, Goa, Kodaikanal and Delhi, does not approve of the revised Escrow and custody arrangements entered into with the said nationalised Bank, he is hereby notified that he shall have the right to obtain a refund of the amount paid by him provided that he makes and delivers an application in writing to any of the addresses mentioned hereinafter not later than May 31, 1986.

1. **Dalmia Resorts International**
   65, Mittal Chambers, Nariman Point,
   BOMBAY - 400 021.
2. **Dalmia Resorts International**
   206-207, BMC House, N Block,
   Connaught Circus,
   NEW DELHI - 110 001.
3. **Dalmia Resorts International**
   Hotel & Restaurants Consultants (P) Ltd,
   D-6/7, IInd Floor,
   Parsn Commercial Complex,
   121, Mount Road,
   MADRAS - 600 006.
4. **Canara Bank**
   Marshal House, Parliament Street,
   NEW DELHI - 110 001
5. **GTC Industries Ltd**
   Tobacco House, S.V. Road,
   Vile Parle (West),
   BOMBAY - 400 056
6. **The Sree Meenakshi Mills Ltd**
   Tirupparankundram Road,
   MADURAI - 625 003.
7. **Dalmia Dairy Industries Ltd**
   11 ABC Atmaram House,
   1, Tolstoy Marg,
   NEW DELHI - 110 001.

The application for refund must be signed by the same person or persons who have signed the original application for the purchase of the property shares or holiday certificates and such refund application must contain a reference to the date, name of the bank, the number of the cheque and the amount of the deposit. No claim for refund/losses will be entertained by **American Express Bank Ltd.**

For further details, please contact :

General Manager—Marketing
Dalmia Resorts International
206-207, BMC House,
N Block, Connaught Circus,
NEW DELHI - 110 001.

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KHALISTAN DECLARATION

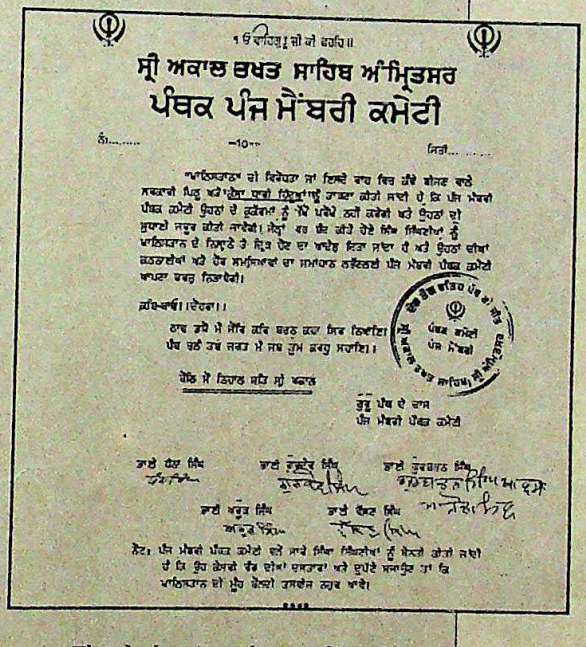
Last Straw

INITIALLY, the declaration of Khalistan by the five-member panthic committee was dismissed as the work of crackpots. Subsequently, it became increasingly obvious that the declaration had manifold objectives. One was to internationalise the Sikh issue and make it more difficult for western governments to extradite Sikh extremists as sought by the Government of India. With the formal declaration of a Sikh state from Sikhism's holiest shrine, it was felt that extremists facing extradition would find it easier to convince western nations that they were freedom fighters and secure political asylum.

Sources acquainted with the extremist leadership revealed that the panthic committee and the AISSF had originally planned to declare Khalistan on April 13, Baisakhi Day. But a faction fight split the AISSF and differences arose between the committee and the "acting jathedar" of the Akal Takht, Gurdev Singh. The announcement was then postponed to June 4, the second anniversary of Operation Bluestar. But the US-based World Sikh Organisation headed by Major General J.S. Bhullar and the International Sikh Youth Federation are believed to have put pressure on the panthic committee to announce Khalistan without further ado. A few days before April 29, the WSO's Chandigarh-based contact-man, a retired bureaucrat, spent some time with the committee members. His reasoning prevailed and the committee advanced the date to April 28. But Delhi newspapers were on strike that day, so the date was postponed to April 29.

By hastening the announcement, the committee also gained revenge on Gurdev Singh with whom it had recently been involved in a running battle. The committee had appointed Gurdev as the head priest of the Akal Takht, but he joined hands with Baba Joginder Singh and a rival faction of the AISSF and tried to overthrow AISSF convenor Harinder Singh Kahlon. Labelling Gurdev a government "agent", committee members alleged he had disappeared from the temple for four days in mid-April and on his return set up a presidium to take over the AISSF. Gurdev challenged the committee, summoned its member Wassan Singh and Kahlon and awarded them punishment.

Wassan Singh vowed to get even. He and the committee members, sources said, anticipated that some kind of police action would follow the declaration of Khalistan. They also



ੴ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਹਿ ॥

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

ਪੰਥਕ ਪੰਜ ਮੈਂਬਰੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ

ਨੰ..... -10- ਮਿਤੀ.....

ਆਖਿਰਕਾਰ ਜੋ ਵਿਦੇਹਣਾ ਜਾਂ ਜਿਸਦੇ ਕਾਰ ਵਿਚ ਹੀਰੇ ਬੰਨਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਸਰਕਾਰੀ ਪਿਠੂ ਖਹੇੜਾ ਧਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ'ਚੋਂ ਹਮਾਰਾ ਕੌਮੀ ਜਥੇ ਦੇ ਕਿ ਪੰਜ ਮੈਂਬਰੀ ਪੰਥਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਕੁਕੈਲਾਸ ਨੂੰ ਖੋਹ ਪਾਏ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰੇਗੀ ਅਤੇ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਸੁਰਾਣੀ ਜਰੂਰ ਕੌਮੀ ਜਾਏਗੀ। ਐਨ' ਵਰ ਪੰਜ ਕੌਮੀ ਹੋਏ ਸਿੱਖ ਸਿੱਖਿਆਵਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਖਿਰਕਾਰ ਦੇ ਨਿਸ਼ਾਨੇ ਤੇ ਸਿੱਧ ਹੋਣ ਦਾ ਮਾਣੇਹ ਕਿਤਾ ਜਾਦਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਕਰਤੂਤਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਸਾਜ਼ਿਸ਼ਾਂ ਦਾ ਸਮਾਜਕ ਕਲੰਕਤਤੀ ਪੰਜ ਮੈਂਬਰੀ ਪੰਥਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਆਪਣਾ ਫਰਜ਼ ਨਿਭਾਏਗੀ।

ਸ਼ੱਕ-ਵਾਦੀ। ਦੇਹਰਾ।।

ਠਾਰ ਤਮੇ ਮੈਂ ਜੋੜਿ ਕਰਿ ਬਰਨ ਕਰਾ ਜਿਮ ਲਿਖਾਇਆ।
ਪੰਥ ਚਲੈ ਤਬ ਜਗਤ ਮੈਂ ਜਸ ਹੁਮ ਕਰਯੁ ਸਹਾਇਆ।।

ਪੰਥਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਪੰਜ ਮੈਂਬਰੀ

ਬੋਲੋ ਸੋ ਨਿਹਾਲ ਸਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ

ਹੁਕਮੁ ਪੰਥ ਦੇ ਦਾਸ
ਪੰਜ ਮੈਂਬਰੀ ਪੰਥਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ

ਭਾਈ ਦੇਹਾ ਸਿੰਘ — ਭਾਈ ਰਾਜਦੇਵ ਸਿੰਘ — ਭਾਈ ਤੁਰਵਾਨ ਸਿੰਘ
ਭਾਈ ਅਰੂੜ ਸਿੰਘ — ਭਾਈ ਧੋਨਾ ਸਿੰਘ

ਨੋਟ:- ਪੰਜ ਮੈਂਬਰੀ ਪੰਥਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਵਲੋਂ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਲਿਖਿਆਰੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਕੋਲਾਂ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਵੇ ਤੇ ਕਿ ਉਹ ਕੌਮ ਦੇ ਦੋਖੀ ਦਲਤਾਰਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਦੁਹਾਏ ਸਮਾਜਿਕ ਤਾ ਕਿ ਆਖਿਰਕਾਰ ਦੀ ਮੁੱਖ ਕੋਲਾਂ ਹਮਦਰਦ ਲਹਰ ਆਵੇ।

The declaration: letter of intent

knew that Gurdev Singh would not abandon the Takht he was supposed to be "jathedar" of. That is exactly what happened. The five members of the committee sneaked out of the temple and Gurdev Singh was arrested by the police on the morning of April 30.

In Chandigarh, meanwhile, there was information suggesting that pressure for the declaration of Khalistan had come from Pakistan; and interestingly enough the announcement said that the new state's capital would be not Lahore but Delhi. If this conjecture was true, Pakistan's motivation may well have been a desire to try and seize the initiative at a time when Benazir Bhutto was creating political problems for President Zia-ul-Haq.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

would have been less than a third of the Dal's 73-strong legislature party and been automatically unseated from the Assembly under the anti-defection law.

Earlier, when Amarinder and Badal released a list of MLA's who opposed the police entry into the Golden Temple, the ruling group took a leaf out of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao's book and spirited some 40 legislators off to Chail and Shimla in Himachal Pradesh, to shield them from the allurements of the dissident group. "We have sent the MLA's to the maharaja's palace," joked Finance Minister Balwant Singh, referring to the fact that Chail at one time used to be the summer palace of Amarinder's father, the Maharaja of Patiala.

Fighting for political survival, Barnala had to take the somewhat ignominous step of adding 21 legislators to his council of ministers, including three dissidents, making more than half his MLA's members of the Government. Seeing its strength reduced, the Badal group then escalated the conflict and announced that Amarinder, Badal and Tohra would address gurudwara meetings all over the state from May 11 against the commando action in the temple. This drive would end at Amritsar on June 4, the second anniversary of Operation Bluestar.

BUT BARNALA struck back in a preemptive move by summoning the Assembly for a meeting in Chandigarh on June 2, to decide on the removal of Ravi Inder Singh from the speaker's post. This was almost certain to succeed, given the support extended to Barnala by the entire opposition. And despite Amarinder's declaration that "by July 31 Barnala's Government is going to collapse," there was little doubt that the rebels had been checkmated for the moment.

Interestingly enough, though Tohra joined hands with the dissidents, his two lieutenants—Health minister Basant Singh Khalsa and Revenue Minister Major Singh Uboke—decided to stay put in the Barnala Cabinet. Khalsa confessed that though he was unhappy about the police action, he would not be a party to toppling the Government as this would be pushing Barnala into the open arms of

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the Congress(I). "The Centre will then treat us like it did G.M. Shah in Jammu & Kashmir, discredit the Akali Dal and dismiss the Government whenever it wants. This is the game that Ravi Inder and his friends are playing," Khalsa charged.

But Badal and Amarinder charged that Barnala had already played into the Central Government's hands by ordering Operation Search, in effect justifying the earlier Operation Bluestar. "We got votes on an anti-Bluestar plank. Now what will we say?" asked Badal. Amarinder added: "No Akali chief minister would be stupid enough to order such an action unless he was under tremendous pressure."

With both sides having taken diametrically opposite positions, it was inevitable that they would clash. That clash occurred as Badal, Tohra, Amarinder and Sukhjinder arrived at the Golden Temple on May 11 with their supporters. But Barnala's men were already there and a scuffle followed. Once again the area around the temple was put under curfew. Barnala made the telling point that the dissidents had been able to enter the temple for the first time in over three months only because the Government had cleared it of militants.

Responding to the dissident demand that he should apologise for the police action, Barnala said he had done nothing wrong. He was, however, willing to appear before the Akal Takht if Kirpal Singh, the SGPC-appointed jathedar, held him guilty of misconduct.

The politicians' headline-grabbing shenanigans distracted attention from one pressing issue: the escalating tempo of killings by terrorists, who brazenly peppered 44 people with bullets in the week following the police entry. In Tarn Taran alone, 11 people were killed in three

OPERATION SEARCH

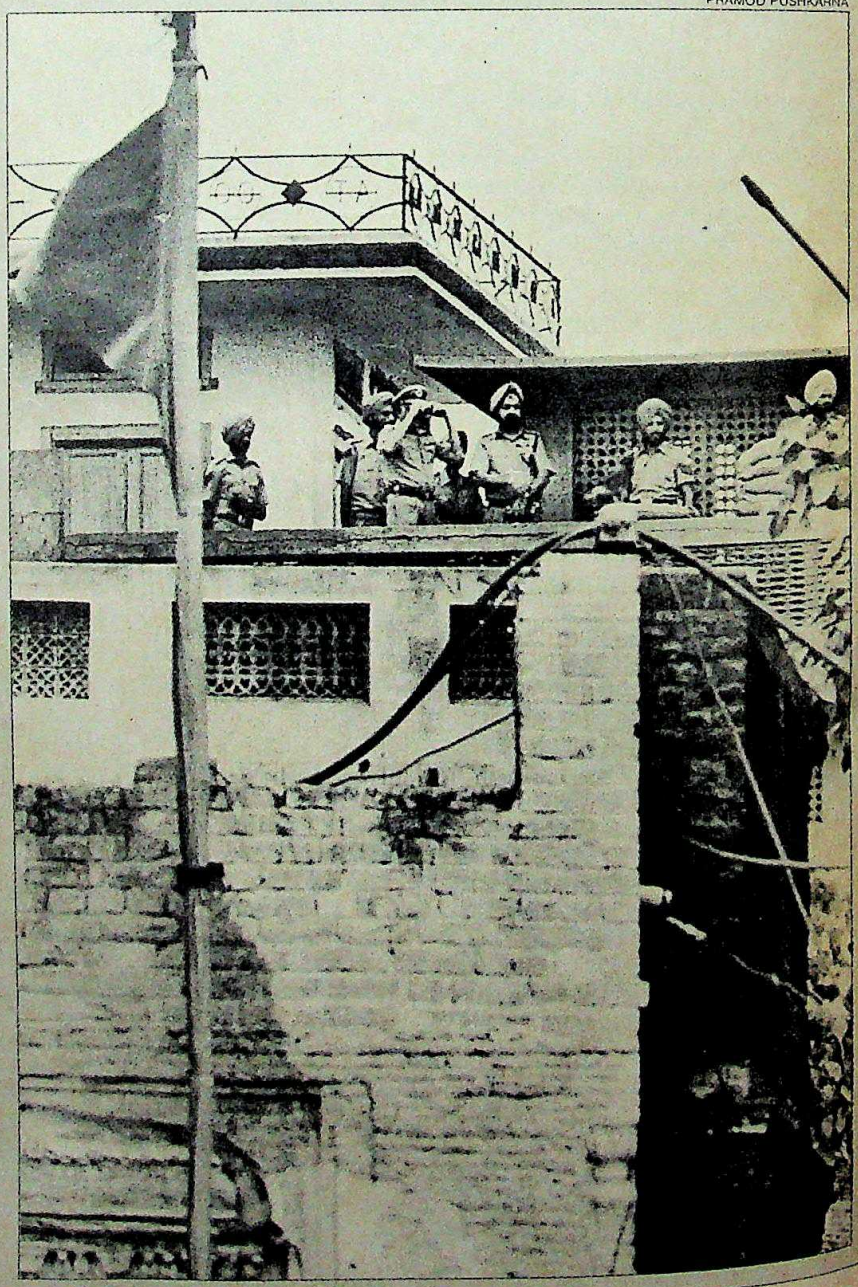
Poor Catch

THE FOUR newsmen had little inkling of what was in store when they received a cryptic phone call inviting them to a press conference on April 29 in room 46 in the Golden Temple. For the past few months, room 46 had been used by Wassan Singh, key member of the five-man panthic committee set up to "guide the affairs of the Sikhs" by Damdami Taksal militants who usurped control of the temple last January. Wassan Singh and his colleagues on the committee, Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, Aroor Singh, Gurdev Singh and Dhanna Singh, had gathered in room 46 to release a statement to the press. Khalistan had come into being, said the statement, later amended to "the fight for Khalistan had begun".

In a sense it had. In Delhi, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi abruptly adjourned a meeting of the National Development Council and went into a huddle with cabinet colleagues and Punjab Chief Minister S.S. Barnala, who was in the capital. Within 24 hours, black-suited commandos of the National Security Guard (NSG), hurriedly flown to Amritsar aboard IAF AN-12s stormed the temple and arrested about 300 activists of the Taksal and its ally the All-India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF).

But the operation proved hardly worth the risk. The committee members, three of whom are proclaimed offenders, had escaped the net along with other wanted extremist leaders. According to an SGPC employee, minutes after their

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Ribeiro scans the complex: a controversial move

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separate incidents, and four passengers were pulled out of a bus and shot near Verowal. In almost all the cases the terrorists escaped, unchallenged by a dispirited police and a scared public. Half a dozen killings a day were now considered disturbingly commonplace.

The only redeeming feature was the splits in some of the killer gangs which, police sources say, led to the shooting of the dreaded terrorist, Sukhdev Singh Sakhira. Another terrorist was killed in a similar shoot-out in Amritsar.

But by far the most important question that arose out of the political developments in Chandigarh was whether Barnala would survive the withdrawal of support by over one third of his party's MLA's. He can stay on as chief minister if he accepts the support offered by the 43-strong Opposition. That prospect pleased Amarinder: "That will discredit Barnala even more," he said. Barnala of course wants to avoid being perceived as a creature of the Centre.

But in the ultimate analysis, Barnala's future will be determined by how opinion in Punjab crystallises during the coming weeks when the dissidents take their case to the people. Badal and his men draw parallels between the April 30 action and Operation Bluestar. While many Sikhs in the villages will undoubtedly agree with them, there are others who realise that the comparison with Bluestar is vastly overdrawn. The transparent ambition of the rebels also damages their cause. The moment the revolt acquired political dimensions, it shifted the focus of public attention from the original issue, the police entry into the Golden Temple. And by a strange coincidence, things will be coming to a head as the second anniversary of Operation Bluestar approaches.

—RAMINDAR SINGH and GOBIND THUKRAL

press conference, the four of them tucked in their flowing beards, changed into safari suits, donned spectacles and differently-styled turbans and joined the throng of pilgrims leaving the temple complex. Only Aroor Singh is reported to have spent the night in the complex, and may be among the 300 persons taken into custody during the combing operation. The other most-wanted person, AISSF convenor Harinder Singh Kahlon, was seen moving around in the complex, but slipped out two hours before the operation began after being warned by sympathisers in the local police.

It was to prevent just such leaks that the preparations for the operation had been kept secret. The decision to send in the security forces was taken in Delhi on the night of April 29 after the Cabinet meeting and the consultations between Rajiv Gandhi and Barnala. Around midnight, Barnala left for Amritsar in an aircraft belonging to a wing of the spy agency, the Resarch and Analysis Wing. Accompanying Barnala was Minister of State for Defence Arun Singh, Congress (I) Vice-President Arjun Singh, a major-general of the National Security Guard and top officials of the Home Ministry.

The team from Delhi rendezvoused at Amritsar airport with the Director-General of Punjab police Julio Ribeiro and Amritsar Deputy Commissioner Ramesh Inder Singh. Plans were hurriedly drawn up to raid the temple. "This was the most difficult decision of my life," Barnala later admitted.

Initial plans for the Punjab police to go in accompanied by NSG men in plain clothes were scrapped in favour of an assault by three companies of the NSG to flush out any armed terrorists in the complex. At around 4 a.m. on April 30 plans were finalised and Barnala, Arun Singh and Arjun Singh flew back to Delhi. Barnala rested for a few hours before returning to Chandigarh for a state cabinet meeting. Within hours, AN-12 aircraft started ferrying NSG and CRPF commandos to Amritsar.

AT AROUND 4.30 p.m. on April 30, several truckloads of Punjab police and CRPF constables cordoned off the temple complex. The Guru Ram Dass Sarai and the Guru Nanak Niwas, hostelries for visiting pilgrims, were emptied and all the rooms checked. The commandos then entered the temple complex firing in the air. They first stormed the langar building from where they rounded up about 50 people, and then entered the *parikrama* after cutting off electricity supply and plunging the area into darkness. Eyewitnesses say that about 10 or 12 stun grenades were thrown in rooms housing suspected terrorists. The firing stopped at 2.15 a.m.

Contrary to expectations, there was no opposition or return fire. An unidentified young boy of 16 was shot dead as he panicked and ran. Another two were seriously injured and one of them died the next day. There were some tense moments when Gurdev Singh and about 150 followers took shelter in the upper story of Harmandir Sahib, the sanctum sanctorum of the complex. They told the DC and SSP that they did not trust the security forces and insisted that a list of their names be drawn up, signed by the DC and handed to Giani Puran Singh, granthi of the Harmandir Sahib. Puran Singh arrived at 5.30 a.m., and it was only after the list was drawn up and signed that Gurdev Singh and his followers surrendered.

But a last-minute snafu the previous night nearly caused the final phase of the operation to be called off. Ribeiro, Ramesh Inder Singh, the NSG general, the DIG of the BSF and other officers had gathered at their command post in the Brahm Buta Akhara adjacent to the temple. At about 10 p.m., when the NSG was waiting for the order to go in, a Punjab police DIG said he had received information that some extremists had wired the Harmandir Sahib with dynamite and threatened to blow it up. Hearing this, Ramesh Inder Singh said he could not allow the NSG to enter. After questioning the DIG as to the source of the information, Ribeiro decided the threat did not appear to be serious. But the news was conveyed to the chief minister in Chandigarh. Barnala said that if it was necessary to go in they should , but care should be taken to see that Harmandir Sahib was not damaged in any way.

Meanwhile, of the 378 persons initially rounded up from the temple complex, only 233 were detained, mainly those belonging to the Taksal and the AISSF. Cases of sedition have been registered against 57. But the end result was disappointing. "No one of note was caught," admitted Ribeiro and only a handful of weapons were recovered, two double-barrel guns, one 303 rifle, one 32 revolver and one pistol.

The most disappointing aspect was the escape of the five members of the panthic commitee who had declared the formation of Khalistan, and some key terrorists who were believed to be hiding in the complex. "Their escape leaves my work half done," said Ribeiro. But capturing the five committee members may not have been the main aim of the operation. Ribeiro says that "we knew they had left the temple". He also did not rule out the possibility of an extended police presence in the temple. "I may need to stay in here," he said.

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Amritsar

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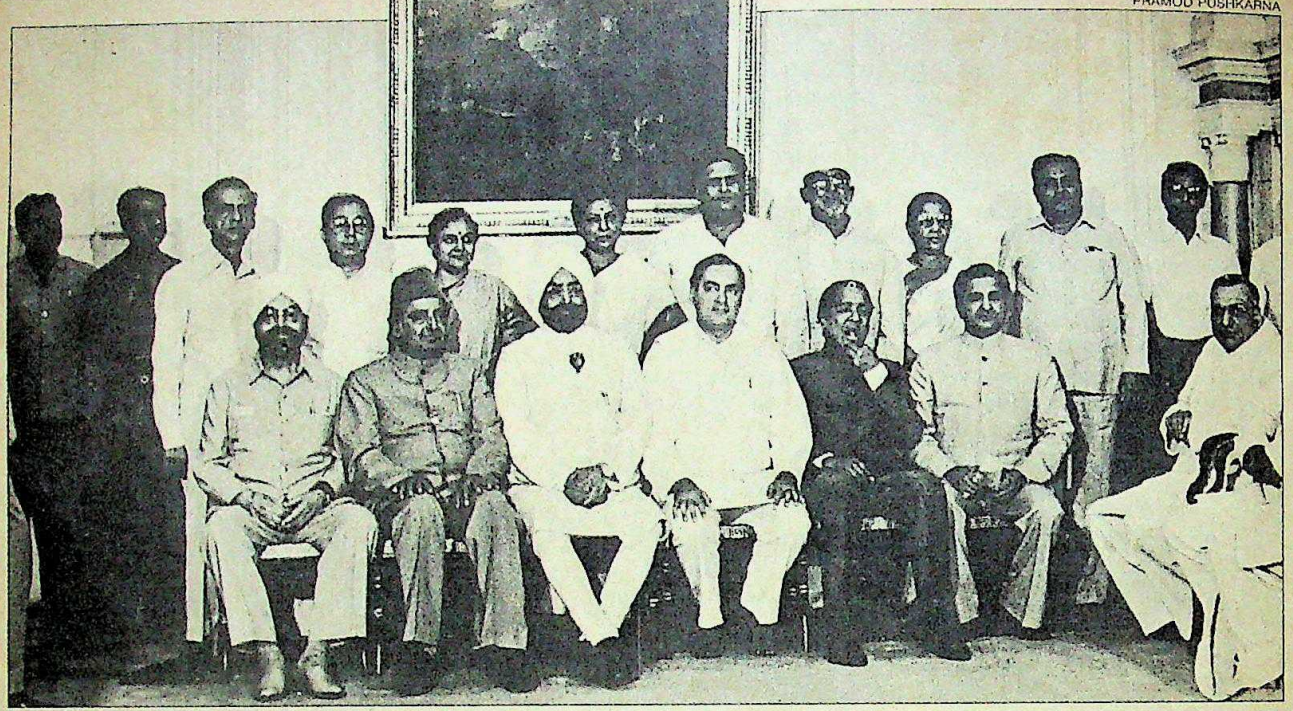
PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Newly sworn-in ministers after the ceremony: puerile exercise

CABINET RESHUFFLE

Playing it Safe

REPORTS of an impending cabinet reshuffle had been circulating in the capital's hypersensitive political circles for weeks. Nervous cabinet colleagues consulted one another on the possible permutations, insecure in the knowledge that major surgery would be carried out after the end of the Parliament session and before the prime minister left on his African tour. Yet, when Rajiv Gandhi finally ended the suspense last week and executed his second major reshuffle in 16 months, it hardly seemed worth all the waiting.

The exercise was a case of tweedledum and tweedledee, and far less significant than its predecessor in November. If the non-performers and those tainted by controversy were unaffected, the new incumbents were a motley, uninspiring bunch. Indeed, it turned out to be a limited political exercise apparently aimed at rewarding loyalists, striking a regional balance and wooing caste and community leaders.

Despite the expectations of a major purge, Rajiv dropped only one cabinet minister, Bali Ram Bhagat, whom he had inducted barely five months ago as the country's external affairs minister. He also inducted two new cabinet ministers, nine ministers of state and a deputy minister, raising his ministry's strength to 58.

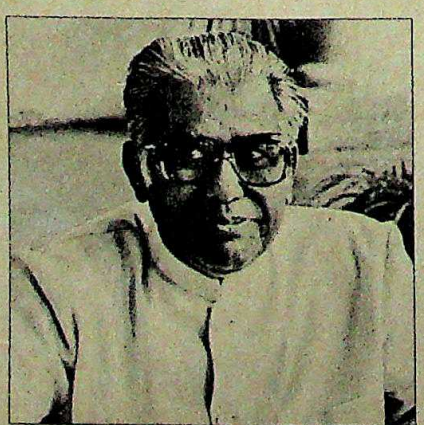
Party loyalists were quick to paint the reshuffle in rainbow colours. Said Nawal Kishore Sharma, AICC(I) general secretary: "Rajivji has selected a team which combines both experience and new blood." All that and loyalty too: most of the new appointees have played a leading role in attacking Congress(I) dissidents, or been effective in combating opposition assaults in Parliament.

Thus, the new cabinet ministers, Gurdayal Singh Dhillon and Mufti Mohammmed Sayed, have no leg to stand on without support from Rajiv, who ignored pressure from his own aides to induct Darbara Singh to represent Punjab in the Cabinet. In the case of the new ministers of state, people like K.K. Tiwari, Santosh Mohan Dev from Orissa, Saroj Khaparde from Maharashtra and Shiela Dixit from Uttar Pradesh have been in the forefront of the Ra-Ra-Rajiv campaign. Admitted a senior cabinet minister: "It is clear from the list that the prime minister has reposed confidence in those who remain loyal to him personally."

That would undoubtedly explain the elevation of Buta Singh as Union home minister, ignoring the damage this would do to Akali sentiment in Punjab. Buta Singh had not only been declared a *tankhaiya* after Operation Bluestar, he is also naturally anathema to the Akali Government in Punjab. Although Buta Singh has faithfully carried out Rajiv's instructions to try and influence the Sikh community in the country, his appointment as home minister adds a new complication to Punjab's affairs. In fact, Buta Singh was not in the country at the time of the reshuffle. He had left for London three days earlier.

Political observers, meanwhile, feel that Buta Singh's elevation has another, more subtle logic. They conjecture that his shift from Krishi Bhavan to North

B.R. Bhagat: solitary dismissal



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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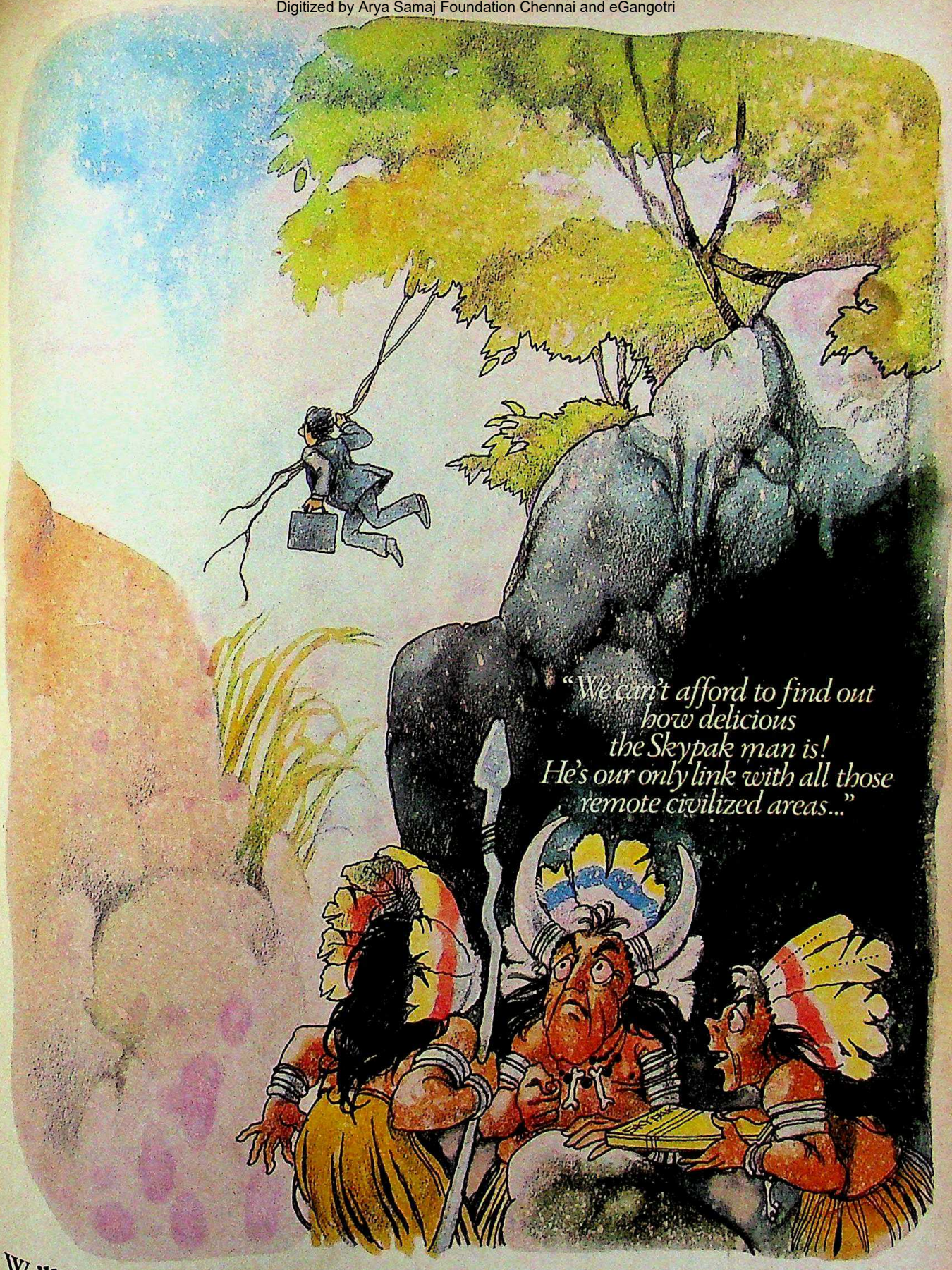

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FASHION SPORTSWEAR

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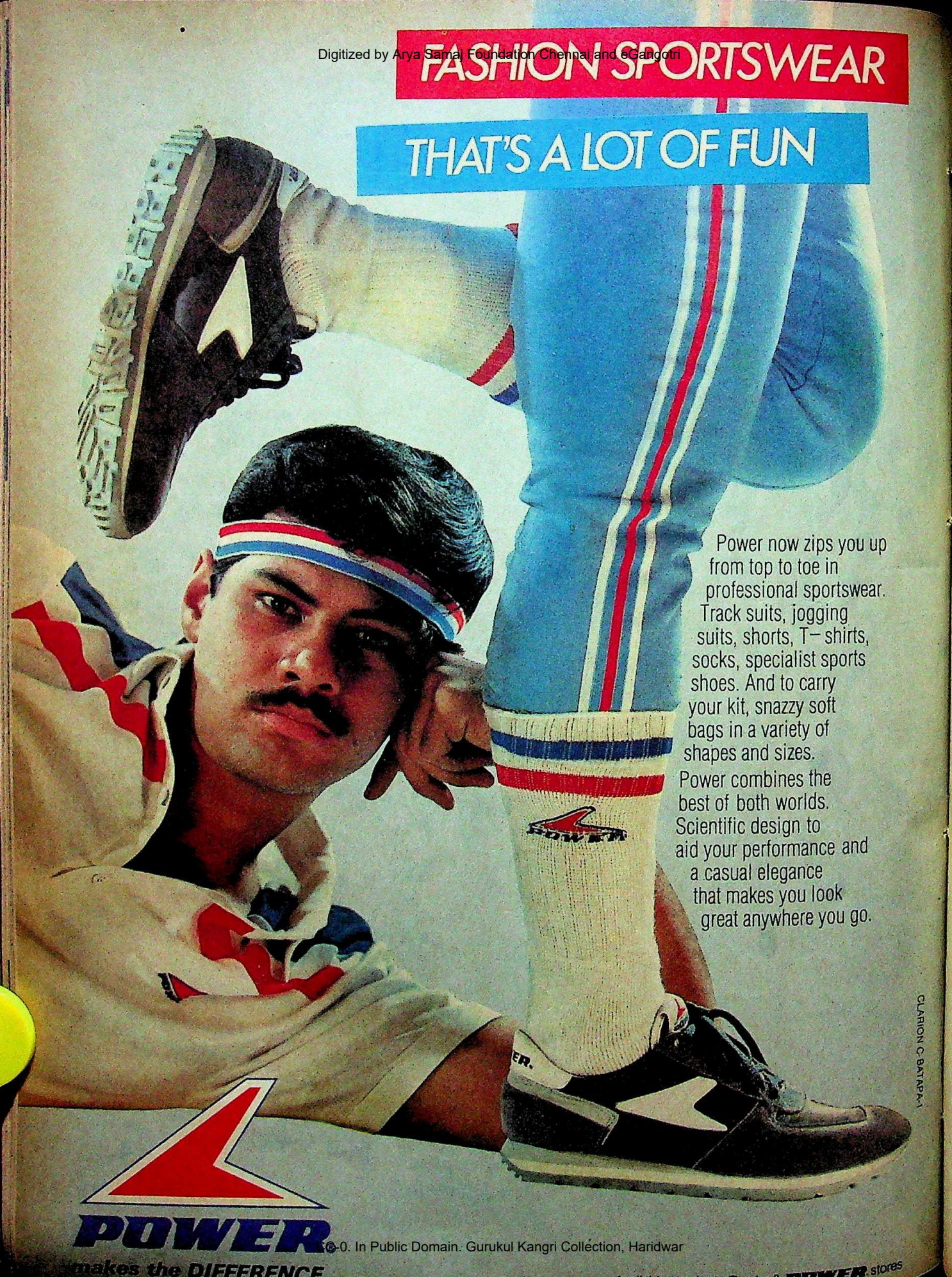

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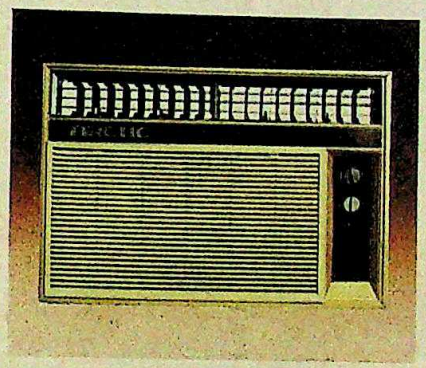

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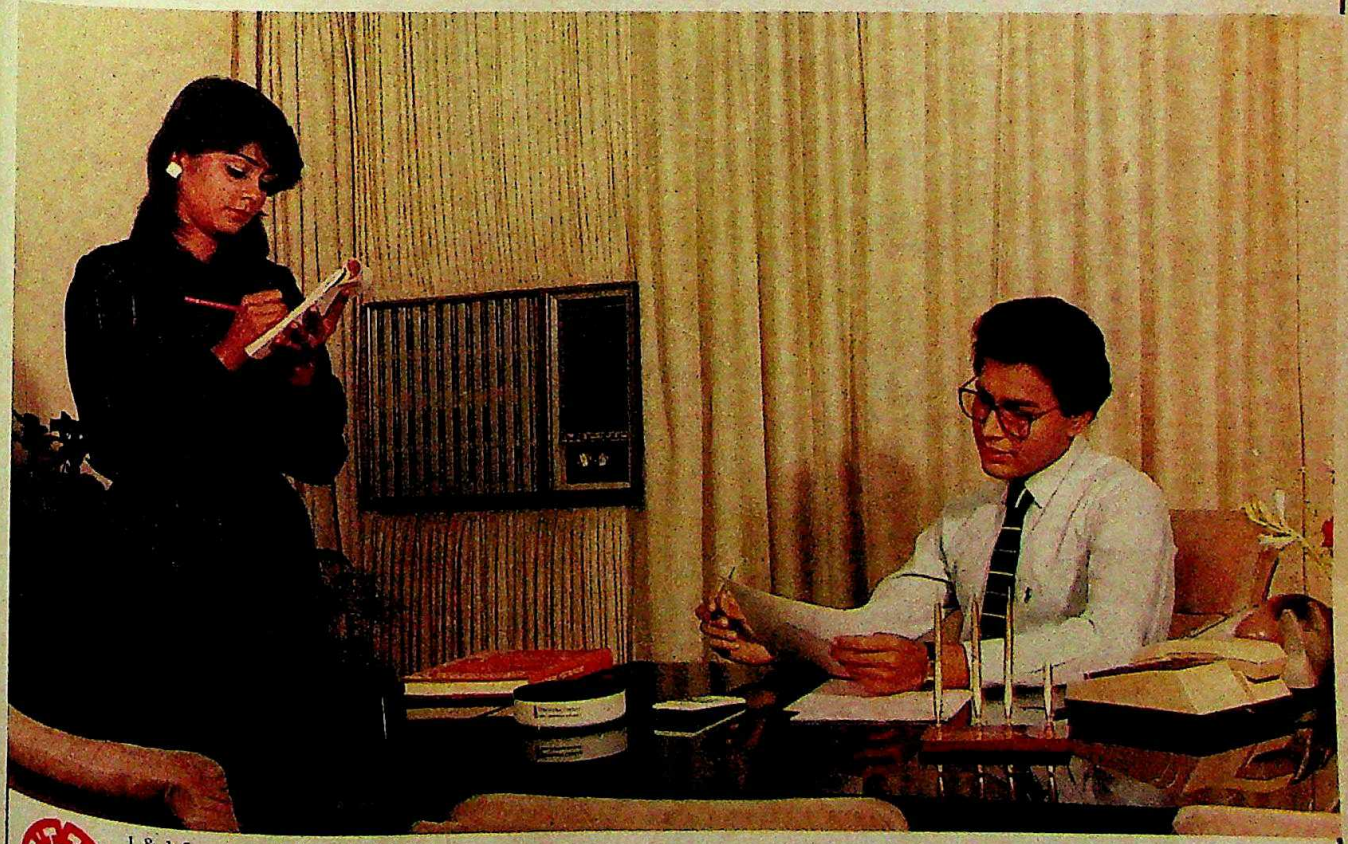

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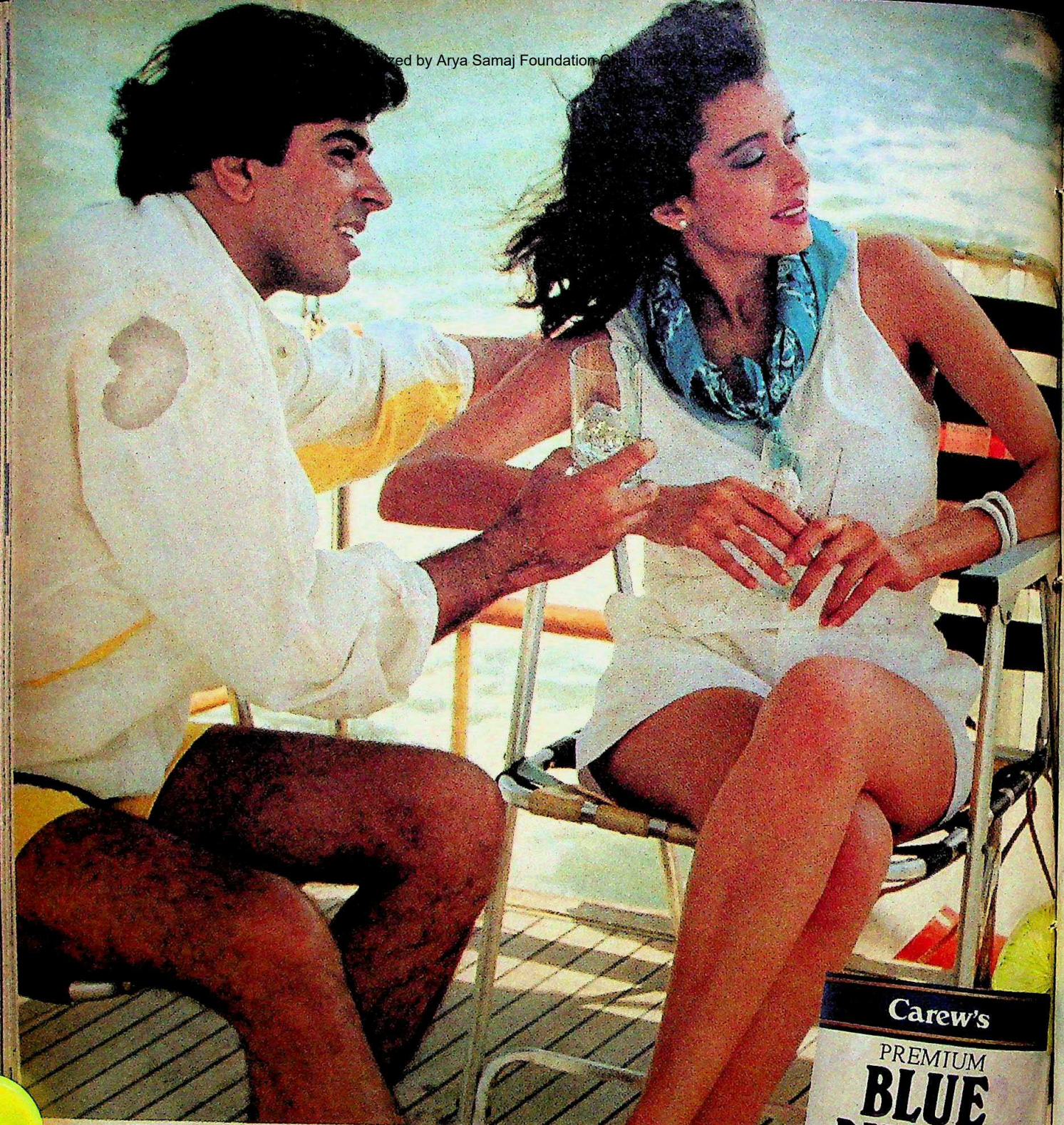

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Block is to give Minister of State for Internal Security Arun Nehru a freer hand in running the home department. Buta Singh is known to treat Nehru with respect, and with the moving of Minister of State Ghulam Nabi Azad—also a Nehru protege—from parliamentary affairs to the home ministry, Nehru will virtually have the run of North Block.

The elevation of P. Shiv Shanker as minister for external affairs will eventually take him away from the financially sensitive Commerce Ministry, of which he keeps additional charge on a temporary basis. As chairman of the AICC(I) foreign affairs cell for over a year, he has been visiting a number of countries as Rajiv's emissary.

The reshuffle also seems to have been influenced by last month's minor revolt in the party led by Kamalapati Tripathi. Tripathi's angry outburst that Indira loyalists were being ignored seems to have had the desired effect. The new inductees, with the possible exception of Brahm Dutt, who had a brief flirtation with the Lok Dal, are all people with strong Indira loyalties. Rajiv even abandoned his plans to offer ministerial berths to a few MP's, like Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, after Tripathi's tirade.

According to Congress(I) sources, Tripathi had also influenced the decision to drop external affairs minister Bhagat. In his letter to Rajiv at the height of the dissident drama, Tripathi had named Bhagat as one of those who had criticised Mrs Gandhi in the past.

That Rajiv was wary of dropping any prominent Indira loyalists was also evidenced by the fact that lacklustre ministers like H.K.L. Bhagat, Mohsina Kidwai, A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and B. Shankaranand, who were rumoured to be on the chopping block, were given a fresh lease of political life. Bhagat was actually rewarded with the important additional portfolio of food and civil supplies.

Meanwhile, other ministers in the thick of controversy remained untouched because of their good ministerial performance. Madhav Rao Scindia, minister of state for railways, has been the subject of an official investigation, but remained unaffected by the reshuffle, obviously because the railways have done exceptionally well under his tutelage. Said his senior colleague, Transport Minister Bansi Lal: "The prime minister has been monitoring the performance of all of us very closely."

The cabinet changes have demonstrated that Rajiv, like his mother, has acquired the habit of grooming a coterie of ministers whom he can depend on for advice on vital issues. A core group comprising Human Resources Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, Finance Minister V.P. Singh, Industry Minister N.D. Tiwari and Shiv Shanker has emerged as the coterie at the Centre which regularly advises the prime minister on political and government matters. This is probably why none of them has been affected adversely by the reshuffle. Buta Singh now joins this select quartet by virtue of the office that he now holds.

On the minus side, the reshuffle also proved that Rajiv has paid little heed to the question of stability in key ministries. The commerce and the external affairs ministries have seen at least four changes in the last 14 months while there have been three changes in the agriculture and home ministries over the same period. The Industry Ministry has witnessed a regular parade of junior level ministers who have been shifted to other departments.

And, even after two major and three minor cabinet reshuffles, the prime minister is still to acquire a complete cabinet. Two cabinet ministers, Bhagat and Shiv Shanker, hold additional charges of ministries, while there is as yet no full-time defence minister. Indeed, the prime minister told newsmen after the swearing in that yet another reshuffle of ministers would be done following the party elections in August. There may be valid reasons for this schedule, but stability in the various ministries has become a casualty.

While the cabinet reshuffle has seen the induction of a number of Brahmins as ministers—scotching talk of a Thakur mafia being on the ascendant in the party—it added to the regional imbalance in the council of ministers. Important southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu are still without any cabinet-level representation, while Karnataka has only one cabinet minister. The two Andhra politicians in the Cabinet in fact represent Maharashtra and Gujarat. In contrast, Rajiv's home state of Uttar Pradesh tops the list with four cabinet ministers and nine ministers of state while Madhya Pradesh, with 39 party MP's, does not have any minister of cabinet rank.

All in all, the reshuffle has been a disappointing exercise in ambiguity, considering the high hopes it had raised that, after 16 months in the saddle, Rajiv was going to separate the wheat from the chaff. What he has succeeded in doing is mixing both to such an extent that it is impossible to decipher exactly what his menu for the country is likely to be in the future.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

RAJIV'S POWER HOUSE

Narasimha Rao

N.D. Tiwari

Buta Singh

P. Shiv Shanker

V.P. Singh

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CONGRESS(I)

Dissident Dangers

A DECEPTIVE calm has draped the Congress(I) after the Pranab Mukherjee expulsion drama. The dissidents claim that the slowdown in their activities is a tactical retreat while party bosses insist that the decisive action against Mukherjee and others has burst the dissidence bubble. The truth lies somewhere in between—the dissidents are certainly demoralised, but dissidence is far from over, as the cross-voting on the Muslim Women's Bill clearly showed.

But the impact of the crackdown on the few carefully selected dissidents has certainly pre-empted any further overt dissident rumblings, at least for the moment. The fence-sitters in the main centres of dissidence—Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka—hastily backed off and began sending reconciliatory messages to the central leadership. Both A.P.Sharma and Sripati Mishra, two of the three suspended members, pleaded in the reply to their show-cause notices that they had never been party to any dissident activity, and both of them voted for the Goverment in Parliament on the Muslim Bill.

But the party can hardly afford to be complacent. Leaders like Madhavsinh Solanki, Gundu Rao, Vidya Charan Shukla and Jagannath Mishra are continuing their extensive but covert contacts with their followers in the countryside in their endeavour to reform the party and regain their lost prestige. Former AICC(I) general secretary S.S Mahapatra and his ilk, who were sidelined shortly after Rajiv's ascendancy, soon joined in and Pranab Mukherjee launched his public contact programme with a warning to all Congressmen that the party was not safe in the hands of the present leadership.

The party's central leadership is striving to give the impression that dissidence has been buried. Boasted Sitaram Kesri, AICC(I)treasurer: "Dissidence existed only in newspapers and the lawns of a few disgruntled, powergreedy and baseless nonentities in the Congress(I). The massive vote in favour of the Muslim Women's Bill in both the Houses of Parliament has proved beyond doubt that Rajiv Gandhi continues to be the undisputed leader of the party and the nation." Added J.K. Jain, secretary of the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party: "Any attack on the prime minister is like spitting at the sky. It recoils on you."

But the outward show of confidence and unity is more like wishful thinking. Despite a three-line whip, issued a good five days before the bill debate, directing all members to cancel outstation engagements and be present in the House, as many as 48 party MP's were absent from the Lok Sabha. These included Vidya Charan Shukla, who chose to stay out of the capital despite the party's refusal to concede his request for absence from the Lok Sabha. Further, more than 30 others pressed the 'no' button while voting on the bill (they claimed later that this was done by mistake), taking the prime minister, who was present in the House, by visible surprise.

The dissidents are certainly demoralised, but dissidence is far from over, as the cross-voting on the Muslim Women's Bill showed.

Those who 'accidentally' voted against the bill included Union Minister for Urban Development Abdul Ghafoor and Sheela Dixit, daughter-in-law of West Bengal Governor Uma Shanker Dixit. Both of them immediately sent a slip to the speaker soon after the red light flashed against their names, pointing out their 'mistake'.

According to senior parliamentarians, such mass mistakes have hardly ever been committed in the Lok Sabha. Chuckled a senior dissident Congress(I) leader from Karnataka: "It was just a way of expressing our solidarity. If we were enough in numbers we could have pressed the issue, but there was no intention of defying the party whip at this stage."

The absence of a large number of MP's forced the high command to revise its earlier assessment that the dissidence had been contained. Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K.L. Bhagat was the first to receive a copy of the voting record with the names of those who were either absent or had pressed the 'no' button. But with the confusion over the "mistakes", even Bhagat was not sure of the extent of defiance. Said Bhagat: "We are collecting the relevent information. One can't say anything till we have heard the other side too."

But the resultant embarrassment has convinced the high command to pursue a tough line. Following specific instructions from Rajiv Gandhi, party Vice-President Arjun Singh sought detailed information from Bhagat. Said Singh: "No party can afford to be ignorant about the goings-on within its own organisation. We are vigilant and have decided to look into every aspect of the voting on the bill. But I don't see any crisis in this. We think everything went our way."

But not for long. Dissident ranks were elated when party Working President Kamalapati Tripathi wrote yet another letter to Rajiv, disapproving of the action against Pranab Mukherjee

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and others. Significantly, Tripathi sat next to Mukherjee during the Rajya Sabha session on the bill. The dissidents were also quick to point out that there had been no significant response to the attempts of a few aides of the prime minister to extract adulatory statements in favour of the disciplinary actions.

They scored another minor victory last fortnight when Rajiv gave in to demands for a major scrutiny of the electoral rolls. The dissidents had charged that because of bogus membership, the 'Indira-loyalists' were facing the threat of getting deleted from organisational posts in states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. As a major concession to Tripathi, all returning officers and observers for the forthcoming party elections were driven down to Tripathi's house to listen to his complaints and take corrective action.

But the dissidents are clearly in no mood to settle for minor concessions—they are demanding a major share in ministerial posts at the Centre, in state governments and in the ranks of the party leadership structure and have chalked out a long-term strategy to achieve their ends. In meetings held separately in Patna, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Bombay and Delhi last fortnight, dissident groups decided to organise party workers and convince them that they (the Indira-loyalists) were being made victims of a systematic campaign to get rid of the old guard who were identified closely with Mrs Gandhi.

THE DISSIDENTS also plan to give an ideological underpinning to their campaign. One of the notes prepared for party workers says that the prime minister has been influenced by his "non-political" advisers to adopt elitist economic policies which will be used by the Opposition to label the Government as anti-poor. The note goes on to list the concessions given to the multinational corporations, a few industrial houses in the country and the liberalisation in the import of luxurious items in the name of modernisation. Says the note sarcastically: "Is the import of spares for Marutis more important than providing a drinking water pump in a village, or sewage facility in an urban slum?"

Another issue which they plan to take up seriously is the acid attacks on Congressmen by Rajiv himself. Rajiv, in his capacity as AICC(I) president, has used every public platform to condemn Congressmen as corrupt and power brokers. The dissident leaders feel that Rajiv is doing this on the advice of his coterie who believe it will enhance his image. The dissident theory is that this will finally boomerang on Rajiv when he asks people to vote for a party, which, according to his own admission, is full of corrupt elements.

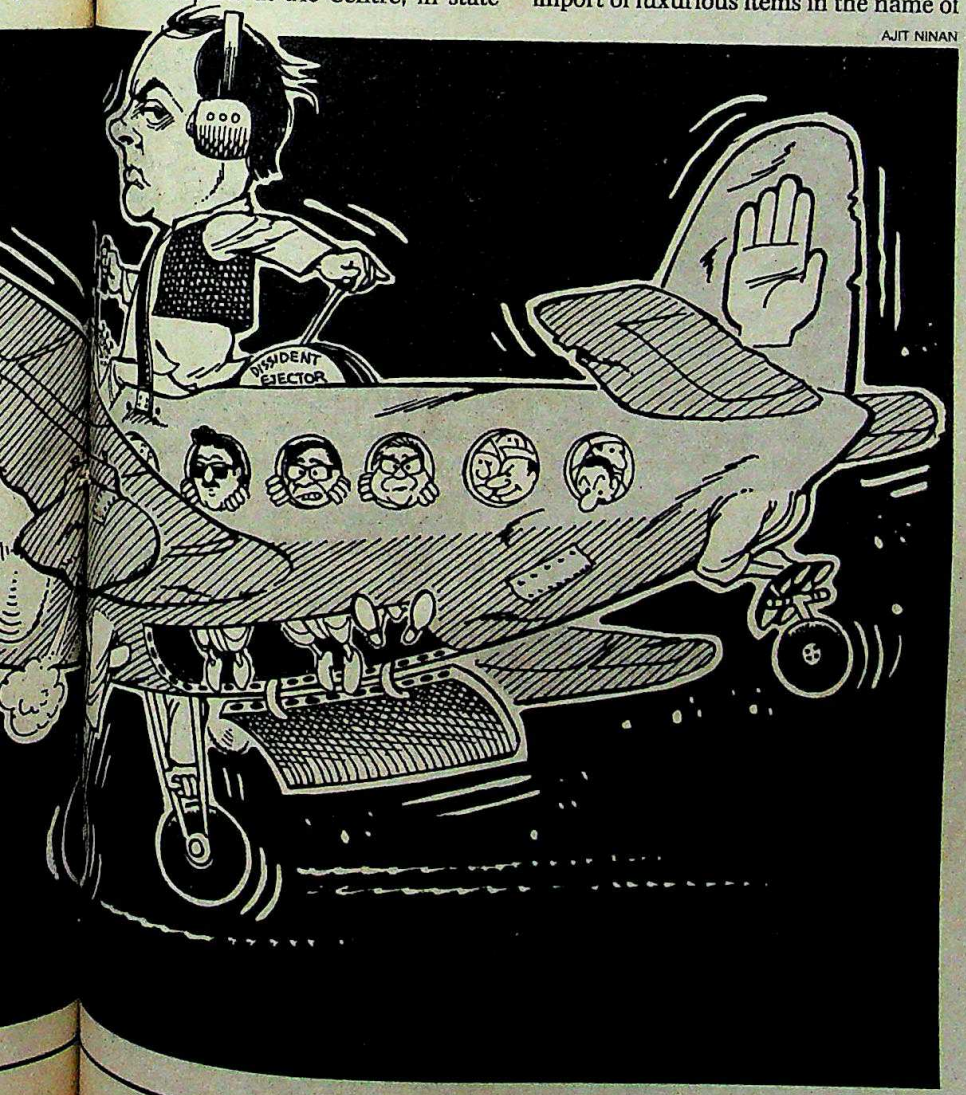
In order to retain their hold over the party, the dissidents have also drawn up a coordinated plan to win the maximun number of party elections. In a normal situation, these groups would also have contested against each other but now they have decided to put up common candidates for the posts in the DCC(I) and the PCC(I). In Uttar Pradesh, the anti-Bir Bahadur Singh forces led by Health Minister Lokpati Tripathi have decided to contest the elections as one group. In Madhya Pradesh, anti-Arjun Singh elements, in which Chief Minister Moti Lal Vora's supporters are playing an active part, have taken a vow to jointly defeat the nominees of Arjun Singh.

The dissidents are also planning to raise the question of the declining vote banks of the party, which they believe is a direct reflection on Rajiv. They point out that he has not won a single election on his own name so far. While the 1984 parliamentary election was fought and won on purely emotional issues, the assembly elections 10 weeks later saw a sharp decline in the Congress(I) vote. The party has also done very poorly in all subsequent by-elections and the assembly elections in Punjab and Assam.

As the power struggle within the party hots up, the assembly elections to be held in the next few months in West Bengal, Tripura, Haryana and Kerala has acquired a crucial significance for the party—and the future of the dissidents. But the immediate test will undoubtedly be the party elections scheduled for August. But whatever the outcome of the party poll, it certainly promises to be a hot and decisive summer for the two camps rapidly forming in the Congress (I)—the Indira loyalists consisting of the old guard against the largely untested strength of Rajiv's men.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

AJIT NINAN



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P.K. KAPOOR

THE PRIME MINISTER

Instant Drama

Rajiv Gandhi on the road to Pincholi

THERE is instant drama. The MI-8 helicopters have just landed in the wasteland of Tangri block in Nasik district, and Rajiv Gandhi—on the first leg of his visit to Maharashtra's drought-prone tracts—is not interested in the scheduled visit to the work-site of a percolation tank. Instead, he gives an official a copy of that morning's newspaper, which has a report of a village nearby where workers under the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) have not been paid for weeks. "Let's go there," the prime minister says as he quickly climbs into a jeep. The cavalcade is off in search of official wrong-doing.

At the village, the newspaper report seems like hyped-up journalism and the scandal seems to be missing. So Rajiv is soon back on the official tour schedule, visiting the percolation tank, then another in a second district, and then yet another in a third district. Through the blistering day, from one helicopter hop to the next, the prime minister wends his way past officials brandishing charts and figures, seeks out the workers and asks them questions: what are their problems, do they get paid on time, is the bajra that they get of good quality?

If the answers seem schooled, or there isn't very much surfacing that is of interest, he is quickly back in the jeep after instructing the officials to head for some unsuspecting village. "You very quickly get an idea of whether the administration is handling drought relief well or badly," he told INDIA TODAY. Rajiv Gandhi is not another Haroon al Rashid, he is the Inspector Zende of Indian politics.

But as the prime minister traverses the barren land, there are many close encounters of the unexpected kind. Ramdas comes round the bend on the dirt road from his village Pincholi and sees the prime minister approaching in a jeep. He falls off his bicycle in surprise, quickly turns round and follows, eating the dust thrown up from the tyre tracks.

Off the highway into Bhadji village, an old woman stands and stares. A dog barks, the dust rises in puffs from the prime minister's Bata shoes, and an official says keenly: "We've discovered a lovely village, sir." Round a corner, there is another uncomprehending stare from three women and a child. Rajiv turns into a *gali* and accosts five old women and they speak up readily. It is constantly amazing how, while officials cringe, there is so often a complete absence of awe among the ordinary people.

Talking to women of Gole village

P.K. KAPOOR

Their constant refrain: Give us water. Or the wages are not paid in time ("Can we pay them daily, instead of weekly?" Rajiv asks state Chief Minister S.B. Chavan). In Pincholi, a woman says she gets no more than Rs 2 at the project where she works in Kaoli, 8 km away. Rajiv is quickly off to the site to check this out.

His inquisitioning is gentle, probing. There is a creche at the work site, and he wants to know how old it is. Two months, says the *bai*. But the cradle's gleaming aluminium frame and unsoiled, brightly coloured nylon rope give the lie to the answer. He next asks about the survival rate for the saplings that are planted. "Forty per cent," an official begins to mumble. "Fifty per cent," his senior butts in. "Then you couldn't be having a water problem," Rajiv quips and moves on in search of the truth.

Back in the helicopter, en route to the next halt, he pats his face with a wet towellete, orders a tall lime juice, asks if there is dessert after lunch, and when told there isn't, says formally: "I then surrender my plate." The prime minister is enjoying himself. A short snooze, a quick peep through the window to assess the crowd at the next helipad, and he is out of the craft, waving enthusiastically.

At the public meetings, organised by the Government but decked with party flags, he

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talks of deforestation, the technology mission that the Government has set up for drinking water, of various other steps that the Government will take to tackle the drought, of the new education policy and the stress he is going to lay on girls' education. Always, the stress is on the women; he seeks out their section of the crowd, throws them garlands as he drives past. The old women are embarrassed, the young ones grab what bit of the garland they can.

The problems are serious, of course. This is the third consecutive drought in Maharashtra, one-third of the state is affected, a quarter of the 85,000 borewells in the state have gone dry. The land is parched, frighteningly devoid of virtually all tree cover. But from the air the Government's handiwork can be seen everywhere: a series of percolation tanks, trenches cut into hillsides for planting saplings as soon as there is rain. The nss created 180 million man-days of work state last year. So the people have work and the money with which to buy food.

What the people don't have is water. There is always poverty, of course, and the accompanying privation. But for all the severity of the drought, there is not a hint of starvation anywhere.

This truth would have met the prime minister's eyes anyway; but officialdom is anxious to impress. And the state Government has used the 10-day notice of the prime minister's visit to try and make an impression. Not satisfied, officials try to butt in and answer questions that the prime minister asks of the workers. They get a flea in the ear for their pains.

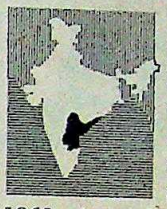
In the end, what has the exercise accomplished? The answers are not always fully convincing, but there is merit in them: The visits give the prime minister a first hand feel of the situation, the occasional wrinkles in the programmes are spotted and ironed out, and a prime minister's display of personal interest in tackling the drought sends its message down the hierarchy. In any case, as an official argues, is it right for such a large part of the country to be going through a problem phase and the prime minister show no interest?

Finally, there is what neither the prime minister nor his officials will tell you: that after journeying through vast stretches of arid land, Rajiv Gandhi's speeches and comments focus not on computers but on deforestation, not on the 21st century but on the fodder problem.

—T.N. NINAN in Maharashtra

ANDHRA PRADESH

Prize Catch



IT WAS a stunning blow for the Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh—easily the worst since the bloody suppression of their uprising in the north coastal district of Srikakulam in 1969. A crack team of police officers, acting on a tip-off, raided four apartments in thickly populated suburbs of Hyderabad as part of Operation Red Rose and busted the clandestine state headquarters of the militant People's War Group (PWG), arrested Nalla Adi Reddy, secretary of the PWG along with six of his associates and seized an incredible cache of firearms and incriminating documents. Exulted the Director-General of Police, Clifford Saldanha: "It is the single, biggest catch in our anti-Naxalite operations."

His excitement was understandable. The mass of secret correspondence, documents, cyclostyled leaflets and tapes seized from the hideout should enable the police to establish, for the first time, the entire scale of operations of any Naxalite group. Investigators with considerable experience of tackling the Naxalite problem in the state have been drafted to sift through the papers and work out a strategy to break the back of the PWG.

Also seized in the raids were wads of currency notes totalling over Rs 4 lakh and an impressive quantity of arms and ammunition—22 revolvers, 28 rifles, 54 country-made weapons, .355 calibre cartridges and 61 grenades—with both Indian and American markings.

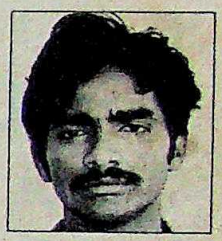
The tip-off came after sustained interrogation of a PWG activist. Three police parties raided apartments in New Nallakunta, Bholakpur and Warsiguda before finally zeroing in on the first floor apartment in the working class Ramnagar area which turned out to be the PWG's headquarters. Seven plain-clothesmen, armed only with service revolvers, tip-toed their way up the stairs and stormed into the flat. The catch included Daggula Shankar, who had served as the courier to the provincial committee headquarters where Reddy had been hiding for the last 18 months.

The documents revealed that:

► PWG collections from *beedi* leaf contractors, arrack contractors and others amount to roughly Rs 3 crore a year.

► Rifts in PWG factions have deepened after the expulsion of Ramamurthy, an ex-serviceman who was in charge of the arms training camps in Rayalaseema, and the removal of K.G. Satyamurthy from the central committee.

► There is definitely a link between the PWG, which works clandestinely, and organisations like the Radical Youth League andthe Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) among others. These organisations use public forums, denied to the PWG, to carry on a campaign against the state Government and build up public opinion in its favour.



Reddy and Shankar (top); and (above) Saldanha inspecting cache: lucky break

However, the APCLC President K.G. Kannabiran has angrily refuted the police's findings. Said Kannabiran, a leading lawyer: "The charge that the committee is a frontal organisation of Naxalite groups is an old one. The police and the Government hurl it at us time and again to cover up their own human rights violations."

The truth in the police claims will be known only after the seized documents are thoroughly gone over and the police file their charge-sheet. But with more arrests likely in the coming weeks, it is certain that Naxalites will continue to make headlines in Andhra Pradesh.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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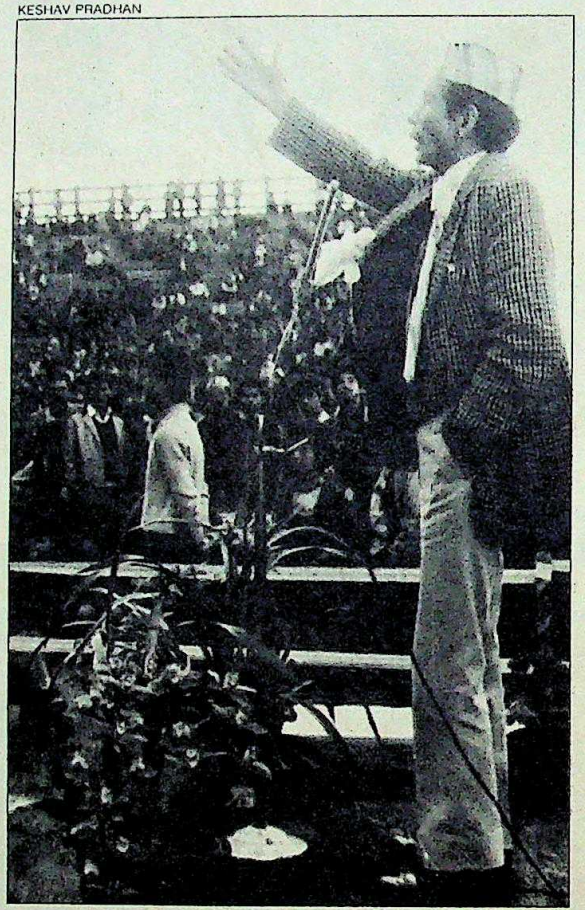
DARJEELING

Separatist Shock

KESHAV PRADHAN



Ghising addressing GNLF rally

DARJEELING is normally a holiday-makers paradise at this time of the year but last fortnight it clouded over with presentiment of a violent separatist agitation. Its walls filled up with posters and graffiti demanding "Gorkhaland"—a separate state for Darjeeling district—and the police moved into the streets. The Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), which is spearheading the separatist movement, organised meetings and processions throughout the district, startling tourists with cries of "Jai Gorkha" and "Gorkhaland Zindabad."

Chief Minister Jyoti Basu raged in Calcutta: "They (the GNLF) are out to destroy the country. We will oppose them politically and administratively." Minister for Hill Development Tamang Dawa Lama was despatched to Darjeeling to campaign against the movement, backed by contingents of the Eastern Frontier Rifles. The CPI(M) believes the Gorkhaland demand is "against the sovereignty and unity of the country". Declared Lama: "We think there is a deep conspiracy behind this agitation."

But the unyielding separatists gave a call for a 72-hour bandh. "Jyoti Basu has no legal right to interfere with our demand. If the CPI(M) tries to crush our movement with violence our cause will only become more popular," says GNLF chief Subash Ghising. A former corporal, Ghising has been agitating for a separate state since 1979 when the-then prime minister Morarji Desai pronounced that Nepali is a language of foreigners.

The GNLF's agitation on its 11-point programme began with a black flag protest against the "genocide" of Nepalis on April 13, the Nepali new year day, when over 15,000 Nepalis from all over the district assembled in Darjeeling despite the imposition of Section 144 and road blockades by the police. The programme envisages timber blockades, election boycott, social ostracisation of pro-Bengal leaders, boycott of national celebrations, refusal to pay taxes, and ritual burning of the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty. If the Centre still does not respond, the GNLF has resolved to launch a "do or die" struggle, though the enigmatic Ghising refuses to clarify whether this implies a recourse to arms.

Ghising had only a miniscule following till recently. But the eviction of Nepalis from Meghalaya in March made him into a hero overnight. "We were shocked to hear that nearly 6,000 Nepalis had been picked up like chattel by the Meghalaya police and dumped in Guwahati from where the Assamese packed them off in trucks to North Bengal," says All-India Nepali Bhasha Samiti President Prem Allay. A Bhasha Samiti team sent to Assam and Meghalaya found that the evictions were summary and illegal.

The West Bengal Government's decision to send the evicted Nepalis on to the Indo-Nepal border at Kakarvita added to the Nepalis' gall. Pointing out the Basu Government's double standards, Allay said: "When Bengali refugees came from Assam three years ago, Jyoti Basu's Government had escorted them to refugee camps." However, Darjeeling District Magistrate G. Balagopal denies the charge. "They did not ask for help and went on their own to Kakarvita. Our police merely kept a watch on them," he says. The CPI(M) contends that the evicted persons were all Nepalese citizens. But Bhasha Samiti inquiries confirmed that at least 400 bona fide Darjeeling residents were also pushed back.

The GNLF charge that Nepalis were treated as second class citizens has struck an emotional chord, convincing even educated Nepalis of the need for a separate state. "We are not secessionists or anti-Indian. We want Gorkhaland because we want an Indian identity," explains Ghising. Once Gorkhaland is formed, he believes, Indian Nepalis will no longer be lumped together with the citizens of Nepal. Even the Darjeeling district Congress(I) unit has lent qualified support. Said a Congress(I) leader: "We have decided to press for Union territory status for Darjeeling."

The CPI(M) has hit back by highlighting the contradictions in some of the GNLF's pronouncements. Asked Lama: "If you (the GNLF) respect India's unity and integrity, then why have you announced that you will not sing the national anthem?" Replied Ghising: "We have not got anything from the country for the last 37 years. All our pleas have fallen on deaf ears and in our frustration we have to protest."

The CPI(M)'s warning that the agitation will be disastrous for Darjeeling's tourist-based economy has left the Nepalis unmoved. Says a Darjeeling restauranteer Uttam Gurung: "We are suffering because of this agitation but I still feel it must go on. Our future depends on it." The only fear is if any Bengali is assaulted in Darjeeling, it will be the vulnerable Nepalis living in Calcutta and Siliguri who will be affected.

So far the GNLF is on a non-confrontational path but this will obviously not continue given the intransigence of the state and Central Government. Ghising hints ominously that there are about 40,000 retired soldiers in the district. Indication enough that it could well be a while before the dark clouds over Darjeeling are dissipated.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE in Darjeeling

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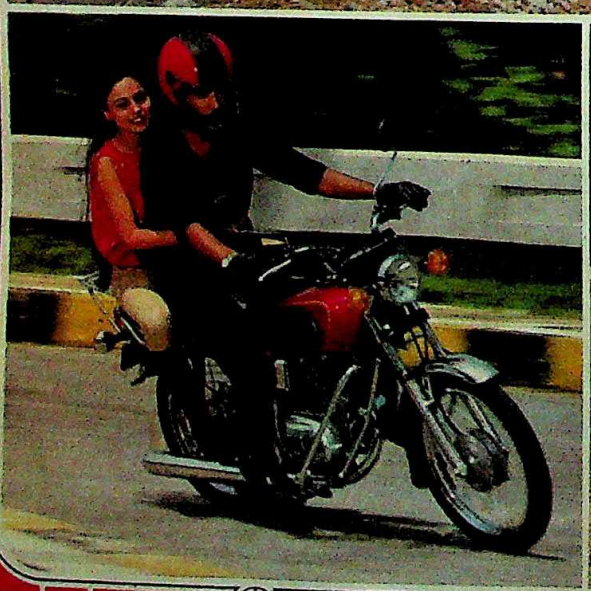

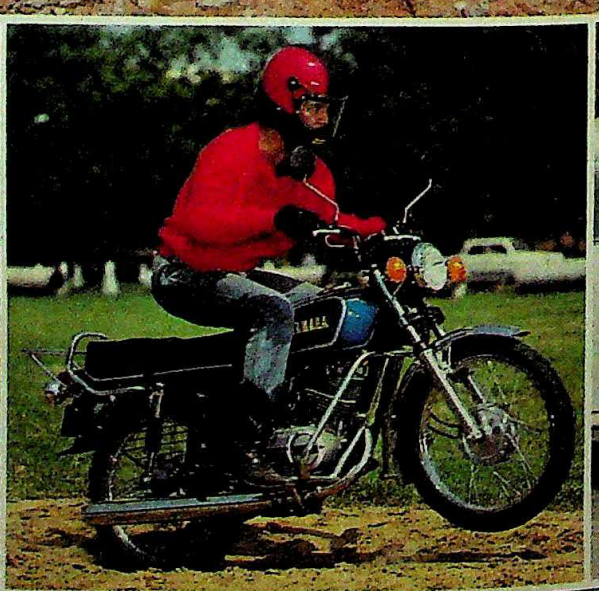

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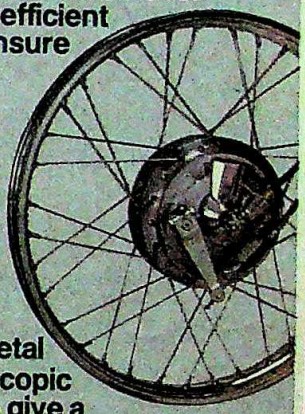

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WEST BENGAL

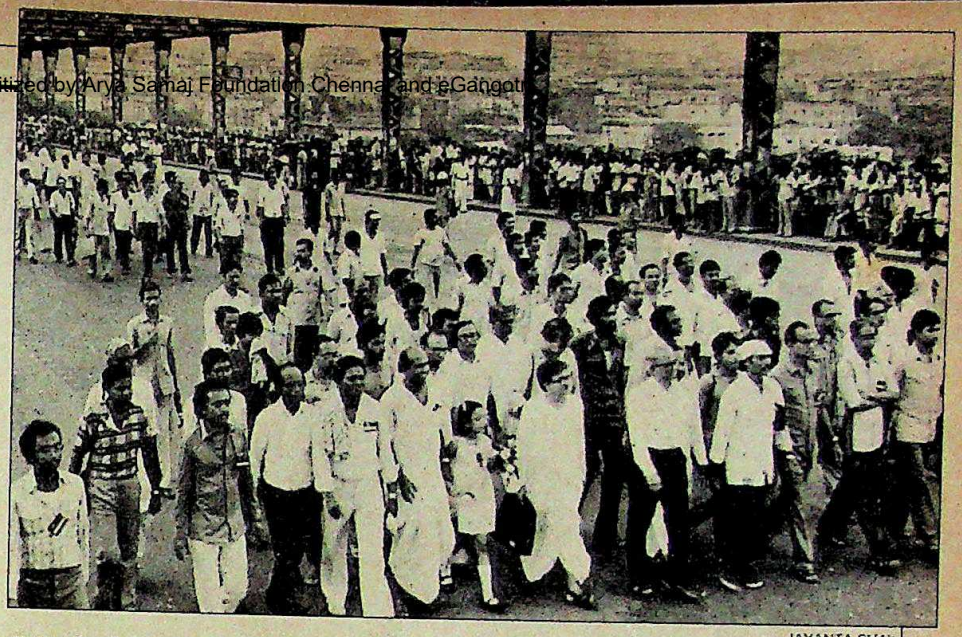
Urban Strategy

WEST BENGAL'S Marxist rulers are preparing to rise like the proverbial phoenix from the state's urban areas where they were reduced to ashes in the last Lok Sabha elections. At a series of marathon state committee meetings last fortnight, the state CPI(M) top brass decided on a multi-faceted strategy designed to re-establish their appeal among the state's urban voters by reaffirming their commitment to the underprivileged and by tugging at regional heartstrings.

The first test of their refurbished programmes will be the state-wide municipal elections scheduled for June 15. "The municipal polls will be a mini-election for the state and its results are bound to have a bearing on the subsequent assembly elections," said Biman Bose, the CPI(M) state committee member who has been in charge of gearing up the party's numerous local units since last December's party congress.

The most spectacular—and instantly popular—pre-municipal election promise announced last fortnight was that slum dwellers and low-income families constituting the bulk of West Bengal's urban populace would no longer have to pay municipal taxes. The state Government has also promised free drinking water connections to *basti* households, released ad hoc grants to municipalities for last minute cosmetic improvements, and announced a number of other civic schemes. Urban Affairs Minister Prasanta Sur, deaf until now to the squatters' travails, even declared that all squatters evicted by the ring railway project would now be paid compensation.

"This is cheap populism, not socialism," rages state Congress(I) leader Subrata Mukherjee, who had tried unsuccessfully to stymie the municipal tax changes when it was first proposed at the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. In Calcutta, corporation officials estimate, the tax changes will hit the upper 30 per cent of citizens whose enhanced property tax and newly imposed water tax will, in effect, subsidise the running of the entire city. "The Left Front's decision will help people like the deputy speaker of the West Bengal Assembly, who lives in the middle of a slum, and will penalise impoverished property owners who cannot even repair their houses because of low rents," charges Mukherjee. But the majority of Congress(I) leaders have kept mum on the issue for obvious reasons.



JAYANTA SHAW

CPI(M) leaders on a padyatra in Calcutta: back to the people

But the Left Front has not forgotten the state's urban middle classes. They are sought to be mollified by the decision to honour Rabindranath Tagore by holding a year-long programme to celebrate his 125th birth anniversary. This seemingly innocuous move is perhaps the most significant aspect of the Marxist strategy. It not only marks the end of the Left Front's estrangement from mainstream Bengali culture but simultaneously projects a pro-Bengali image for it too.

The Left Front has also promised self-employment schemes to the unemployed, jobs for women in slum health care and development and is explaining that the Congress(I) can never provide jobs since the Centre is doing nothing to open or help the 9,000-odd closed or sick factories in the state. "Youth who have become disillusioned with the Congress(I)'s false promises about jobs are now coming to our Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI)," claimed Biman Bose.

The state Congress(I) is still on the defensive in the wake of these measures, but things are getting better for the party in other ways. Factionalism among the state Congress(I)'s big guns—A.B.A.Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Subrata Mukherjee, Somen Mitra, Ajit Panja and Asoke Sen—appears to have gone underground. Pranab Mukherjee's abrupt ouster has not precipitated any crisis—only three Congress(I) MLA's have sided with him. On the other hand, the selection of candidates for 1,240 municipal slots went off relatively smoothly. Said Mukherjee: "This is the first time we have been able to put up candidates for a significant election with so little trouble."

Preparations for next year's assembly elections have already started. The Bombay-based advertising agency, Rediffusion, is reported to have been contacted for preparing an exclusive poll campaign for West Bengal well in advance, and a small team of the agency's psephologists are studying election data and the results of "secret" public opinion polls. But an analysis of urban voting patterns in West Bengal suggests that the Left Front has little to be complacent about: the overwhelming majority of the 85 "urban" assembly seats (29 per cent of the total seats) in the state had been over-run by the Congress(I) in the last Lok Sabha elections.

The Left Front's unprecedented decision to enter into local alliances with its two implacable foes on the "extreme" left—the CPI(M-L) in Bolpur and the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) in Joynagar—is an indication that it is worried. Congressmen charge that elections are being held in only 74 out of about 100 municipalities in the state because the Marxists are in no position to win in the others. But election analysis also shows that the Front usually retains its marginal seats even if it loses in constituencies where it had traditionally been strong. Should this curious factor come to play in the impending municipal polls, the Congress(I) could well lose its urban bastions to the Marxist phoenix.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN

Armed MKSS workers in Patna

ARWAL MASSACRE

Deadly Division

DAYS after the Arwal massacre of April 19, the reverberations of the tragedy still course through Bihar, their echoes reaching as far as the corridors of power in distant Delhi. The massacre—in which at least 21 people owing allegiance to the left-wing Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (MKSS) were killed by the police—was the culmination of the running battle between the landless peasants' organisations and powerful landlords in the Jehanabad sub-division in which the police have been openly siding with the latter. The Arwal massacre has been followed by an equally violent chain of events which have left seven more dead.

While Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey continues to publicly defend and justify the police action, the outrage has shaken him. Civil rights activists have described the firing as part of a concerted plan to systematically eliminate those mobilising the poor by branding them "Naxalites" and killing them in stage-managed "encounters". Lok Dal leader Karpoori Thakur and Congress(I) dissidents led by the former chief minister Jagannath Mishra have complicated matters by coming out with their own version of the events and calling it another "Jallianwalla Bagh" massacre.

While Dubey is still publicly justifying the Arwal massacre, the issue is rapidly proving a focus for dissident activity.

That the incident was being coloured by vested interests had become evident almost immediately after the massacre. The same evening, Home Commissioner B.K. Singh and Director-General of Police S.B. Sahay rushed to the spot allegedly to shield Jehanabad Superintendent of Police C.R. Kaswan, who had led the police party responsible for the outrage. The two officers are said to have "dictated" the first information report while the state administration reportedly advised Jehanabad Collector Ashok Singh not to file his own report, in spite of the fact that he was the first top official to reach the spot. Singh had sent a wireless message after his visit calling the firing "unwarranted, unorganised and uncontrolled".

The police claim they were compelled to fire when a 1,000-strong mob of MKSS activists and sympathisers threatened to attack the police station. But villagers, citing concrete evidence to back their claims, say that the police had

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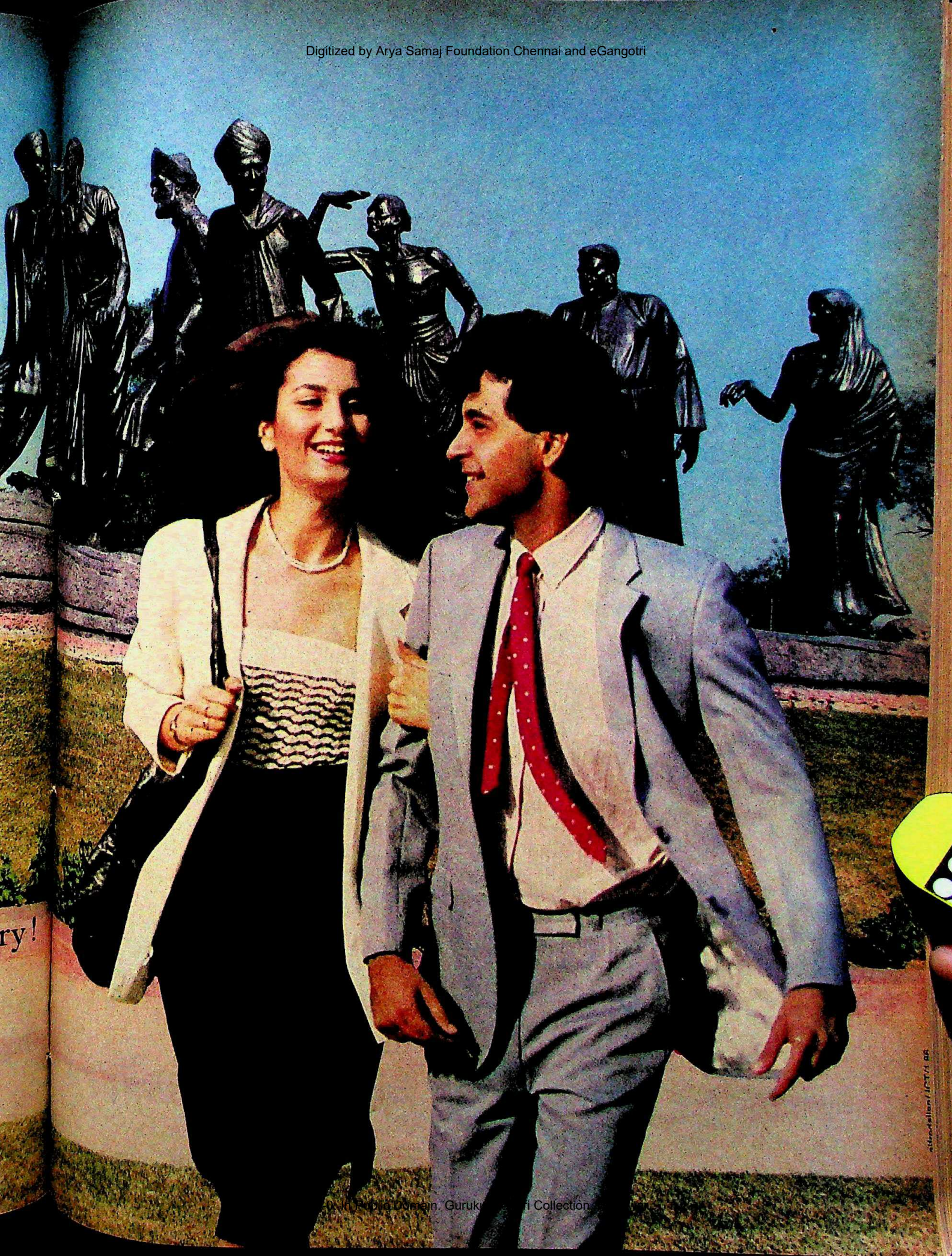

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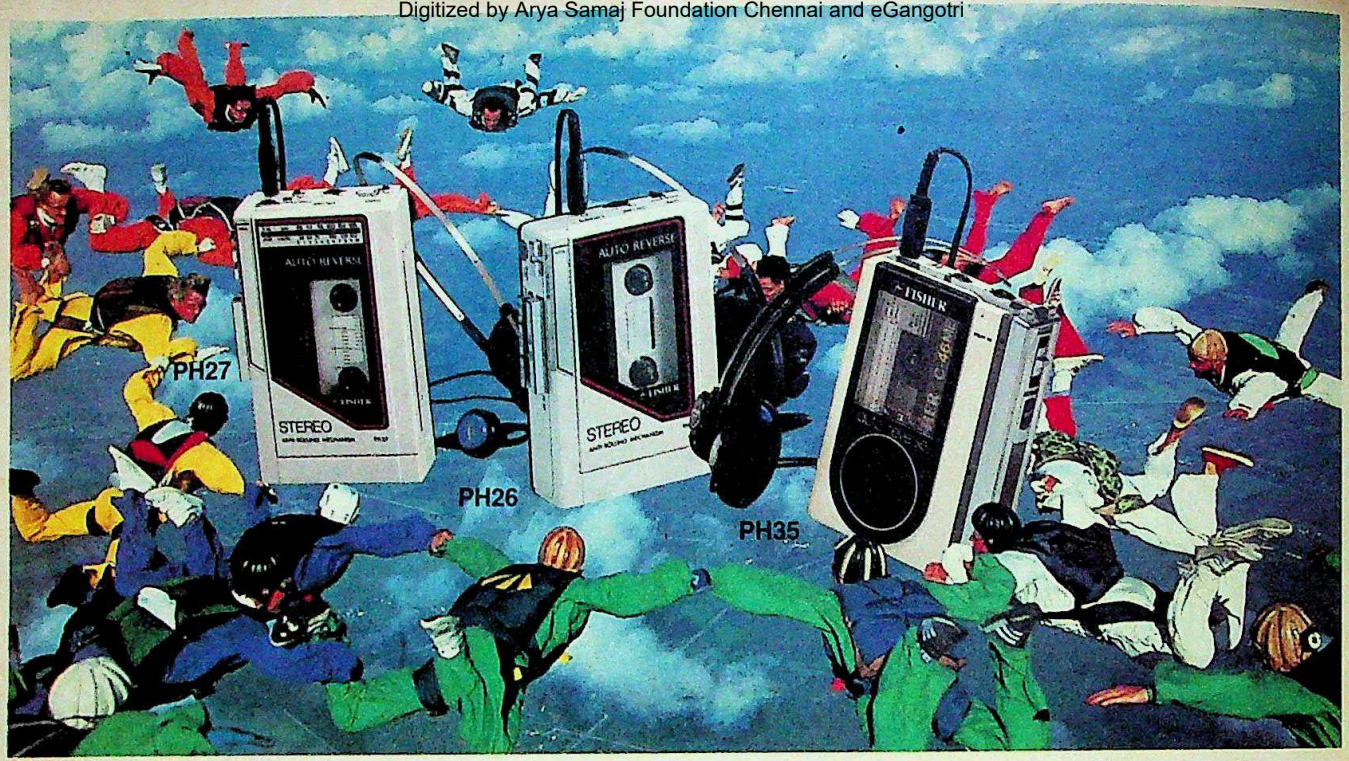

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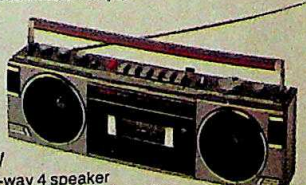

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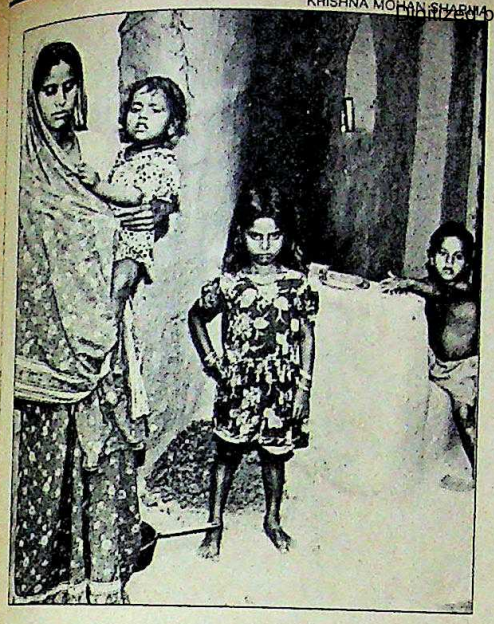

KRISHNA MOHAN SHARMA

Family of one of the victims

fired indiscriminately on a peaceful meeting of villagers protesting the forcible takeover of nine *kathas* of government land by a rich Harijan with police connivance.

The outrage gave the Congress(I) dissidents a ready-made axe to grind. Jagannath Mishra, incensed by the fact that Dubey did not even bother to visit Arwal, promptly dashed off a cable to the prime minister inviting him to Arwal and pointing out that when the Parasbigha massacre had taken place in the same Jehanabad sub-division in 1980, the then prime minister Indira Gandhi had not only visited the area but had immediately placed the state under President's rule.

To drive home their point, the dissidents set up their own 15-member fact-finding team to investigate the matter. Three prominent rebels—Jaikumar Palit, Brajmohan Singh and Shyam Sunder Singh—rushed to Delhi last fortnight and submitted its 14-page report to the prime minister, requesting him to visit the area and verify the facts for himself. Though they did not make their report public, sources said that the report categorically condemned the firing as "uncalled for and unjustified".

When the state Government submitted its preliminary report to the Centre on the carnage, Minister of State for Internal Security Arun Nehru, according to informed sources in the state secretariat, rejected it and Rajiv deputed a trusted aide, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commissioner V.D. Sharma, to tour the area and give in to the Government his own report.

Sharma spent three days in the area, refusing state government facilities and help, and reportedly went back convinced that landless peasants were being done away with under the pretext of crushing Naxalites.

Meanwhile, Karpoori Thakur, leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly, prepared his own report, saying that the countryside in Bihar was passing through a reign of terror and lawlessness. Citing examples of "oppressive and coercive acts" of the police and landlords, Thakur listed five cases in March and April in which families of Harijans, Muslims and backward castes were looted, tortured and terrorised by landlords with the active help of the police.

The state unit of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) followed with its own report of the situation. It traced the cause of the clashes in central Bihar to the emergence of various landlords' *senas* in the region which, it said, are oppressing and crushing the poor in their fight for equality. "This repression," the report said, "has also given rise to resistance by the underdogs. This presents a dreary picture."

That the police have been working on a plan to liquidate the "extremists" who have been challenging the private armies of the powerful landlords and creating awareness among landless serfs (INDIA TODAY January 15, 1986) is evident. A ten-page confidential note prepared by DGP Sahay admits that the police are helping the private armies (called "defence groups") in the "Naxalite-infested" areas. The note outlines a six-point plan to deal with the Naxalite menace, including raids on extremists' hide-outs by special commando groups of the Bihar Military Police (BMP) and identification of the areas believed to be strong-holds for effective policing.

Informed sources say, however, that at the root of the recent spate of violent incidents is a group of Congress(I) leaders forming what is known as the "Jehanabad lobby", reportedly headed by Rajya Sabha MP Mahendra Prasad Singh. Taking advantage of the factionalism within the party, this lobby is said to have influenced the chief minister to crack down not only on the Naxalites but also on government officials sympathetic to the peasants.

All appointments and transfers in the region are said to be controlled by this group and any official who does not fit into their scheme to eliminate the "Naxalites" is removed forthwith. It is reportedly at the instance of this lobby that a new police district of Jehanabad was created on April 1 and Kaswan posted there a fortnight later. The Arwal massacre interestingly took place just three days later.

While the state government continues to turn a blind eye, the wheel of violence rolls on, reaping a deadly harvest. According to one estimate, more than 350 poor and landless peasants have been killed in clashes between the two *senas* in the five districts of Patna, Nalanda, Gaya (which includes the Jehanabad sub-division), Bhojpur and Aurangabad, in the last six years. That the Government has not heard the last of it yet was proved when the MKSS announced last fortnight that it would not rest in peace until it avenged the Arwal massacre. The state Government seems to have forgotten that violence only begets more violence.

—FARZAND AHMED

MAHARASHTRA

Ill Winds

DOCTORS seem to have a peculiar talent for getting into trouble in Bombay. After the recent furore involving the controversial attempt by former Maharashtra chief minister Shivajirao Patil-Nilangekar to get his daughter a post-graduate medical degree, medical circles are agog with yet another scandal. This time it concerns the selection of a surgeon—known for his high political connections—for the prestigious B.C. Roy Award. The nomination of the surgeon has propelled city doctors to challenge what they see as the sordid state of affairs in the Medical Council of India (MCI), the premier medical organisation in the country.

"The award was the last straw on the camel's back," said a visibly upset Dr N.S. Laud, convenor of the Moral Re-armament cell of the Bombay University Senior Medical Teachers' Association. He was in New Delhi last fortnight to meet L.K. Jha, who was the ex-officio chairman of the selection committee for the Rs 50,000 award, to convey the

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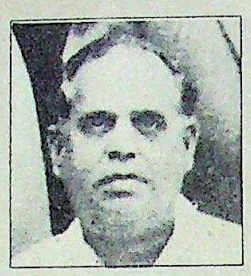
reaction of Bombay doctors to the nomination of Dr R.K. Menda of Maharashtra and Dr M.M.S. Siddhu of Lucknow. The third recipient is Professor V. Ramalingaswami, director-general of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), who is the only one considered deserving of the honour.

Anomalies abound about this year's selection. To start with, the same committee had rejected Menda's nomination last year. Both Menda and Siddhu are members on the management committee of the B.C. Roy National Award Fund. To top it all, Menda was on the selection committee this year which chose him as one of the recipients.

Instituted in 1972 in memory of Bengal's doctor-statesman who was also the first president of the MCI, the award confers recognition and several cash prizes of Rs 5,000 for outstanding work in various medical disciplines. The award has been conferred only on seven persons in the last 13 years. Critics allege that such requirements have been given the go by and Menda and Siddhu have been chosen for their political connections and their support of MCI President Dr A.K.N. Sinha.



Dr R.K. Menda was on the selection committee which chose him as one of the recipients of the B.C. Roy award despite having rejected his nomination last year.

Siddhu holds an ordinary MBBS degree but is a prominent member of the Janata Party while Menda has had a controversial association with successive governments in Maharashtra. For the last 11 years, he has been the state Government's nominee in the MCI besides being a member of the state medical council and other bodies. As an MCI executive member pointed out: "All state governments except Maharashtra send their director-general of health services to the MCI but Menda is so powerful he keeps getting renominated.

Menda's role as a member of Bombay University's Executive Council came in for criticism during the Nilangekar scandal. More recently, he was alleged to have got his nephew admitted to Grant Medical College in violation of rules but with the "special permission" of the MCI, and his gynaecologist daughter posted to a municipal hospital ahead of more senior doctors. Both decisions were reversed following the Nilangekar scandal. However, Menda refused to comment, beyond suggesting that personal rivalries were behind the controversy.

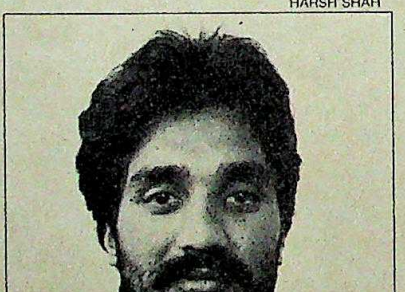
With murky politics threatening to besmirch the nation's highest medical award, the controversy has cast a long shadow on a prestigious national award which hardly redounds to the credit of the medical fraternity.

—M. RAHMAN

CRIME

Escape Scandal

HARSH SHAH



Jinda: most-wanted terrorist

MORE than a month after Harjinder Singh, alias Jinda, literally walked away from police custody in Ahmedabad, the escapades of the Pakistani-trained Sikh terrorist continue to embarrass the governments, and in particular the police forces, of Gujarat and Rajasthan, as well as the CBI. Jinda was arrested in February after a massive nation-wide hunt. The police suspect his hand behind several bank robberies, with much of the loot financing Sikh terrorism.

To start with, the circumstances leading to his escape became the cause for a bitter feud between the Gujarat police and jail officials till Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary handed over the case to the CBI. Within days of his escape, Jinda surfaced in Udaipur at the head of a band of terrorists who shot two police officers dead inside a police station.

Jinda gave the slip for the third consecutive time to the police on May 7 at Bombay. He was spotted with two others in a flat in Antop Hill but the police officers hoping they might be unarmed posted a constable to keep watch. However, Jinda and his two accomplices overpowered the constable, and locked him in a bathroom before escaping.

Gujarat's police and jail authorities must share the blame equally for his escape. Returning from the sessions court in Narol, the three policemen escorting him decided not to wait for the police van and instead took an auto rickshaw. They then decided to stop for lunch, reportedly on Jinda's suggestion. After a while, Jinda told the cops he was going to buy some fruits and walked out. He naturally never came back.

In tacit admission of their guilt, Ahmedabad Police Commissioner P.K. Jha promptly ordered the arrest of the three policemen but there is no doubt that the jail authorities must share part of the blame for the escape. Jailor Balwant Vaghela did not specify in his memo to the police that Jinda was a dreaded terrorist who ought to be taken to court under heavy police escort. This had been done on the three previous occasions but Vaghela, who was promoted from a constable's post three months ago, merely lumped Jinda along with two other prisoners, without even mentioning his name.

There is again a nation-wide alert out for Jinda, with a strict watch being kept on the border. The police do not know what Jinda will do next: slip across to Pakistan, strike in Delhi—he can choose his hour and place.

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BELGAUM

Saffron War

MUNICIPAL corporation buildings usually have the tricolour fluttering at the top. Given the sad state that most of them are in, some of them don't have even that. But the two-storied building of the Belgaum Municipal Corporation (BMC) not only has the tricolur but a saffron flag as well fluttering at the top. This saffron piece of cloth, denoting "Marathi might", is a symbol of the war that the corporation has declared on Karnataka.

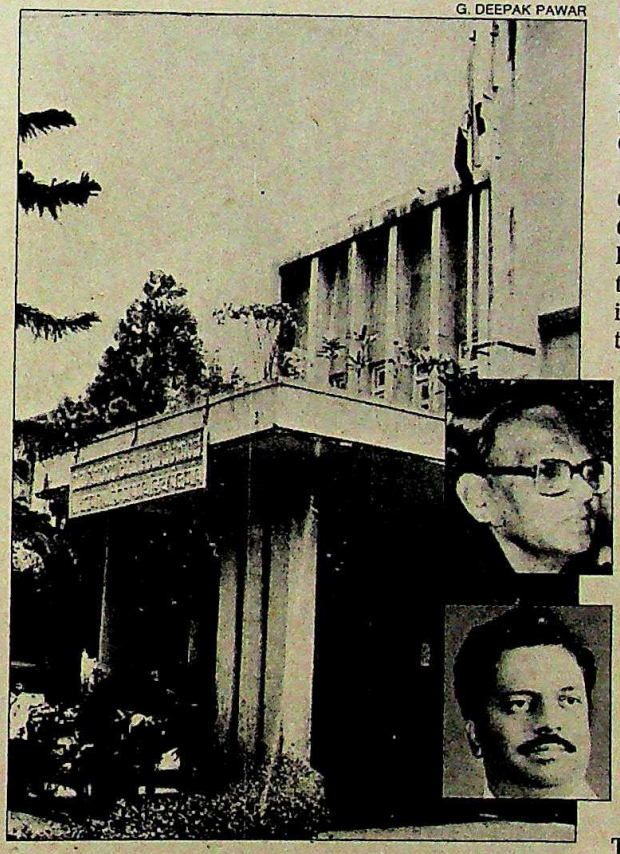
The Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES), which wants Belgaum to be merged into Maharashtra, is leading the forces opposed to the state Government. It all started in 1983 when the MES won the municipal elections by galvanising the 44 per cent Marathi vote in the city's population of 2.25 lakh. This gave it a winning 33 of the 51 seats. The MES soon made it clear that it was going to use the corporation for political purposes: the very first resolution passed was to seek Belgaum's merger with Maharashtra.

Several similarly defiant actions soon followed. In 1984, the BMC passed a resolution "introducing" Marathi as the third official language. By another resolution last year, the corporation lamented the state Government's policy of teaching Kannada compulsorily to all primary students. Annulling these resolutions, a piqued government warned that the MES's business was to look after Belgaum's civic affairs only.

But matters came to a head last month when Belgaum Mayor Sharad Joshi and other MES corporators hooted out Patil Puttappa, a cabinet-rank representative of the state Government who had come to exhort the BMC to use Kannada as the official language. Given the personalities involved, the flare-up was expected. Puttappa, a Kannada zealot and chairman of the Kannada Watchdog and Border Advisory Committee, had given two days' notice of his visit. Joshi held a strategy session to ensure a noisy reception for Puttappa, and the latter, fearing physical attack, came with a police escort.

Puttappa walked into the mayor's chamber and started addressing the corporators gathered there in Kannada, telling them to use it as the sole official language. Almost immediately, the indignant corporators were on their feet, booing and heckling him and demanding to know who he was to tell them all this. Before matters could get out of hand, the police escorted a fuming Puttappa out of the room. Joshi claimed later that Puttappa had behaved in an "arrogant manner". "He doesn't know how to behave. How can he come to our house and ask us to get out? We asked him to speak at least in English. But he insisted on speaking only in Kannada. How can people who don't know Kannada understand him?"

G. DEEPAK PAWAR



Belgaum corporation office; and (inset) Puttappa (top); and Joshi

Barely a week later, a group of Kannadiga students disrupted a meeting of the corporation by throwing some handbills from the visitors' gallery, protesting against the members' "ill-treatment" of Puttappa. Enraged MES members leapt out of their chairs, climbed up to the visitors' gallery and started grappling with the students. Said B.O.Thippeswamy, one of the protestors: "While two corporators pinned me to the floor with their feet, two others beat me up." Joshi, however, denied this. "The demonstrators not only shouted slogans against us while the meeting was in progress, but persisted in abusing even the women corporators in filthy language," he said and added: "The police also did not help us in restoring order and we had to take steps to evict the members from the hall."

Government spokesmen have not hidden their ire. While Puttappa said menacingly that the corporators had "no idea of the consequences", state Law Minister A. Lakshmisagar warned: "If they think they can get away with all this, they are mistaken." But Joshi dismissed these warnings, saying: "The Government can do nothing."

The crisis is partly of the state Government's own making. Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde has set September 1986 as the deadline for 100 per cent implementation of Kannada as the sole official language. The fracas has only served to push the decades-old border dispute between the two states to the foreground. Just days after the flare-up, Joshi and his corporators trooped to Kolhapur in Maharashtra, 110 km from Belgaum, to attend a conference on the border issue. Karnataka demands the implementation of the 1967 Mahajan Commission award which, following no yardsticks, said Belgaum should stay with Karnataka. Maharashtra, however, has rejected the award.

The Centre's guidelines to the Mathew Commission to follow the principle of linguistic and geographical contiguity, the MES argues, should also apply to this case. Says Kiran D. Thakur, MES general secretary and editor of the Marathi lobby mouthpiece, *Tarun Bharat*: "If the Centre doesn't review the Maharashtra-Karnataka border with the same principles, it would amount to adopting double standards."

The MES later described the Kolhapur meeting as "the final war". That may be overstating the case, but another round is sure to start if the Karnataka Government makes good its threat to supersede the corporation.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD in Belgaum

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JANATA PARTY

Hard Times

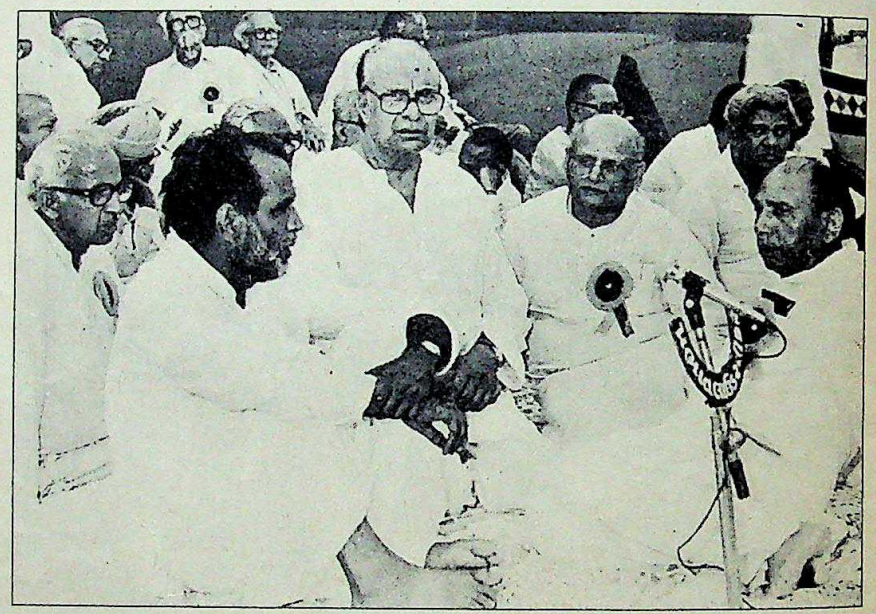
THE JANATA party seems to have as much trouble finding a president as in locating a place to hold its national conventions. In barely three weeks, a barren, 25-acre plot at Parandwadi, 35 km from Pune, was developed and renamed Jayaprakash Pattan to provide the last minute site for its fourth national convention. This spot in the wilderness—which some might say is symbolic of the party's political fortunes—was the only option left when the Karnataka unit of the party backed out of playing host because of drought in the state. Other state units, including Maharashtra, refused to take on the responsibility for the same reason. Chandra Shekhar finally overruled suggestions to postpone the convention and personally supervised the arrangements at Parandwadi, one of the 10 villages in the country where he was gifted land for the creation of a Bharat Kendra during his long march from Kanyakumari to New Delhi two years ago.

If the timing and location of the convention were decided by Chandra Shekhar, he eventually dominated its proceedings too. Isolated, rocky, ringed by the Chaurai hills of the Sahayadri range, and with the temperature varying dramatically between 17 and 37 degrees centigrade, Parandwadi demonstrated yet again that factional rivalries leave Chandra Shekhar as the only Janata leader acceptable to the majority as president. He has led the party since its inception, and though he has often expressed a desire to step-down, he remains indispensable.

But the re-election was spiced with controversy. Swami Agnivesh—the maverick spokesman for bonded labour from Haryana—to the astonishment of a majority of the members of the national council, took the stage minutes after Chandra Shekhar's unanimous re-election was announced and complained that the election was void as his nomination had been ignored. After a nervous re-examination of the nomination papers, party General Secretary Bapu Kaldate upheld the protest and announced elections for the next day.

"I am just throwing a pebble and creating a wave," the saffron-clad Agnivesh said, as he moved from one state enclosure to another canvassing for votes. "If Chandra Shekhar had given the slightest hint that he wanted to continue as president all this would not have happened. I am standing against him with a heavy heart, but I am contesting only to save democracy in the party." The Morarji Desai faction led by former Union labour minister Ravindra Varma lined up behind Agnivesh.

The incumbent president was embarassed but won easily. Of the 623 votes cast by national council members, 525 were for Chandra Shekhar and 83 for Swami Agnivesh, with 15 votes declared invalid. "Without all this drama Agnivesh would not have got more than 10 votes," Chandra Shekhar said later.



Chandra Shekhar with party leaders at the convention

The first candidate when nominations opened on April 12 was the Gujarat Janata leader Indubhai Patel, party treasurer and president of the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories. In response to Patel's nomination Janata parliamentary leader Madhu Dandavate entered the fray and when nominations closed on April 24, George Fernandes, Ravindra Varma, Biju Patnaik and, of course, Agnivesh, had also thrown in their hats, though Patel and Dandavate were the only two serious contenders. A closely-fought contest seemed inevitable but unexpectedly, all five candidates withdrew their nominations and Chandra Shekhar now continues as party president.

Was the entire leadership drama stage-managed by Chandra Shekhar's men? Was Patel the party president's front man so that he remained in control? There are no clear answers. Explaining his turnabout and decision to stay on as president, Chandra Shekhar said: "Seven months ago I suggested Dandavate should be president. I pressed his case with many friends (in the party) who remained stubborn. Then I asked Biju to look for a consensus candidate and he said Indubhai had the widest acceptability. His nomination had its chain reaction. But I made it clear that I had never sponsored Indubhai's name."

While Chandra Shekhar's aides maintain that Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde had agreed at a meeting with him in Bangalore to leave the choice of a successor to the president, Dandavate's supporters insist that it was on Hegde's suggestion that he offered himself for election. A Patel-Dandavate contest was fraught with the danger that the factions within the Janata Party would polarise. But what finally persuaded senior Janata leaders to agree on Chandra Shekhar was the growing dissidence within the Congress(I). "We expect a vertical split to take place in the Congress(I) within 12 to 18 months," confided a Janata MP. "When that happens, Chandra Shekhar is the best bet for attracting dissident Congressmen to the party."

So, as both the Janata Party and Chandra Shekhar's presidency entered the 10th year, senior leaders looked to the future in the hope that a realignment of political forces in the country would bring back some of the party's lost power and glory.

—M. RAHMAN in Parandwadi

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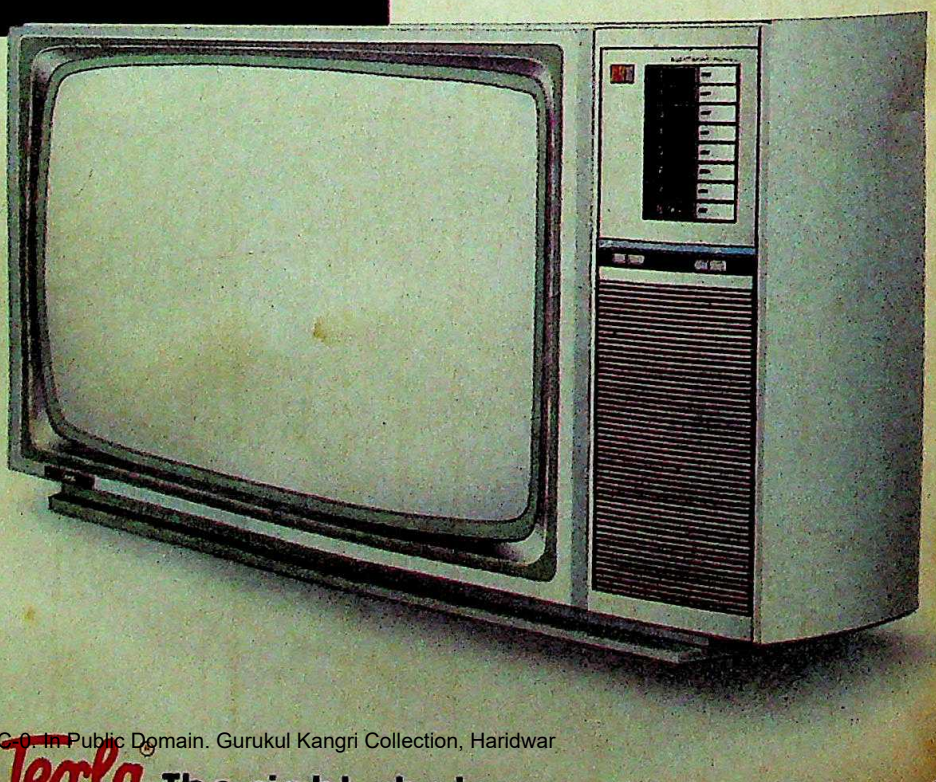

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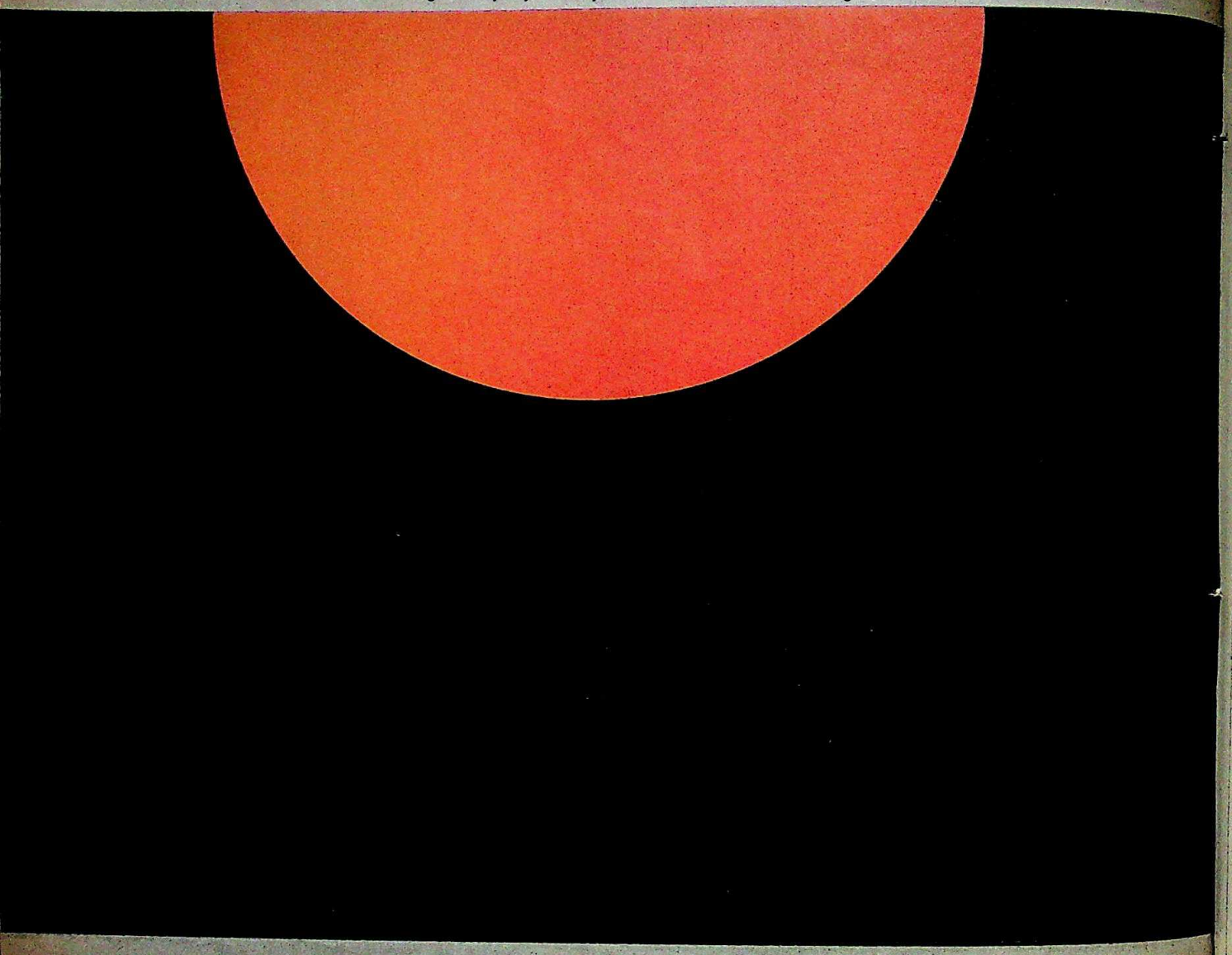

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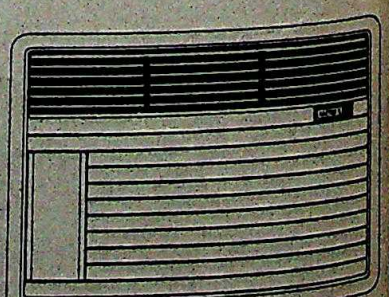

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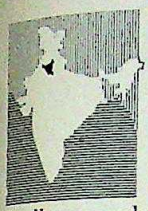
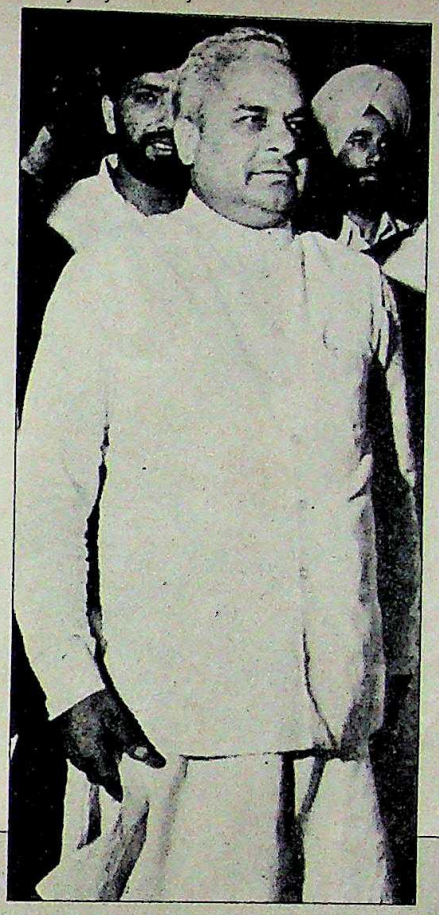
HARYANA

Bhajan's Bind



IN HIS long and not-so-illustrious career, Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal has mostly had his way. His powers of persuasion are legendary, but the courts have finally succeeded in putting him in a no-win situation. Lal has long dodged holding municipal elections in the state, but the Punjab and Haryana High Court has finally got him in a bind from which even he may find it difficult to wriggle out. With the state assembly elections barely a year away, and some doubt about Lal's political support in the state, the dilemma he faces is acute.

In what constitutes a blunt warning, a division bench of the Punjab and Haryana High Court late last month reiterated its earlier directive to the state Government to hold elections to 72 of 81 municipal committees by July 31, or face the ire of the court. Ruled Justices Devinder Singh Tewatia and Harmvir Sehgal: "If the elections are not held, it would expose the state Government and the concerned authorities to a charge of flagrant disregard of the directions of the high court and insensitivity to the democratic aspirations of the people."



Bhajan Lal has long dodged holding municipal elections but the high court has finally got him in a bind.

There is little doubt that the Government is shy of holding municipal elections. Of the 81 municipalities in the state, 25 have been administered by executive magistrates since 1962, elections to 41 municipal committees were last held in 1968-69, and the other 15 had their last elections in 1973. The law has been systematically amended to prevent fresh elections. Initially, only six months could elapse between the expiry of the term of one municipal committee and the formation of a new one. This was first amended to three years, then four, then five and later six, and now there is no time limit at all. Says opposition leader Devi Lal: "Haryana has created history by denying people the right to manage their own civic affairs. Bhajan Lal and his cohorts have ruled the municipalities through the back door."

Lal's problems began nine months ago when a public-spirited lawyer, Satya Narayan Singla, after having successfully fought against corrupt practices in the Haryana Public Service Commission, urged the high court to direct the Haryana Government to hold elections to the municipal committees. Singla took this step after the Government was unmoved by Lachman Singh Kamboj, Lok Dal MLA, repeatedly raising the issue in the Assembly. Says Singla: "I was irked by the utter disregard of civic affairs by the state Government."

A writ of mandamus was filed seeking the court's intervention, and in November 1985, Justices Tewatia and Surinder Singh directed the state to complete the election process before the end of April. The Government assured the court that polls would be held in compliance with its directive, but earlier last month it suddenly filed a special leave petition before the Supreme Court, requesting an extension of the time limit till 1986-end for holding elections, although the electoral rolls for 70 municipalities were ready. But the Supreme Court rejected the plea and directed it to follow the instructions of the high court.

With the case back in the high court, Kamboj and Singla argued that the state Government was trying to hoodwink the court. Their argument gained credibility when the Government counsel argued that "law and order in Punjab is deteriorating and this has had its natural impact in Haryana" as reason enough for putting off the elections. Interestingly enough, Haryana had elections to the state Assembly and Parliament during the height of the turmoil in Punjab. Since 1968, when the bulk of the committees last saw elections, the state has gone through five assembly elections.

The other argument the state gave in support of its contention was that electoral rolls were not ready for all the committees. Not surprisingly, the court rejected the plea. Said the judges: "Neither of the reasons are germane. It is not the case of the state that under the existing act there is any bar to the holding of elections on the basis of the existing rolls prepared with the qualifying date as January 1, 1985. As regards the law and order problem in Punjab, it has nothing to do with the local bodies elections in Haryana. These are only lame excuses and expose the lack of earnestness on their part."

Lal's real reasons for prevaricating are strictly political, and based on his finely-honed instinct for self-preservation. He knows that the blistering campaign launched by the Lok Dal and the BJP against the Punjab accord and government misrule has cut a lot of ground from under his feet. And with assembly elections due next May, the ruling party just cannot afford to lose control over the town administration. Observed former state Congress(I) chief Birender Singh, MP: "If we lose at the municipal elections, our chances in the assembly polls get seriously affected."

The courts have not left Lal with much room to manoeuvre, but only the politically naive would argue that he faces a fait accompli. Kamboj admits that he does not know if any follow-up action has been initiated to implement the court's directive. But, he says, if Lal manages to wriggle out of the tight spot he has been placed in, "we shall fight, knock at the door of the high court yet again and finally go to the people, our ultimate masters".

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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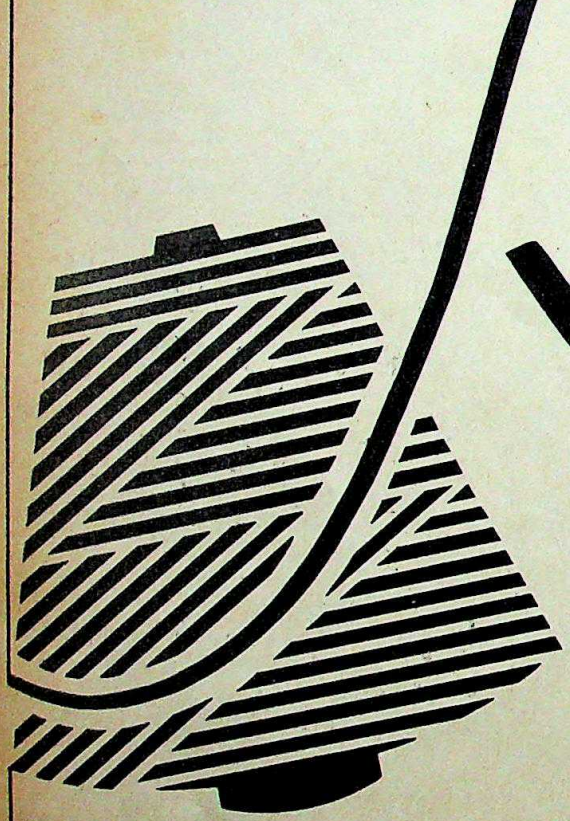
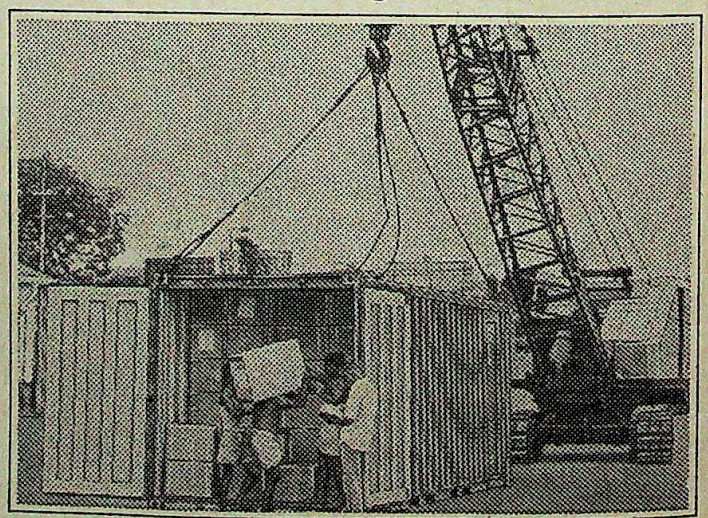
BONN VOYAGE!



South India Viscose sends out its first consignment of rayon filament yarn to West Germany.



The rayon yarn is produced by South India Viscose using its own wood pulp.

The first shipment of 67.5 tonnes of rayon filament, worth Rs. 33 lakhs, will be converted into high quality finished rayon goods in West Germany.

Enquiries from other countries are being received.

Yes, for South India Viscose it's a proud moment indeed. And for the nation ... yet another achievement.

South India Viscose Limited

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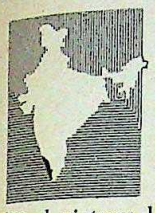
KERALA

The Victor's Spoils

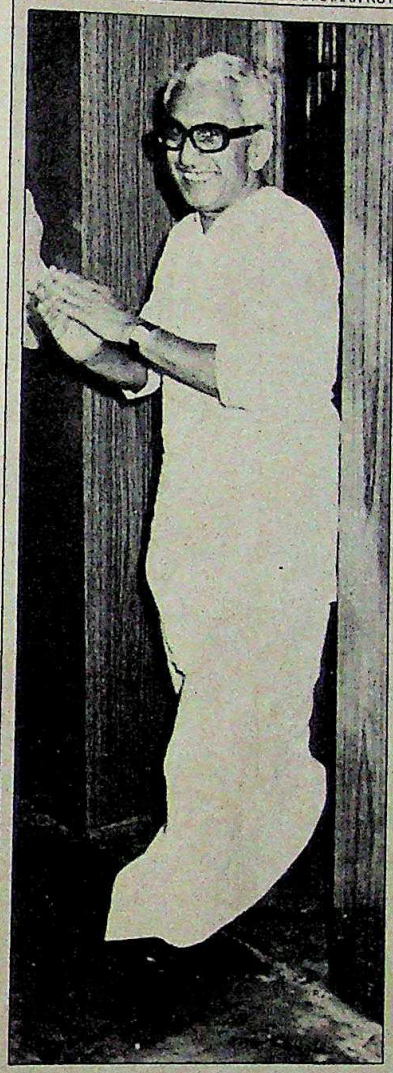


DEFYING all the prophets of doom who have been predicting the eclipse of K. Karunakaran, the Kerala chief minister was on the verge of yet another political victory last fortnight when he seemed to have finally persuaded a recalcitrant Kerala Congress to agree to a ministerial reshuffle. Karunakaran had dashed to Delhi to secure the Centre's permission and was expected to get down to the nitty-gritty of the reshuffle on his return, to finally put the seal on his "image building exercise" initiated last October. His unexpected success in this battle of nerves, which seemed unlikley at one stage, marks not only a tactical victory, but will be a signal to dissidents in the party that the high command is backing him to the hilt. Said a relieved Karunakaran: "I was going through a bad phase but by god's grace it is over."

After his humiliating surrender to the Kerala Congress before the budget session in March (INDIA TODAY March 31), Karunakaran has been trying to give a badly needed face-lift to the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF). As part of the deal then struck between the Kerala Congress and the Congress(I), a cabinet reshuffle was agreed to in which K.M. Mani of the Kerala Congress would give up his finance portfolio. Soon after the budget session, Karunakaran resumed talks to break the stalemate over the portfolio reallocation issue.

However, this time Karunakaran made sure that he had the support of the 18-member Muslim League group, the second largest constituent of the ruling front, by promising the League yet another berth in the ministry. That would raise its strength in the ministry to four, the same as the Kerala Congress which has two MLA's less. The Muslim League, under pressure after the sordid "Kuwaitis scandal" (INDIA TODAY April 15) readily agreed to support any move made by the chief minister. Said E. Ahmed, industry minister and Muslim League leader: "We have always supported Karunakaran through thick and thin and at this crucial hour we will back him to the hilt." Added to that was the fact the Muslim League was obligated to the Congress(I) for having the Muslim Women's Bill passed by Parliament.

SHANKARAN KUTTU



Karunakaran's success in the battle of nerves marks a tactical victory for him and a signal to dissidents that the high command is backing him to the hilt.

With the League behind him, the battle-scarred Karunakaran then pulled the carpet from under Mani's feet when his economic adviser and member of the state planning board Dr P.K. Gopalakrishnan exposed Mani's claim that the budget he had presented in March had a massive surplus. Gopalakrishnan was able to prove that the finance minister was wrong and had committed "a fraud on the people of the state". Dr K.N. Raj, member of the Economic Advisory Council to the prime minister, added to Mani's embarrassment by backing Gopalakrishnan's findings.

Predictably, Mani protested vehemently, maintaining that his was indeed a surplus budget, but the wind was knocked out of his sails when Union Minister of State for Finance Janardhan Poojary stated in Parliament that Kerala's current budget showed a deficit of nearly Rs 59.40 crore. Congress(I) supporters were overjoyed that Mani's "financial mismanagement" had been exposed. And Karunakaran, who has been itching for months to get the finance portfolio from the Kerala Congress, now had a valid reason for a reshuffle.

Under tremendous pressure now, Mani decided to come out with his trump card—the Pillai issue. R. Balakrishna Pillai, who resigned from the cabinet last July over his alleged call for a Punjab-model agitation to get justice for the state, has been waiting in the wings for the past few months. But Karunakaran has been dragging his feet, saying that the Pillai issue is a separate matter and will depend on legal opinion. Mani, who had almost forgotten Pillai, agreed to give up the finance portfolio on the condition that Pillai be sworn in as a minister the same day. Summing up the party's condition, a Kerala Congress MLA said: "The Kerala Congress was trapped between the devil and deep sea."

But Karunakaran dug his feet and refused to give in, saying: "There can be no guarantee at this stage that Pillai will be reinstated because it is a legal issue." The Kerala Congress retaliated with the threat of withdrawal from the front but Karunakaran was unmoved, knowing that it had nowhere to go since the CPI(M) had made it clear that it would have nothing to do with communal parties.

According to informed sources, a new team will be sworn in by May 24, the fourth anniversary of the ruling coalition. Said Karunakaran: "The present political stalemate has been amicably settled. We will sit together and decide with an open mind about portfolio allocations." But a prominent Congress(I) MLA summed up the events of the last two months more aptly: "The answer to the stability of the UDF will be in the gospel according to Karunakaran."

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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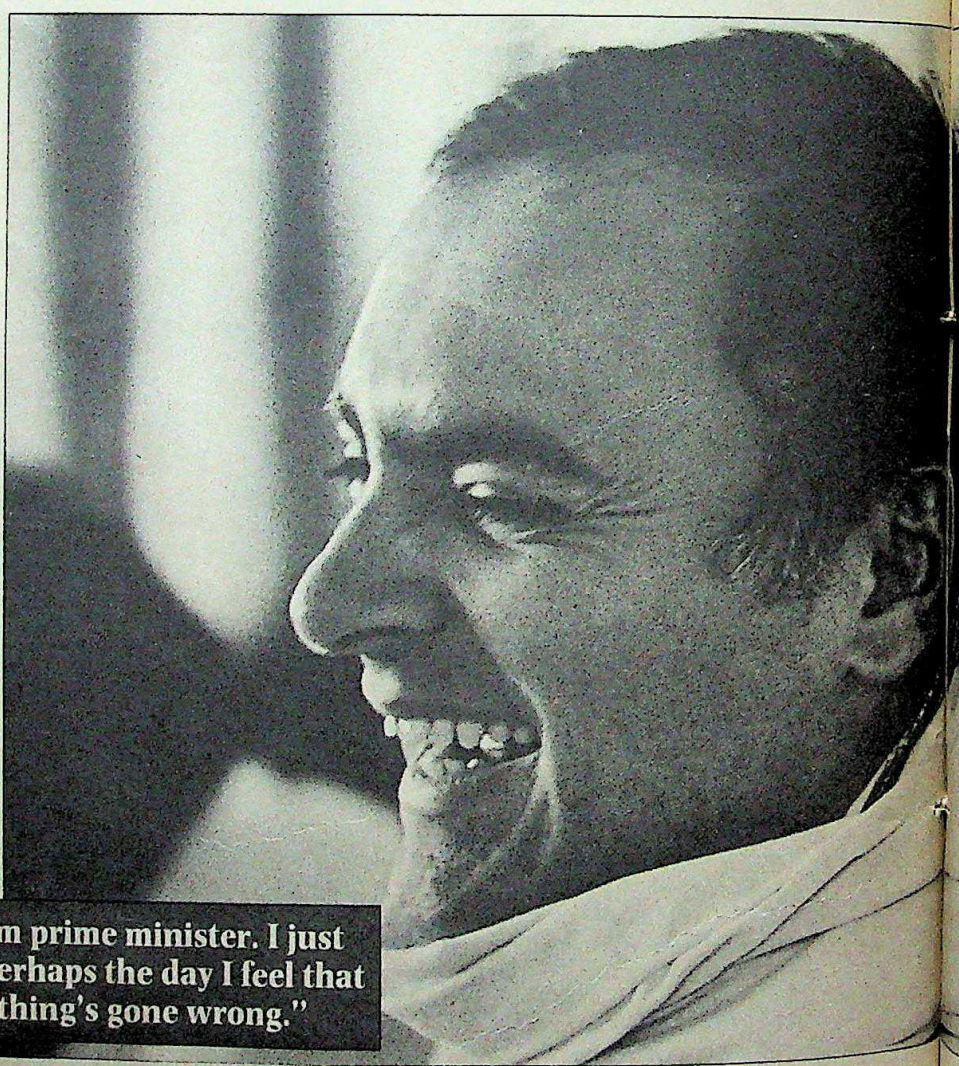
RAJIV GANDHI

"We have to push a little ha

HE IS relaxed, casual and clearly far from weighed down by the cares of office. Interviewed by Executive Editor T.N. NINAN *on an hour-long and noisy helicopter hop from Pimpalgaon Kolte in Jalna district to Songir in Dhule district (part of Rajiv Gandhi's tour of the drought-affected districts of Maharashtra), the prime minister talked at length on a wide variety of subjects: the Congress(I) dissidents, the latest developments in Punjab, the controversial Mulsim Women Bill, and on his own experience in office.*

After a year-and-a-half as prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi remains friendly and informal, retaining his easy ability



"Oddly, I still don't feel as if I'm prime minister. I just feel that I am me, like I was. Perhaps the day I feel that I'm prime minister something's gone wrong."

Q. ***What was your understanding of what the dissidents in the Congress(I) were up to?***

A. I thought a few people were going beyond the limits of normal...what should I say...freedom of action within the democratic processes of the party, especially when elections in the party are due so that all the feelings could be vented in the election process. So we took some action.

Q. ***What exactly did they do? Was it just the interview that Pranab Mukherjee gave to the Illustrated Weekly of India?***

A. Well a series of things.

Q. ***What specifically?***

A. I have told them specifically.

Q. ***Did you think that interview went beyond the limits of party discipline?***

A. Certain words in it, yes. And some other actions also.

Q. ***Has the dissidence been nipped in the mud, sorry bud?***

A. (laughs at the slip) Perhaps you're right.

Q. ***Why did you pick on Pranab Mukherjee? There were others who wrote you letters.***

A. He didn't write me a letter.

Q. ***He said he'd written to you on the Muslim Bill.***

A. I haven't got that letter. I don't know where it is.

Q. ***Do you think they were roping in Menaka Gandhi, Ramakrishna Hegde and others, as has been reported?***

A. I read the newspapers. Should one disbelieve the newspapers? (laughs)

Q. ***What is the basic problem with the dissidents?***

A. Well, one basic problem is that party elections are coming and it's going to expose all the paper tigers. We have not had elections for 13 years; so we have people who've lost their base, who don't have any standing. That will all get exposed.

Now what we've got to do is to see that the elections are fair, because if it's not fair then the pressures in the party will be much more, and instead of the elections letting off steam they will create much greater pressures.

Q. ***Is there anything to the charge of bogus members?***

A. I don't think so, not at this stage anyway. Because you can only say there is bogus membership after the scrutiny stage is over. And that has not started yet.

Q. ***When will it finish?***

A. We've just postponed it by seven or eight days to give people time to bring in

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harder on what we started"

to laugh. Despite the occasional parrying of questions, his inherent sincerity still came through. But as was evident in the speeches he made on the Maharashtra tour and from the interview, there is a subtle but significant shift in the emphasis and tone of some of his comments: he decried 'crude consumerism', there was no mention at all of the 21st century, instead there was a repeated harking back to old values and principles, and apparently a greater consciousness of the hard facts of life for the majority of Indians, plus an almost over-riding concern for human resource development, both in the Government and outside. Excerpts from the interview:

"It's only when you're in the position of a prime minister, meaning where the buck stops, that you realise the type of forces that are working against, well, not you as a person, but against the direction that the country is taking."

BHAWAN SINGH

their complaints. I think it's now, what...the fifth of May or June, I think...

Q. *Was Kamalapati Tripathi satisfied with what you told him when you met?*

A. Well we had a very long talk. You'll have to talk to him and ask him.

Q. *But he continued to do what he was doing earlier, even after you met him.*

A. Well I've read some of the statements that he has made, and they seem well within the...sort of...he operated within the party.

Q. *There seems to be some confusion as to whether you informed or consulted him before deciding on the expulsion and suspensions.*

A. Well he was consulted...It was discussed with him.

Q. *That means he didn't agree with the action?*

A. No, he didn't agree.

Q. *Will a split in the Congress(I) be a good thing?*

A. There won't be a split in the Congress(I).

Q. *People might feel they'll get a chance to strike later. If that does happen, will it be a good thing for you?*

A. I don't think it's going to happen, so the question doesn't really arise.

Q. *The question keeps coming up whether Pranab Mukherjee really did stake a claim to the prime ministership in October 1984. What is the truth?*

A. I don't know. I was in the hospital.

Q. *No, in the aeroplane from Calcutta.*

A. We didn't really talk about it. I don't know what he talked with the others. I didn't discuss it with any of them.

Q. *Did Pranab overestimate his real strength and therefore become a fall guy, because he is prominent and he doesn't really have a following? So if you pick on him you get the message across?*

A. We picked the four or five people who we thought were making...trying to destabilise the party...who were going beyond the limits of democratic freedom in the party. And we took action. There is no...sort...of...further motivation than that.

Q. *Coming to the Punjab situation, how do you see the latest developments?*

A. I think we really have to look at all these things on a national level. What is necessary for us is to isolate all the forces which are in any way assisting anti-national forces.

Q. *I was talking of the Akali Dal, and what happened yesterday with people deserting Barnala.*

A. Well, I don't know what has happened. I've been trying to find out.

Q. *Do you think Barnala is getting isolated?*

A. I'm sure the people in Punjab want peace, they don't want this terrorism.

Q. *But if major leaders in the party go against Barnala, what real power does he have?*

A. The people of Punjab made their position very clear in the elections. In spite of heavy odds, in spite of many senior Punjab leaders not coming out for elections, they voted...they voted against terrorism. So the people of Punjab I am sure will stand very solidly for any action against the terrorists.

Q. *Has the Punjab Government been firm enough against terrorism?*

A. That's a very difficult question to answer unless you're the Punjab Government. Like I said at the National Integration Council, the job that was given to Barnala was an extremely delicate job. He has got to draw the line between the extremists and the misguided. If he draws it too much on either side, we have problems. And I don't think we should try and interpret his actions. We should back him fully; and if he makes mistakes, of course we should tell him. But basically we should not try to sort of nitpick in his actions, because then he loses his elbow

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room and won't be able to do the very delicate task that the people of Punjab have assigned him.

Q. But for many weeks you had people with a price on their heads and known terrorists making speeches, addressing meetings, and nothing was being done.

A. That's slowly now finishing.

Q. Do you think the process of implementing the Punjab accord can be revived in such an uncertain situation?

A. We intend to complete the accord.

Q. But with everything so uncertain within the Akali Dal, the extremists, the violence, Haryana...Where do you start?

In Britain, people came on television, offered money for the assassination of our prime minister. Not once, twice. Now does that mean we should send out bombers and knock them out? What are we talking about?

A. I think the people of Punjab are very clear about what they want. And our promise as well as the Akali Dal promise during the last election was the accord. And we must complete that.

Q. On the Muslim Bill, do you think that whichever way it goes you lose? Because if it goes through you lose support with the liberals or a lot of that section of opinion; and if you bury the bill, then you lose among the Muslims.

A. We're not interested in support. The politics of it is not relevant at all. The elections are very far away, and the Bill will be long forgotten as a political issue. What is important is that with the Supreme Court judgement, a very large proportion of our Muslims—I would say close to 90 per cent—felt that their mazhab was in danger. They felt that way because certain political parties made it an issue, and they made it a religious issue rather than a women's issue. I'm not talking of the Muslim fanatics; I'm talking of some of the more liberal parties. That is what has really caused the problem, rather than the actual Bill itself.

I think there are...We have got very strong reasons for moving the Bill. I think we're absolutely right. We are not selling the rights of women in any way. The rights of women will remain protected in this Bill. We have already accepted Muslim Personal Law as part of our personal law. This is only putting that same thing down on paper. Up to now it was not.

Q. Does this mean that you accept the Shariat as the basis for law?

A. We accepted it long ago. The question is, do you want to delete it now?

Q. Do you think Muslim divorce law needs to be changed?

A. Well, what is required is for the Muslims themselves to look at their laws. The more modern, westernised Muslims have one point of view, the traditional Muslims have another point of view. It is not for us to be arbiters between them. They've got to do that.

Q. But shouldn't the Government...

A. What we want to do is to introduce a uniform code of some sort, and open it for discussion, something like the education policy. Perhaps next year we'll be able to bring it in.

Q. So in other words you're going beyond all this current controversy?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you see a rise of fundamentalism in the country?

A. (Thinks for a moment) I see a drop in good leadership in the country.

Q. Can you explain that?

A. That means people are resorting to fundamentalism to build their leadership, which would not be necessary if that leadership quality is available.

Q. Why is this happening?

A. Very difficult to say. Perhaps it's a lack of ideology...I mean among the people in general.

Q. Organisations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad are becoming big and important, and they are increasing their activities. Do you see this as a problem?

A. Yes, but by and large I think the Hindus will remain under control. I mean they will not become fanatics.

Q. This seems to have become a major issue and a major development, and changes the normally accepted concept of secularism.

A. My view of secularism is very much *Sarv Dharm Sambhaav* (respect for all religions), which is slightly different from the dictionary meaning.

Q. When you made that speech at the Anjuman-i-Islam (in Bombay, two days earlier), and you mentioned this, you didn't point out that secularism also means separating religion from politics.

A. I entirely agree with that. We have to do two or three things. We've got to get national or state politics out of temples, mosques, gurudwaras.

Q. But everything seems to be going the other way: Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, the reaction to the Pope's visit.

A. You must differentiate between the politicians and the people. The people are not going the other way. Certain politicians, yes.

Q. But they seem to be getting support and a response from the people.

A. When you look at the votes, they don't get it. Ultimately that's the crux, what counts.

Q. You don't interpret the 1984 vote as a Hindu backlash of some sort?

A. No, I don't. Not at all.

Q. The Punjab problem had gone on, Indira Gandhi was assassinated, and this was widely considered a backlash.

A. Well, more than just the Hindus voted, in the same sort of percentages.

Q. The promises your government made were basically two things: one was a clean government, and the second was a government which works faster. Now how far have you got on these two?

A. I think we've done well on both counts.

Q. Do you see the response to that, or do people see it differently?

A. If you see the number of administrative decisions, major policy decisions, major programmes that have gone through in this year, perhaps we've never had so many before.

On the corruption side, we've taken steps at the top. Whenever anything has come to our notice, we've been very severe. At the bottom level, of course, it's much harder. But we're trying to do it through various forums. We've been at the ministries, some ministries have built them up, they've come about in varying degrees. We're not fully satisfied with the system yet. But we haven't really given a full chance to what we have started doing. We have to push a little harder on that.

Q. Do you think all the ministers in your government are clean?

A. Well, to give a 100 per cent good chit may be difficult, but nothing has come to my notice. If anything comes to my notice I will be very severe on them.

Q. Well, at least some by reputation don't pass the mark.

A. Well, it's very difficult to act just on reputation, unless there is something a little more specific. You know, your newspapers make reputations one day, destroy

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them the next.

Q. That's not true. It's not so easy for the press. But coming back to the point, what difference do you think you've really been able to make to government?

A. Differences don't come about in a government in a year, or a year-and-a-half, unless you want flashes in the pan. If you have to make a difference, you really have to build institutions, you have to give direction to the old institutions, strengthen the system. Which is what we have started doing.

Q. Do you get frustrated sometimes, at how slowly things move?

A. Sometimes I get a little irritated. That is really where the system comes in. Our basic tool for development is the administration, and we've not sharpened the tool for 38 years or may be even longer than that. We've not moulded the tool for our needs. I don't mean that we must mould it in a party picture or something.

One of the examples is that the minute I came in I asked what is the training process and all that. Now coming from an airline, where you're checked out seven or eight times a year on everything, otherwise you're out, I found that being checked out once in 34 years was a little bit on the low side.

Nobody has bothered to look at the...What is the basic strength of a country? I think it depends very much on the level of training of our people. Training not just meaning that you teach him how to make a basket or a rope and tell him you're a great guy. It's a question of training the person because our biggest investment for the future is the stability that we can build into our people. If we're going to make them what is called 'pragmatic', then they will sell us out. We will no more be independent. We're only independent because we had a certain ideology. We stood for certain things. The people who were pragmatic at that time were working for the British.

Q. What is 'pragmatism' today?

A. Pragmatism today really is translated into a very crude form of consumerism or materialism. Again, in our state of affairs that will weaken the nation.

Q. How's that?

A. That will produce a run for all the wrong things. In the wrong places. We will not be able to strengthen the basic foundations of our nation. And it's not only us. Even if you look at the advanced countries that are being pragmatic, sometimes we feel they take us to the brink.

Q. Why did you identify yourself so closely with Libya, which is not an ideal country to identify yourself with under its present leadership?

A. We didn't identify ourselves with Libya at all. If you see our position it's very very clear. We feel that no matter what the logic, you can't just go and bomb another country, unless you want a war. And I don't understand the logic at all. There have been Sikh terrorists in the US, in England, even in Canada. We've been talking to them to send them back here, where we can deal with them.

Q. But there has been no official connivance in these countries.

A. No there is no official connivance...

Q. But in Libya?

A. No, let me finish. We know that people there have made a noise about it. In Britain, people came on television, offered money for the assassination of our prime minister. Not once, twice. Now does that mean we should send our bombers and knock them out? When they have the St Patrick's Day parade in New York and

BHAWAN SINGH

"The politics of the Muslim bill is not relevant. The elections are very far away and the bill will be long forgotten as a political issue."

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collect money for the IRA, does it mean Britain should send bombers to the US? What are we talking about? And I just hope that the way they are expelling and sending Libyans out of Europe and America and other countries, I hope they will send Sikh terrorists out in the same way.

Q. On foreign policy, you started by trying to take a good neighbourly stance around the country's borders. But do you find...

A. We haven't changed that at all.

Q. Are you taking a tougher stand because people may be thinking that this good neighbourliness is a sign of weakness?

A. I don't think they thought that. Some of them have had their own problems. Pakistan has had elections. Bangladesh is going through the process. So it's difficult to start an opening up when they're going through such complicated internal processes. Sri Lanka has got its own problems. What it means is that with these internal problems...internal developments, really, not problems...the processes that we started off have had to be slowed down much more than we originally wanted it to.

Q. Again, you started out by trying to mend fences with the US, in a way. Now, has this slowed down too?

A. Well, perhaps I shouldn't answer that at this stage.

Q. Are you satisfied with the business and industry response to the policy changes you have made?

A. By and large, yes.

Q. But all they seem to do is to cry about this, that and the other.

A. Well, they've been in a very sheltered environment. When they come out of this, there are going to be some changes. By and large the response has been good. The real response will be seen three years from now when the returns should be coming. It's too soon to say.

Q. How do you see the foreign exchange situation? Is it very serious?

A. It's serious, not very serious.

Q. Do you have to do anything about it?

A. No, we're all right.

Q. There's no question of going for fresh borrowings?

A. We've not looked at anything like that yet.

Q. But the trade deficit is huge, it's almost doubled.

A. It's high, but we'll have substantial savings this year on oil imports and certain other things.

Q. But oil is now a small part of your import bill. It's barely 20 per cent.

A. It still makes a lot of difference. Our major imports are still the bulk items that the Government imports.

Q. You don't see wasteful imports going on?

A. They're very few. As a percentage they're very small.

Q. You seem to have become slightly defensive about computerisation.

A. Well, because it takes time to...In Parliament I said very clearly that computerisation even at the rural level is a big gift, as we've seen in Anand, where it's helping the farmer with his cattle feed, and it's saving him almost 40 to 50 per cent of the cost of cattle feed. So we're not defensive at all on that.

But what has started to happen is that everybody thinks a computer solves all the problems; of course it doesn't. It's only a tool, just like a typewriter was a tool when you changed from a scribe to a faster method. So it's a tool to do your work, and it must be understood as such.

Q. When you talk of technology today, as different from a year ago, you talk more and more specifically of basics. Now does this represent a change in your own perception?

A. What do you mean by basics?

Q. Well, drinking water, oilseeds.

A. Drinking water is going to involve the most advanced technology that we will be using anywhere. Things like reverse osmosis processes, purification of other waters. The drinking water mission is going to be the most scientifically intensive mission that we've got. Much more than even things like lasers and all.

Q. Have you prioritised your tasks for the next six months or year?

A. Well they're already prioritised. It's difficult to categorise unless you go to what sort of level...

Q. What is uppermost in your mind?

A. Uppermost are two things. Because these are what I feel long-term are going to give us the answers. Perhaps one thing: human resource development. In government, in government agencies, public sector and everywhere else. Because without that I don't see how we can really cope, and the word is cope. We're in a very sort of precarious situation.

Let me put it in flying terms. You have a point on your lift curve and you always have to fly beyond that point. If you come below that point, then the drag increases proportionately with the speed dropping, instead of the other way round. And you need more and more thrust to keep flying. So you're in a sort of losing situation. You know, we're very close to that. Any developing country is like that. During the past 38-odd years, we've managed to keep on the positive side. But just barely. Now the question really is the world is moving ahead very fast. So you need a lot of thrust. And if we're really to be able to get out of this, then we need to mobilise every resource that is under our control. And our biggest resource is our people. Let's not treat them as a liability, let's treat them as an asset.

Q. How much do you really expect to change with this new policy on education?

A. It'll take time. Five years, 10 years, may be 15 years. But I think it'll make some very basic changes in the way of thinking of our people.

Q. It would seem that the basic problem with any of this is nothing more than just pure implementation. The money is given, but there are no blackboards...

A. That's not quite right. The money has not been given. Not enough.

Q. Do you see more being given now?

A. Well we've changed that already. And we're trying to now educate the Planning Commission (laughs).

Q. What is the worst bit about being prime minister?

A. Time. There's not enough time to do everything that you want to do. And there's no time to be with the family.

Q. Do you get enough sleep?

A. I think so.

Q. What's the best bit about being prime minister?

A. Well, you can actually do things instead of just talking about them. Or writing about them (laughs).

Q. What do you miss about your old

"What has started to happen is that everybody thinks a computer solves all the problems. Of course it doesn't. It's only a tool like a typewriter was when you changed from a scribe to a faster method and it must be understood as such."

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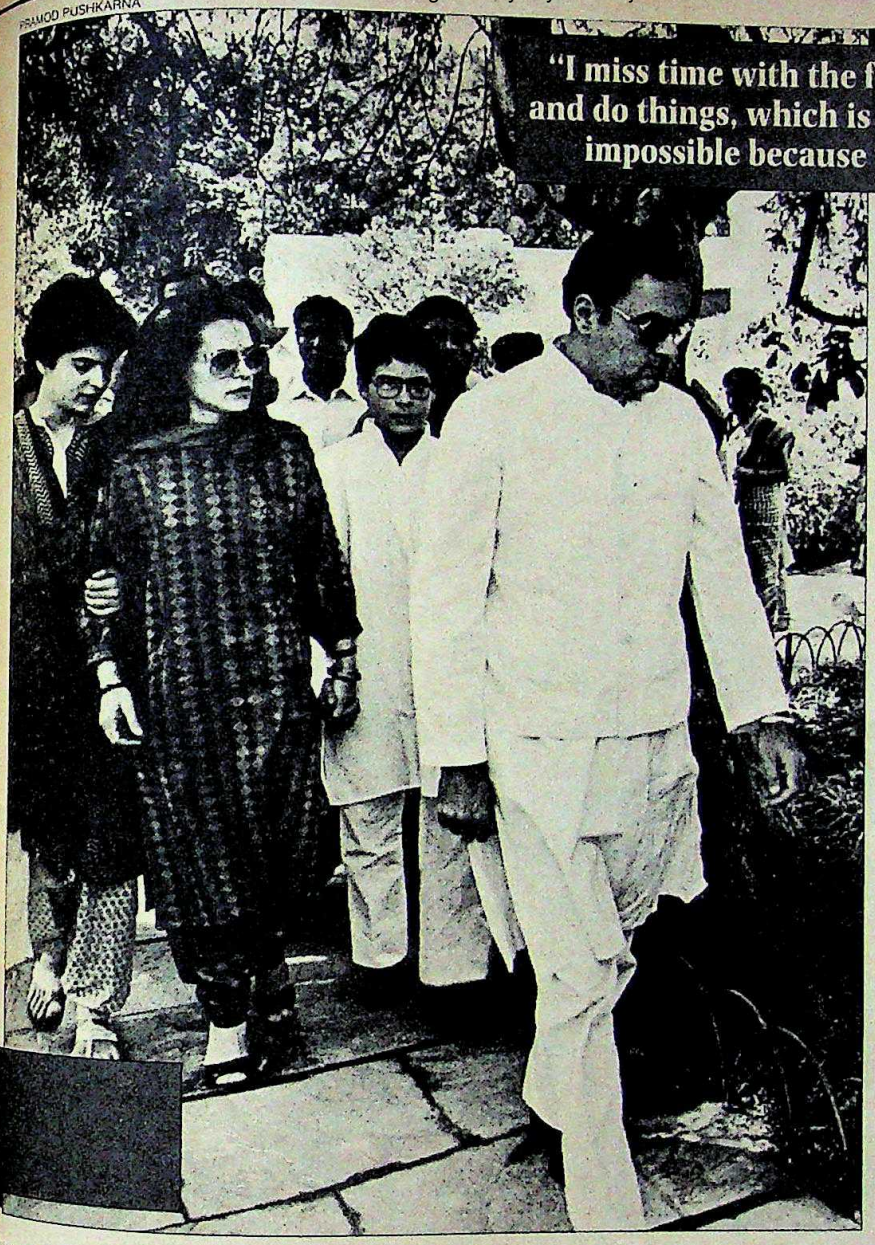
PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



"I miss time with the family, being able to get out and do things, which is very difficult now. It's almost impossible because there is so much tamasha."

life, before you entered politics and the Government?

A. Time with the family. Being able to do things that you really...I mean get out and do things, which is very difficult now. I mean if I want to go to a place, it's almost impossible. Because there is so much tamasha, and everything goes...

Q. *Do you find that you've changed in any way?*

A. I hope not. I don't think so.

Q. *Not at all? Do you see yourself differently?*

A. No, I see myself exactly the same. And oddly enough, I still don't feel as if I am prime minister, if you understand what I mean.

Q. *Meaning what, you think the prime minister is somebody else?*

A. No, it's not like that. I just feel that I am me, like I was. Perhaps the day I feel that I am prime minister, something's gone wrong.

Q. *Have you gone more grey?*

A. I don't know. I must check with my barber whether I've lost more (hair) or greyed more.

Q. *Do you find that you've developed faculties or abilities that you did not have to call upon earlier?*

A. In terms of physical...

Q. *Well, in relating to situations, and people.*

A. Well, that's very difficult to say. Because these things grow. I mean you don't...You learn from each situation, each experience. That means you're developing areas which you had not developed earlier. It happens with everyone, no matter what you're doing.

Q. *What's the single most important thing you've learnt?*

A. Eh, I don't know.

(Mani Shanker Aiyar: Patience with us?)

A. Perhaps.

Q. *Do you enjoy the exercise of power?*

A. Well I try not to exercise it. I try to do things by involving the maximum number of people; and wherever we have a very major step to take, I try and involve the Opposition also.

Q. *Having been in government for a year-and-a-half, do you find that you've reassessed the role that Mrs Gandhi played, and Pandit Nehru played?*

A. Oh I think they played a tremendous role, and Mrs Gandhi especially because the period that she was in power was an extremely difficult period. It's only when you're in power, and I would say only when you're in the position of a prime minister, meaning where the buck stops, that you realise that the type of forces that are working against...well, not you as a person...but against the direction that the country is taking.

Q. *Do you find that you have to compromise more than you probably expected you would have to?*

A. No. Because the day I have to do that I might as well pack up and go home. I see the vote that was given to me as a vote not to compromise on the basic things that I have stood for. And if I compromise on those, then it's no use sitting here.

Q. *Well, you could lose a battle to win a war?*

A. Within certain limits. But on basic issues you can't compromise.

Q. *Do you find you've had to adapt your style? There is an interesting story of when you started meeting these* MP*'s on a regular basis in the middle of the day. And initially you would get them to sit down and say 'OK shoot'. And they didn't understand this. What did you mean: 'shoot'? And then you had to change that.*

A. (laughs) Well, not quite like that. The problem is not with the language, because I wouldn't use the word 'shoot' with them anyway. But in the substance of what you say, yes. People are reluctant to talk, but they're slowly opening up. And perhaps I am also learning to understand what has been said when it has not been said.

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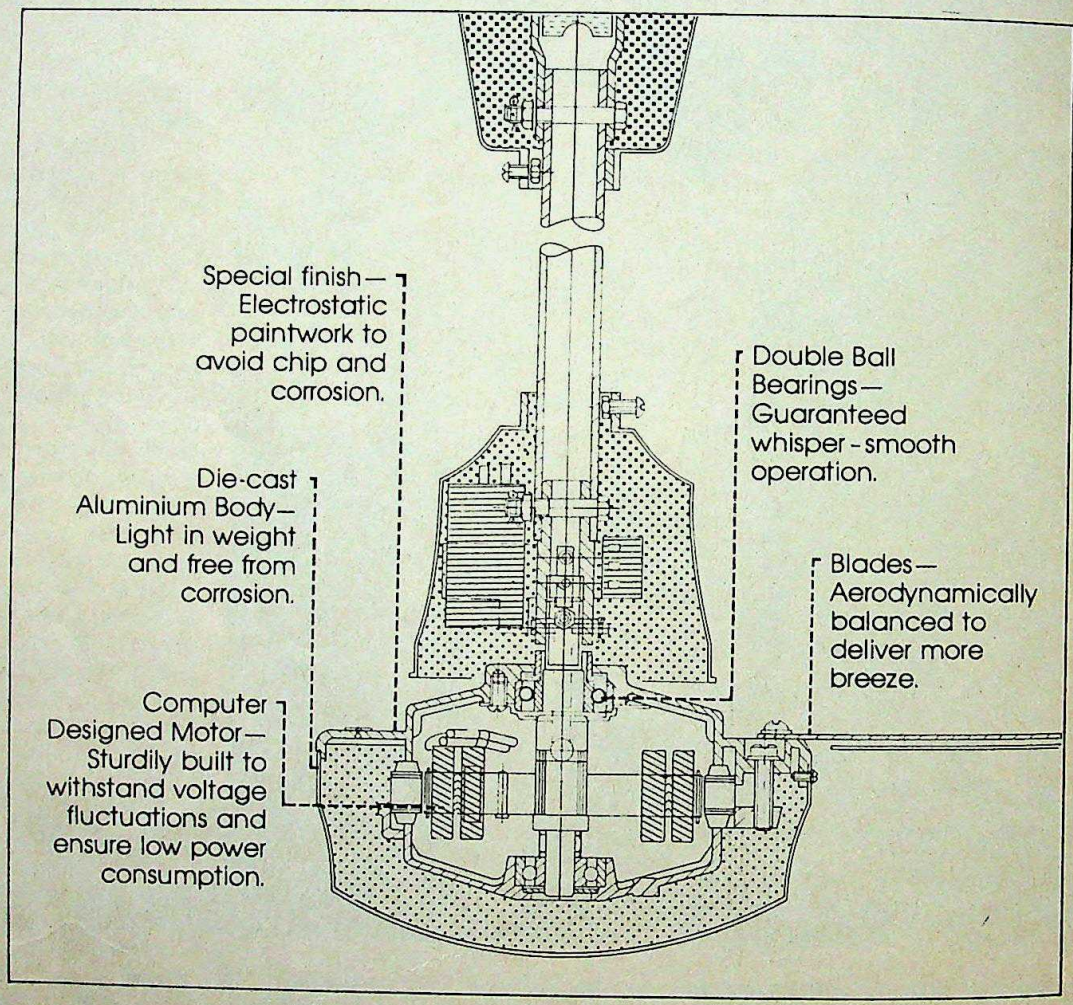

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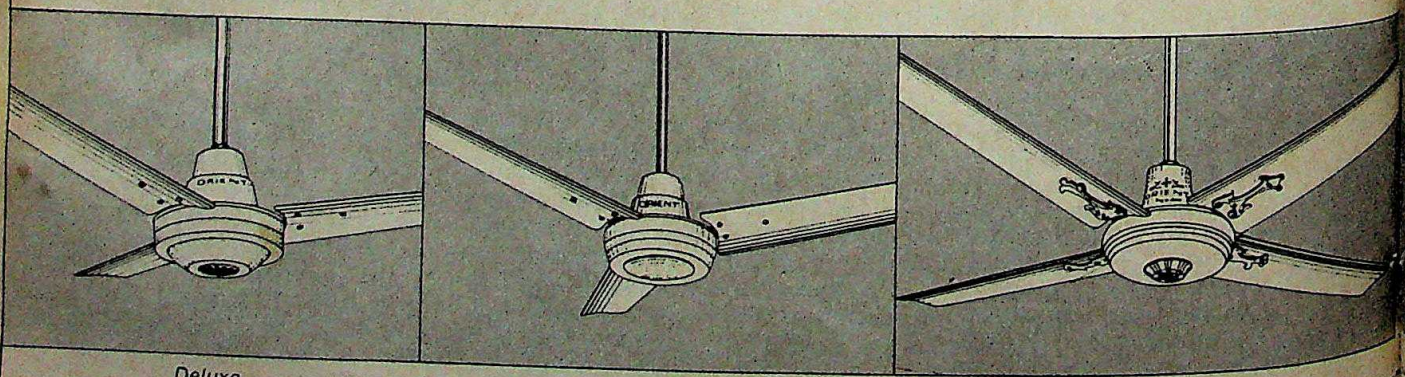

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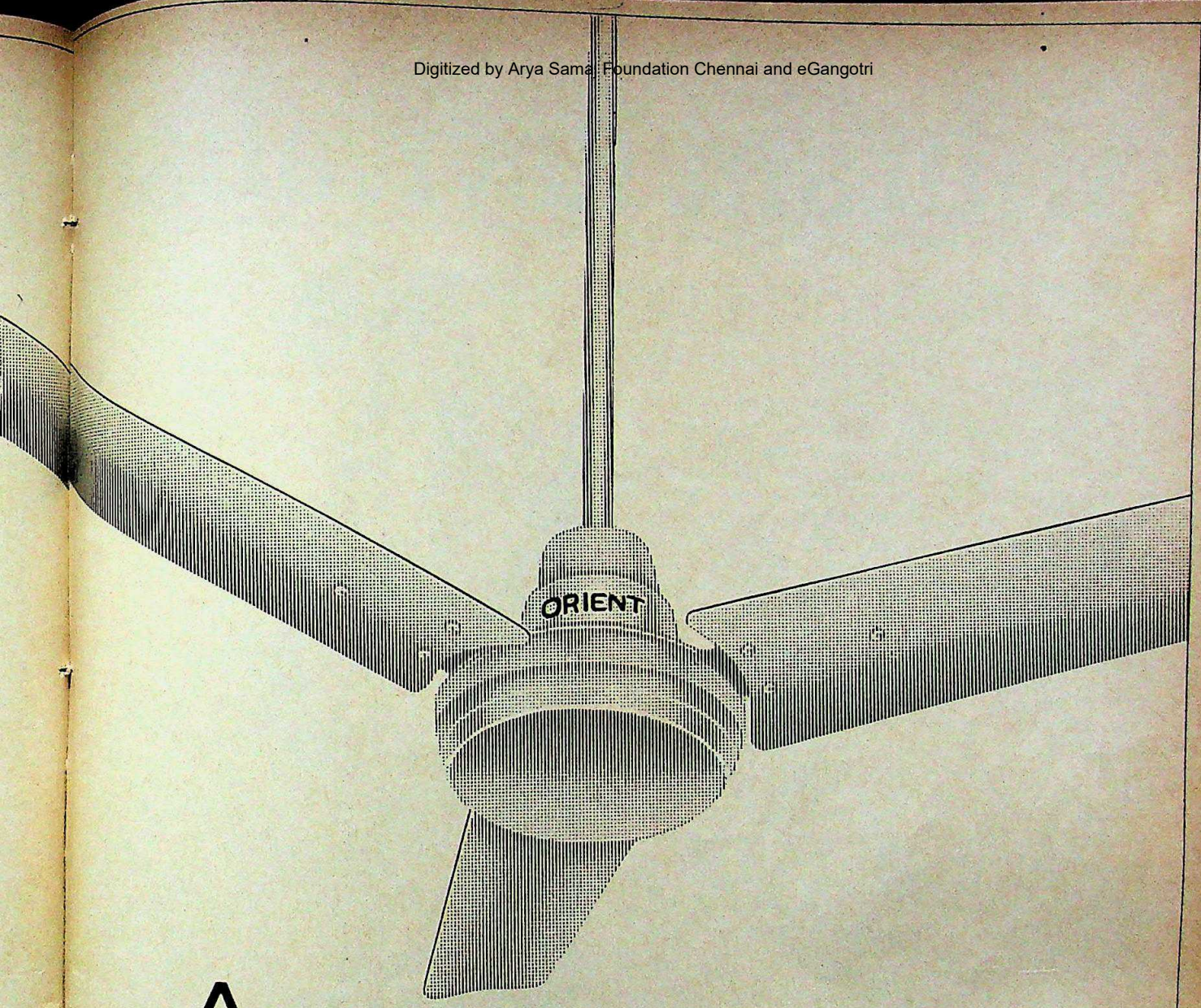

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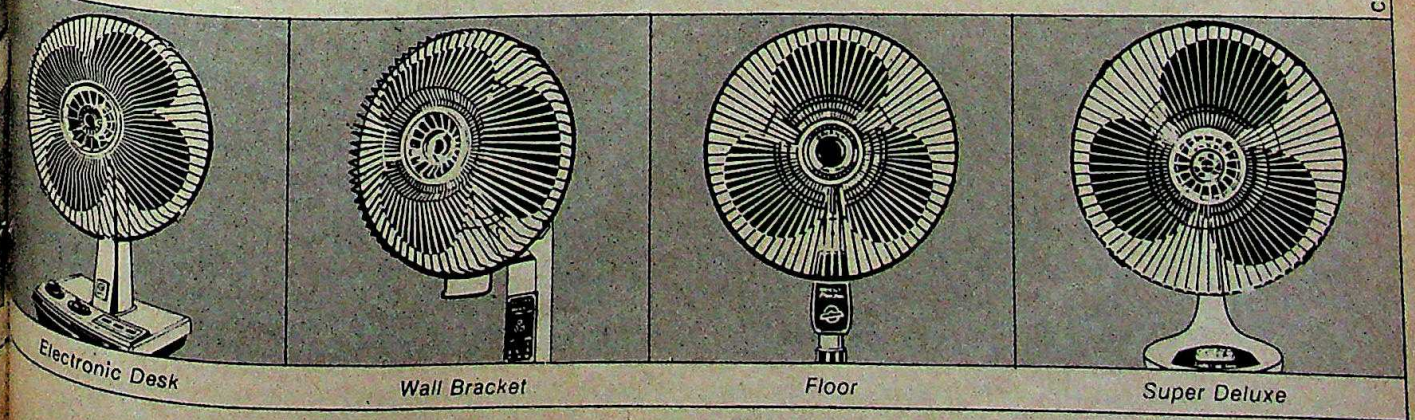

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Hindus

Militant Revivalism

THE SYMBOL is stark, simple, and effective: Lord Rama imprisoned in a padlocked cage. For more than two years now, the incarcerated deity has been criss-crossing the land aboard garishly caparisoned raths, pounding out a messianic message: Hinduism is in danger.

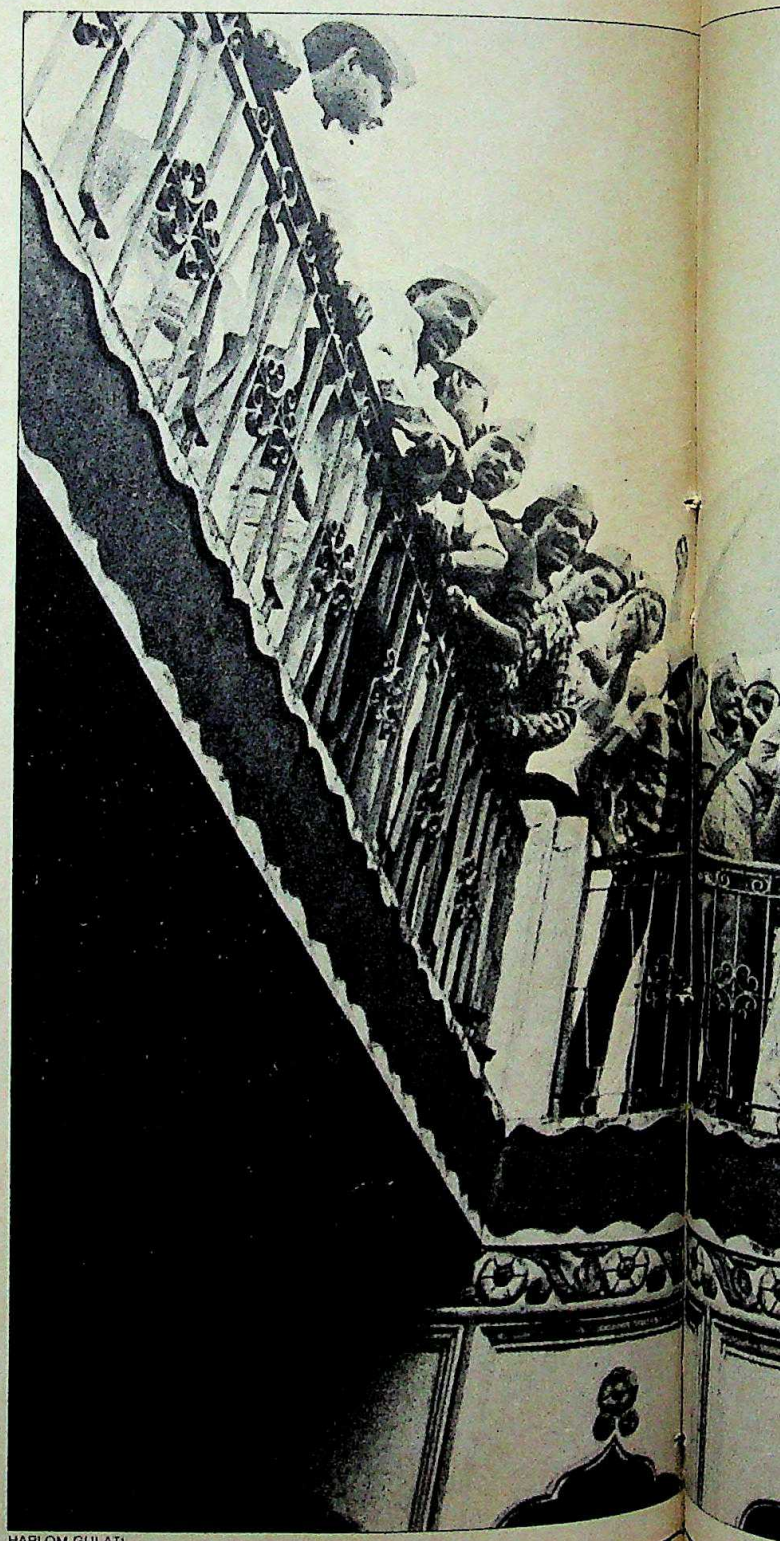
That message has struck a high-strung emotional chord. Slowly but surely, like a juggernaut gaining angry momentum, a palpable, resurgent, united and increasingly militant movement of Hindu revivalism—Hindu *Jagaran*—is sweeping across the land. Frenzied in pace, frenetic in character, the religious and communal combat vehicle is freewheeling across the collective Hindu consciousness, dragging in its slip-stream a divergent following—shopkeepers, sadhus, social activists, professionals, businessmen—and threatening to trigger off transformations of unfathomable dimensions in the country's tightly-stretched political and social fabric.

In Punjab, sharpened *trishuls* have become standard wear for militant Hindu youths, united under the new battle cry of 'Om'. In Kerala, angry demonstrations and mailed fists greeted Pope John Paul's visit. Elsewhere, issues like the Shah Bano affair and the Muslim Women's Bill have evoked militant responses from Hindu organisations, which see these as provocative symbols of minority pressure being applied to wrest concessions from the Government. Ayodhya has been dragged out of relative obscurity to be transformed into a communal cauldron. The Meenakshipuram and other conversions have led to impassioned rhetoric about a resurgent Islam riding in on the strength of petro-dollars.

The new militancy is menacing, and growing in intensity. And the message being hammered home is the same: for too long, the minorities have been appeased and pampered while the majority has been restrained from asserting what it holds to be the only basis for unifying the country—Hindu nationalism.

The new mood and the forces taking shape manifest themselves in dozens of ways: in the sharply increased attendance at temples, the growing strength of the once discredited Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has seen a sudden and unprecedented increase in attendance at its drills and enjoyed the growing popularity of its numerous front organisations, the drive to reconvert people from Islam and Christianity to Hinduism and the effort to end Christian or Muslim proselytisation, the palpable increase in communal tensions across the country's northern belt, the programme aimed at "liberating" more than two dozen Hindu temples converted into mosques by the Mughal rulers, the growing popularity of all-night *jagarans*, even perhaps in the character of the vote in the 1984 general elections, described by a variety of political pundits as a Hindu backlash.

The clarion call to Hindu nationhood, sounded from the pulpits of rath yatras, dharnas, morchas, andolans, padyatras and kirtans organised by socio-cultural-religious groups like the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Virat Hindu Sammelan, Hindu Samajotsav and others like the Bajrang Dal



Members of the Akhil Bharatiya Shiv Shakti Dal in Meerut

HARI OM GULATI

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"Beyond caste, beyond parties, o Hindus, awake, arise and unite."

Swami Satyanarayana Saraswaty, Ramdasa Mission Universal Society

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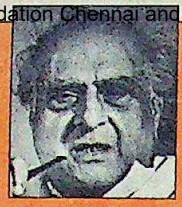
"What is happening among Hindus is like an incarnation. It is as if God is going among the people beseeching them to free him."
ASHOK SINGHAL, VHP Mahamantri



"Revivalist fanaticism cannot produce a united India. We are reaping now a poisonous brew concocted through past follies."
P.N. HAKSAR

and Youth Volunteer Corps, has found credence and acceptability among the unlikeliest of people; people who are banding together, for the first time, under one saffron banner. Observes K.C. Kulish, publisher of the *Rajasthan Patrika*: "There has been a spurt of religious activity in all areas. But I have never seen the kind of religious fervour that exists today. It is the response of a people who are not at peace."

In Kerala, one of the most important centres for the *jagaran*, Marxists have in some cases given up their traditional clashes with RSS activists, and many notable CPI(M) members have been attending VHP meetings in order to court the Hindu vote against the Karunakaran Government. In Trivandrum, Leela Thampy, a social worker, now supports the VHP and talks about "the raw deal Hindus have been getting from the Government and media". In Tamil Nadu's Ramanathapuram district, former hardcore Dravida Kazhagam activist and artist N. Balasubramaniam—once given to iconoclasm and opposition to organised Hinduism—celebrates his new habit of temple-going and excoriates the "carelessness of Hindus about their religious rites and ignoring their own religion".

THERE can be no doubt that the Hindu juggernaut has arrived, its wheels propelled by surprisingly large numbers of Hindus from every corner of the nation who have begun to articulate—as if with one voice—a feeling of persecution. The majority appears to have developed a minority complex. And within the confines of this mass psyche, it is embarked upon a zealous unification—a zeal marked by religious purgation, Harijan and tribal uplift aimed at persuading lower caste Hindus who have strayed into Christianity or Islam to re-enter Hinduhood, xenophobia, the formation of multifarious Shiv Senas with *trishul*-wielding acolytes banded into self-defence groups, public works and educational projects, and militant demands for ending what are seen as the special privileges enjoyed by the religious minorities.

During a recent Ram Navmi Mahotsav organised by the VHP in Ayodhya in April, to celebrate and plan further for the liberation of the Ramjanmabhoomi site—attended by about a few million people and hundreds of mahants and mandaleshwars representing different Hindu sects—a swami offered a new twist to the well-known pacifist couplet: *Jo toke kanta bove tahi bove too phool* (shower flowers on the enemy who pricks you with a thorn). The swami's version: *Jo toke kanta bove tahi bove too bhala. Voh bhi humko kya samjhega, para kisee se paala* (he who pricks you with a thorn, pierce him in return with a spear and teach him a lesson he won't forget).

Small towns across Uttar Pradesh echo with resounding Shiv Sena cries of *Jo hum se takrayega choor choor ho jayega* (He who takes us on will be crushed into smithereens), and *Hindu ki pahchaan, Trishul ka nishan* (recognise Hindus by the sign of the trident). Even liberal, reformist Hindu organisations like the Arya Samaj have been swept along by the currents of the militant resurgence. At a recent centenary celebration in Delhi, the first speaker, Ramgopal Shalwale, a former Jan Sangh MP, said that one of the most recent and significant achievements of

K.M. KISHAN

The prisoner Rama: symbol of Hinduism in danger

the Samaj was its having prevented a masjid from being erected inside Rashtrapati Bhavan when a Muslim was the President of the country. His call to "free" Bharat Mata from outside influences was greeted with resounding cheers and shouts of *Jo Bole so abhaya, Vedic Dharma ki jaya* (speak out fearlessly, long live the Vedic religion). The meeting was attended, among other important personages, by K.C. Pant, cabinet minister.

The cooler heads in the community are aware of the inherent dangers in the new mood of militancy and have been trying, unsuccessfully, to counsel restraint. Says Vayalar Ravi, Kerala's home minister who has been fighting an unsuccessful battle to ban the sale of public lands to religious organisations: "Will it solve any problems if everybody tries to live like a Hindu or as a Christian or as a Muslim and not as an Indian in this country? It will not." Adds Tariq Anwar, chief coordinator of the Congress

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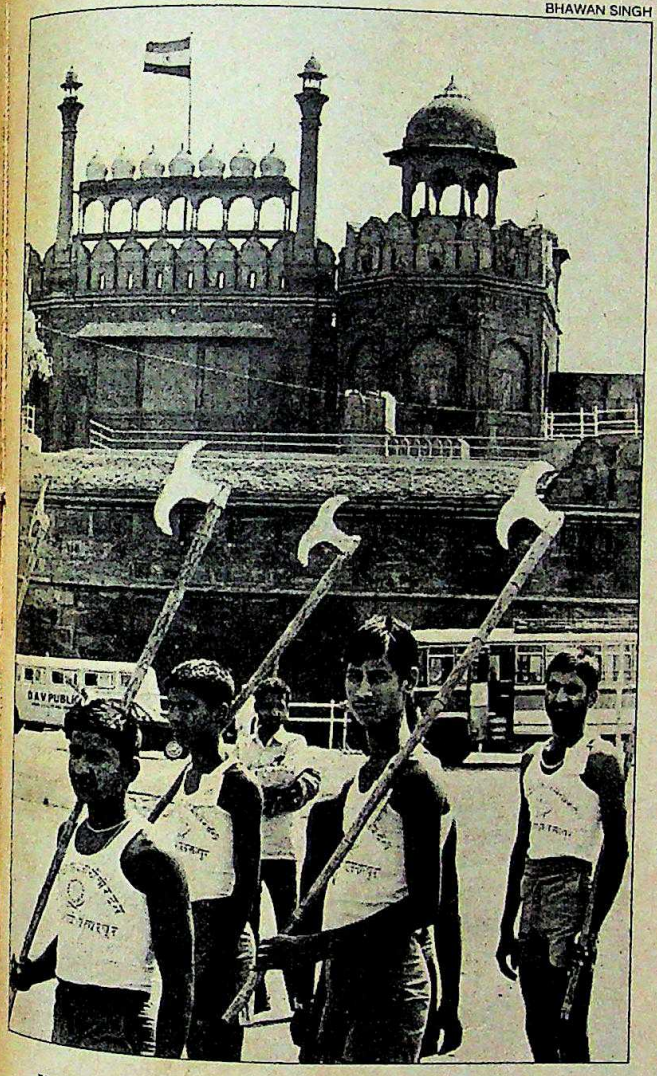
"Today it is the turn of the Hindus to fall into the trap of communalists. Tomorrow it will be the Muslims. We should all think like Indians."
BIR BAHADUR SINGH, U.P. Chief Minister

"A Hindu nation that accepts all diverse religions but does not give special treatment. That is our goal. Our society should be homogeneous."
RAJENDRA SINGH, RSS General Secretary

BHAWAN SINGH



Youths of the Arya Vir Dal outside Delhi's Red Fort

Sewa Dal: "No one seems to be thinking where we are heading by adopting this aggressive communal posture. While it is the duty of the majority community to ensure that the minorities feel safe and part of the nation's mainstream, minorities are dutybound to prove that they want to respond to friendly accommodation."

The Hindu cause has found a redoubtable champion in Orissa's coastal town of Puri, the spiritual capital of India in the east. He is Niranjana Dev Tirtha, 81, the 144th Jagadguru Shankaracharya, one of the most venerated personages of Hinduism. He perceives the Government as the greatest enemy of Hinduism because of what he calls its policy of "appeasing" the minorities. He accuses the Government of having bowed to minority sentiments in passing the Muslim Women's Bill because the Government saw the Supreme Court verdict in the Shah Bano case as an intrusion into the community's internal affairs. "But in Hindu social affairs," he fumes, "there is daily interference." The Shankaracharya is particularly irked by the minimum marriage age law and the Hindu Religious Endowment Act which allows the Government to take over temple land. "The Government has taken away 550 acres of our land in Orissa," he says. "But can you imagine the Government touching even an inch of mosque or church property?" And he argues that by making Hindus vulnerable and insecure, the Government has "negated secularism. There must be a common law for all inhabitants of this country".

Hindu stalwarts like him are convinced—however ludicrous it might sound—that a conspiracy of sociology and demography will soon render the Hindus a minority within their own country, bereft of economic and political power. The Shankaracharya has now taken to travelling around the country to drum up support for his crusade against the Government. "Everywhere I go I sense a feeling of helplessness among the Hindus," he says, and charges that the current "weakness of Hindu society and morals" is the Government's fault. In the cause of Hindu awakening and unity, he brought a procession of more than 1 lakh Hindus to the Kumbh mela, led by 72 Hindu organisations from all over India, and united them on a three-point pledge: Stop the slaughter of Hindus in Punjab, ban cow slaughter, and pass uniform laws for all religions.

THE JAGADGURU'S views are a distillation of the essence of the reasons behind the Hindu restiveness and call to revivalism. The irony that 600 million Hindus, comprising 80 per cent of the population, should feel threatened by a handful of disparate minorities has somehow been buried under the rising tide of Hindu revivalism and truculence embodied in the Shankaracharya's remarks. And the deadly seriousness of the crusade leaves no passage for pondering over paradoxes. The symbolic Ram Ratha represents, in apotheosis, the crisis that many Hindus see as having overcome their community. Intones Ashok Singhal, 58, mahamantri of the VHP, the 22-year-old organisation which is in the forefront of the resurgence: "It is as if God himself is going to the people and beseeching them to unshackle him. What is happening among the Hindus today is like an incarnation. It is like God himself in action."

The current Hindu mood started with a slow burn in 1981, after the mass religious conversions at Meenakshipuram. And it was soon after this that the VHP came into prominence. But the slogans of Hinduism in danger, periodically mouthed by the RSS and VHP, gained momentum with the disturbances in Punjab and Kashmir where, it was perceived, Hindus were at the receiving end because of the connivance of an appeasement-minded government. There was more grist for the mill with the Shah Bano and the Muslim Women's Bill controversy, and the call to action issued by Syed Shahabuddin, Janata MP over the unlocking of the Ramjanmabhoomi temple.

The Muslims saw black. The Hindus saw red. And what was an amorphous feeling of Hindu malaise exploded last winter into a palpable, energetic movement, a movement that was revanchist and which began to smell the political power that comes with

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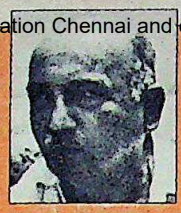
"Will it solve any problem if everybody tries to live as a Hindu, or a Christian or as a Muslim and not as an Indian? It will not."
VAYALAR RAVI, Kerala Home Minister



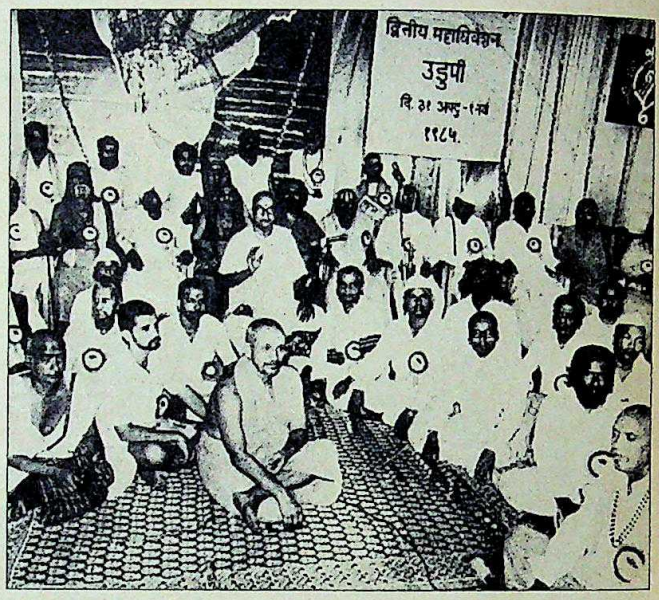
"Hindus are no longer shy of calling themselves Hindus."
YADAVRAO JOSHI,
RSS Joint General Secretary.

unity. *Ekatma yagyas* and celebrators of the Ramjanmabhoomi "liberation" clashed with protesters fired by the influence of the Babri Masjid Action Committee. Communal violence flared. And the killings still continue.

Whether based on reality or imaginary fears, the feeling of being de-Hinduised in a predominantly Hindu country is nonetheless sincere and deeply ingrained in large numbers of Hindus, though one cannot say what percentage of the majority community has been caught up in the new mood. One of the revivalist movement's unique and most significant recent manifestations is the creation of the Dharma Sansad, which now guides the actions of the VHP. The sansad consists of representatives of just about every Hindu sect and order of sanyasis and sadhus—some 900 of them—who took a vow at a Mahatma sammelan last year, before a gathering of more than 5 lakh people at Udipi in Karnataka, to eschew sectarian differences, give up turf battles and intra-religious litigation, and to fight for the purification of Hinduism and the propagation of Hindu nationalism. "This is the first time in 600 years that such an event has occurred," says VHP's Singhal. "In fact, during the meeting at Ayodhya, mahatmas and sadhus have pledged to leave their ashrams and go among the people to spread these beliefs. This is nothing short of a Hindu renaissance."

The sheer size of the effort—organised largely by the RSS and VHP—and its geographical spread are staggering. In Kerala, now gripped by Hindu insecurity because of the perception that Muslims and Christians are rising in numbers, more than 1 lakh RSS activists turned out in uniform recently to listen to Balasaheb Deoras. Nearly all the 5,000 villages in Kerala now have RSS *shakhas*. And communities like the Nairs, Ezhavas and Namboodiris have begun to unite on single platforms to fight for what they call "the Hindu cause". RSS *shakhas* have in fact doubled in number during the last three years, and are now attended by more than a million people daily. This means that every fifteenth Hindu now living in Kerala, regardless of party affiliation, attends an RSS drill. Aggressive Hinduism is also evident in the attendance at Hindu temples and other religious gatherings. Some 16,000 coconuts are broken daily at the famous Ganesha temple in the heart of Trivandrum, compared to 9,000 three years ago. The Sabarimala Hindu shrine, located in the heart of the Muslim-dominated Idukki district, attracted 5 million devotees last year, double the number two years back. Money collected at Sabarimala has shot up fivefold. And every day, some five million worshippers visit Kerala's 6,000 Hindu temples, donating an estimated Rs 20 lakh in hard cash.

A *ratham* carrying an idol of Agatsya rishi is slowly moving towards a temple in the ancient Agatsya Hill in Kerala. Earlier attempts to install the murti had been foiled by the Government in response to minority sentiments. "But this time we are determined to restore the temple to its Hindu glory," says Kerala VHP President K.V. Eradi. The VHP has also banded 36 Hindu organisations in Kerala into a temple protection committee with branches in every taluka and district. Said S. Parameshwaran, a member of the committee: "We cannot allow the temples to be run by non-believers who are in the Government. For many



Mahants take vow of unity at Dharma Sansad in Udipi

years there was no nexus between the temples and the Hindu community. Now we are organising *Smarka Ardhanas* in these temples to discuss our problems. There is a new awakening."

And there has now arisen in Kerala the Young Men's Hindu Association (YMHA) attached to the Ramadasa Mission. Its members are mostly college-going students. Says R. Ravi, 28, an economics student who heads the YMHA: "We have failed to channelise the dynamism of Hindu society, which has been lying dormant. Once we are able to awaken this sleeping giant all our ills will evaporate."

IN KARNATAKA, the site of the Dharma Sansad, 700 VHP committees run schools, temples, hostels and medical centres. In order to spread Hinduism among children, VHP now organises an annual Bharatiya Sanskrit Parichaya Pariksha in which students are tested for their knowledge of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, and awarded gold and silver medals for excellence. This year 39,000 students from 750 schools participated, as against 17,000 last year. Among the cardinal tenets of the new Hindu resurgence is the reinduction of low caste Hindus into the religious fold. Swamy Sathyananda Saraswaty of the Ramadasa Mission Universal Society now preaches the slogan *Jathikalkatheetharai partikalkatheerai Haidavare Unaruka Unaruka* (Beyond caste, beyond parties, O Hindus, awake, arise, and unite). VHP workers have also begun to intercede in violent quarrels between upper caste Lingayats and Harijans in an attempt to bring them together. RSS Joint General Secretary Yadavrao Joshi boasts: "Hindus are no longer shy of calling themselves Hindus."

The same pattern prevails in Tamil Nadu. *Rathams* run by the VHP have begun to symbolise Hindu unity, drawing in

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"The Hindus have been getting a very raw deal from both the Government and the media."
LEELA THAMPY, social worker in Kerala

"We have enough money to buy arms and defend ourselves. We Hindus have been at the receiving end for too long."
RAMAKANT JALOTA, Shiv Sena organiser

RANJAN BASU

Karan Singh at Hindu sammelan in Patna

Brahmins and the Scheduled Castes, and even the supposedly godless cadres of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Three *rathams* named Shakti, Gyanam and Deep, starting from villages in Tamil Nadu, criss-cross the south each day carrying Hindu deities and swamis from various muths through villages and Harijan bastis, offering the lower castes the opportunity to perform *Abhishekas* which they are not allowed to do in the temples.

The sleepy village of Kalancheri in Papanasam taluk on the Thanjavur-Kumbakonam route, with a population of 1,000, now boasts of six Hindu temples. Two months ago, more than 20,000 devotees turned out at the inauguration of the Kumbabhishekam temple built by the VHP. Now the VHP has begun to construct a temple at Vennputhur, a Harijan village near Thanjavur where there was no place of worship. Christian missionaries had been trying to acquire land for a church. But the VHP pre-empted that effort by moving swiftly to construct a Bhagvati Amman temple there. "We wanted our own place of worship and there is now no inducement for us to change our religion," says Ponnusamy, a villager.

Gujarat has not been immune to the spread of the Hindu Rashtra sentiment which, voiced in the wilderness by the RSS a decade ago, now finds almost eager acceptance in large parts of the state. The sentiment has now acquired a new legitimacy, a new belligerency. Within three short years, RSS *shakhas* in the state have mushroomed to more than 1,000 from a previous low of 300. State RSS workers have just completed a house-to-house visiting programme, meeting 5.5 million people in 9,000 villages. Exults Narendra Modi, RSS chief of Ahmedabad: "We cannot cope with the work people want us to do now. There is so much of public involvement and demands made on us."

During the Ekatma Yatra, the VHP organised 53 "Upayatras" carrying Ganga water which would meet the main procession. Hindu consciousness in the state has spurred devotees to celebrate any Hindu festival with eclat and aplomb. During Ram Navmi recently, small towns all over Gujarat were brightly lit and long processions passed through every town. And last year, a record nine million Hindus from various parts of the state visited Ahmedabad to participate in the Swaminarayana mela, during the course of which thousands of youngsters were inducted into the Swaminarayana cult as swamis.

The *Ratha Yatra*, an annual feature in Ahmedabad, caused violence and bloodshed this time after it was first prevented and then allowed to pass through Muslim-dominated areas, with Hindus dancing jubilantly to the tune of religious fervour. Frayed tempers on both sides produced the inevitable clashes, and within minutes seven people lay dead: victims of gunfire. The incident has re-created a surge of communalism in which Hindus, who live in Muslim-dominated areas are selling their houses and moving out. Muslims are doing the same.

Hindu rancour has played a large part in increasing the influence of the VHP. The organisation, to bolster Hindu unity, has started a scheme of Harijan uplift. When Harijan houses were looted and burned in Ambedkarnagar last year, sadhus and sanyasins went around distributing money and high caste Hindus joined the activity. When Dalit leaders in Gujarat threatened last year that they would convert to Islam if the anti-reservation riots continued, RSS and VHP members held long parleys with them. And the RSS has used this to political advantage. Recent elections to the Prantij Cooperative Bank and the Nagar Panchayat in Himmatnagar witnessed Hindus announcing that they did not want Muslim votes.

In VHP and RSS parlance the movement to reconvert Harijans and tribals is called "*Prawartan*", literally meaning "return to

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"I have to stand up for what I believe is right. India is my motherland and I cannot see it destroyed."
SYED SHAHABUDIN, M.P.

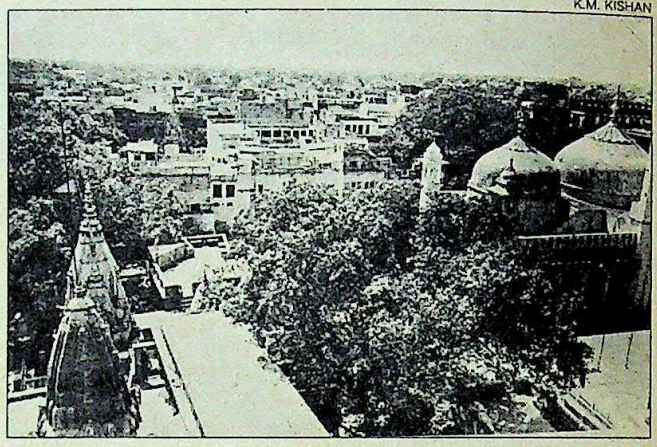
"I helped bring the whole movement together and it will be my dying wish that we Hindus succeed."
D. KHANNA, Dharmik Raksha Samiti

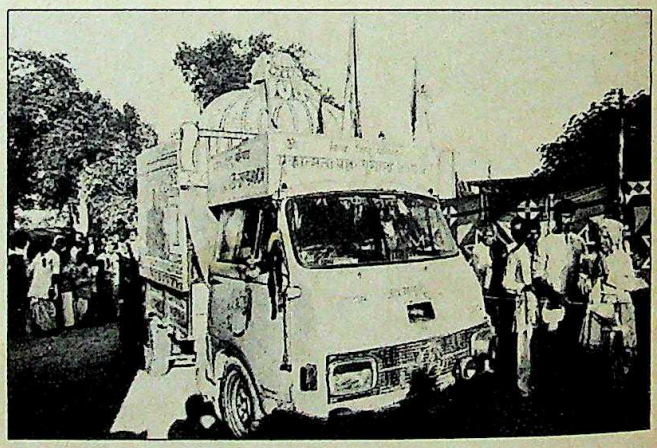
original position". In a 400-km stretch from Simdega to Palamau in Bihar, the Sri Banbasi Vikas Samiti works assiduously to prevent people from being converted to Christianity. So far, the Samiti, with the help of the VHP, has constructed 42 schools, five hospitals and four hostels in the region. And on April 18, Ram Navmi Day, the Samiti inaugurated a large Hanuman temple at Anjan in Guhla district, the "birthplace" of Hanuman. 200 km away, near Simdega, Brahmachari Jayram Parpanna Maharaj has devised a novel method to stop Hindu conversions. For the past three years he has been organising a Malviya Jayanti on Christmas Day to dissuade tribals from going to church. The Banbasi Kalyan Kendra—an offshoot of the RSS—was specially set up to wean tribals back to Hinduism. Headquartered at Lohardagga, near Ranchi, the kendra has established hospitals and temples for tribals and mounted a "mass awareness" campaign during the Pope's visit to prevent conversions. VHP activists claim that nearly 75,000 Hindus have returned to the Hindu fold during the last few years.

WHILE Hindu organisations engage in public construction and social welfare programmes in several states, they encourage the formation of Hindu self-defence groups in others. The *trishul*—Shiva's trident—has emerged as the militant symbol for these loosely-formed militias of unemployed youth and small shopkeepers in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. In Punjab, the Shiv Sena is a motley crowd, divided into two distinct groups, one led by goldsmith-turned-organiser Ramakant Jalota and dominating Jalandhar, Kapurthala and Amritsar, and the other led by Jagdish Tangri, a Ludhiana businessman operating in Patiala and Hoshiarpur. Jalota claims that 80,000 youths have been "baptised". These groups now control major Hindu temples, like the Durgiana mandir in Amritsar, Devi Talab in Jalandhar and the Shiv temple in Ludhiana. "We have enough money to buy arms and defend ourselves," says Jalota, who can match even Bhindranwale's rhetoric. "We Hindus have been at the receiving end for too long, we cannot tolerate it any more."

In Uttar Pradesh, towns like Meerut, Khatauli, Sambhal and Moradabad, the Muslim heartland of northern India, units of the Akhil Bharatiya Shiv Shakti Dal are being formed. The initiation ceremonies for Hindu recruits are similar to the ones in Punjab, except that they take place after puja and *havan* ceremonies in small ashrams. Activists wear saffron caps and sashes, and in addition to wearing plastic-covered *trishuls* along their waists, they also sport embroidered *trishuls* on their clothes. They claim anywhere from 30,000 to 50,000 adherents. During meetings their leaders chant *Jo bole so randhir*, and the followers answer in refrain, *Jai Bharat, jai Hinduvir*. One of their local leaders in Meerut, Ravi Kumar, son of a local halwai, expressed an intense nationalism at a recent meeting. "*Shiv Shakti ka jap karenge, apni raksha aap karenge*," he intoned. (This is a time of our testing, we must be ready to sacrifice ourslves for Akhand Bharat). We are not political but we will create a movement that will help elect only Hindu-minded MLA's and MP's." Their Delhi-based leader, businessman Virendra Sharma, said at a baptism ceremony that

K.M. KISHAN





Kashi temple (above) and Ekatma yagya in Uttar Pradesh

Mrs Gandhi had "become a symbol for Hindu martyrdom. The country that was bequeathed to us by our ancestors is being splintered. We must foster a spirit of nationalism and emulate Germany and Japan in the way they built themselves up."

According to senior government officials, numerous towns in western Uttar Pradesh have become flashpoints for more communal violence. Meerut is peaceful now after the killings in February, resulting from clashes over the Ramjanmabhoomi issue. But an official warned that "people are in a fighting mood". Moradabad, after a respite following the 1980 riots, is tense once again. "There's a lull here," said one official in the 6-lakh strong brass capital of north India that has a 45 per cent Muslim population. "Any local issue ignites a spark." Nearby Sambhal, an ancient town of 80,000, the majority of them Muslim, is tense under an undeclared curfew following a handful of stabbings and killings. RSS activist O.P. Garg claims that Hindus are fighting on two fronts—against the Government as well as the local majority community "which is pampered by the local administration". Barabanki is still recovering from a spate of communal violence in which 14

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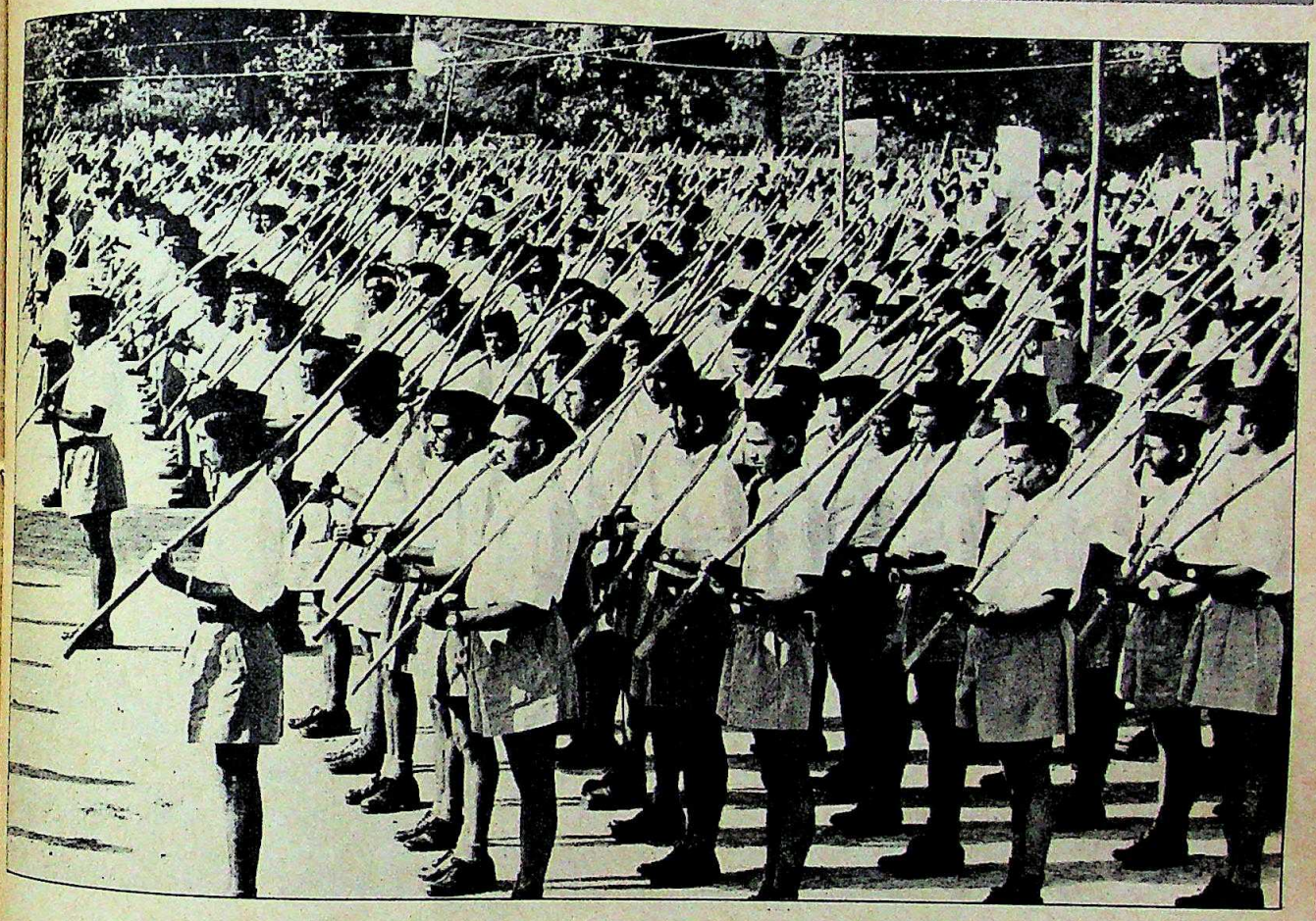
"It is the duty of the majority community to ensure that minorities feel safe and part of the nation's mainstream."
TARIQ ANWAR, Congress Sewa Dal

"We are not political but we will create a movement that will help elect only Hindu-minded MLA's and MP's."
RAVI KUMAR, Shiv Shakti Dal, Meerut



An RSS shakha in Delhi: disturbing militancy

people were killed and 61 injured.

And more holy wars loom ahead. During the next phase of its battleplan, starting this summer, the VHP will move towards Kashi (Varanasi) and Mathura to re-annex the Vishwanath temple and the Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi which, they claim, were captured and converted into mosques and idgahs by Mughal emperors. Though VHP and RSS leaders openly assert that their targets are just these two temples, they are also working on a list of 25 other Muslim shrines which they say were ancient Hindu temples. This long-range plan is already creating panic. Lok Dal Varanasi Vice-President Sharan Yadav describes the VHP plan to launch a drive toward the Kashi Vishwanath temple as "dangerous and disastrous".

That the VHP—the intellectual arm of the RSS—has become so strong is hardly surprising. It has benefited not only from the challenge of Shahabuddin, who claims that "I have to stand up for what I believe to be right because India is my motherland and I cannot see it being destroyed by this mania for absorption", but also from the politics of communalism and casteism to which every political party has pandered. "We are reaping now the poisonous brew concocted through those follies," says elder statesman P.N. Haksar.

Organised, ideologically fired, and armed with a million dedicated workers in 3,500 branches all over India, the VHP now reaps the benefits of communal politics played in recent years by none other than the Congress(I). "You will soon see within this country," warns Singhal "a vertical divide within each political party—those who accept Hindu nationalism and those who don't." VHP, he said, has already completed a mass contact programme in the country which included lobbying 250 legislators at the state and Central levels. "We find a lot of support for our cause. In fact we have managed to raise about Rs 2.5 crore for our projects, but the Government has imposed a lien on our funds. The Government doesn't question money raised by other religions from foreign sources, but it tries to persecute us."

That the communal chicken has come home to roost is not lost on politicians. Taking note of this development, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh said: "Today it is the turn of the Hindus to fall into the trap of communalists and raise dangerous questions, tomorrow it will be the turn of the Muslims. We should all think like Indians and not like Muslims,

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"The country of our ancestors is being splintered. We must foster nationalism of the German or Japanese variety."
VIRENDRA SHARMA, Bhartiya Shiv Shakti Dal

"We have failed to channelise the dynamism of Hindu society. Once we are able to awake this sleeping giant all our ills will evaporate."
R. RAVI, Young Men's Hindu Association

Hindus and Christians." But the communal divide—now almost out of the control of the mainstream political parties—began with the patronage of Singh's own party. It took an emotional turn in 1983, during the Kashmir polls, when hardcore RSS elements in Jammu forgot their Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidates and joined hands with the Congress(I) in a bid to end Farooq Abdullah's regime. Mrs Gandhi had herself openly exhorted Hindus in the Jammu region to vote for her party.

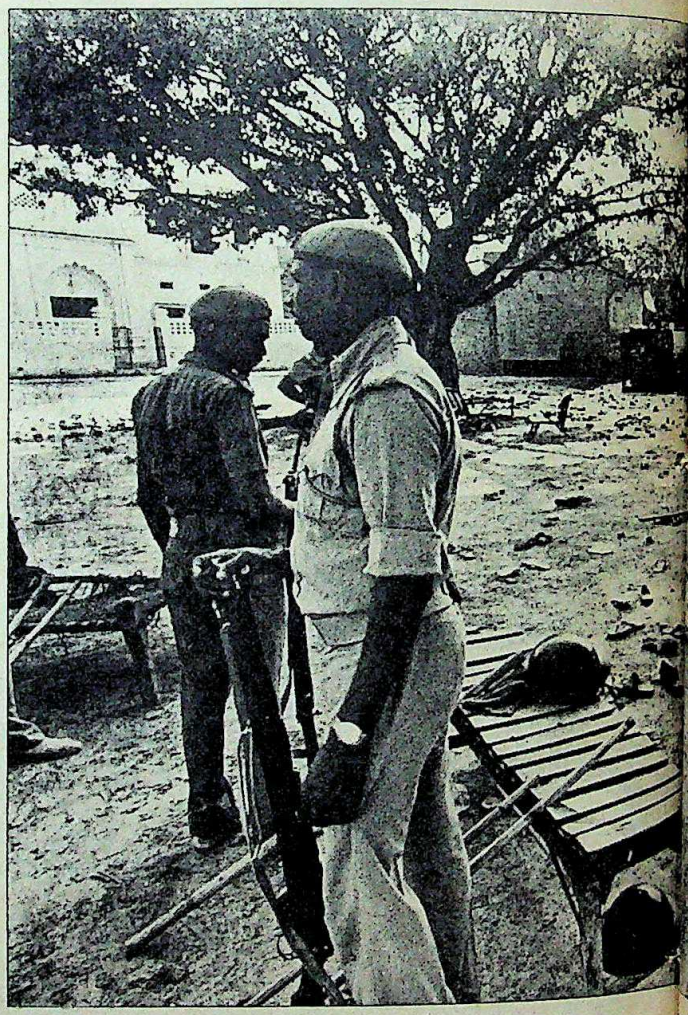
After 1980, Mrs Gandhi began to refrain from attacking the RSS or BJP on communal issues. And in 1984, the Congress(I) joined hands with the Shiv Sena's Bal Thackeray in Maharashtra to fight the panchayat poll. Following the Bhiwandi riots, the-then chief minister Vasantrao Patil in fact struck a deal with the Shiv Sena to get a Congress(I) candidate elected to the post of deputy chairman of the council. VHP leaders claim that Mrs Gandhi had several contacts with them and urged them to launch programmes for Hindu unity.

THE PARISHAD, in existence since 1964, came into the limelight in 1982, soon after the Meenakshipuram conversions, when it launched a drive that culminated in the reconversion of thousands of Muslims back to Hinduism in Ajmer. That same year, VHP trustee Moropant Pingle conceived of the Ekatma Yagya. The Congress(I) quietly backed the idea with an eye to political gain. And Mrs Gandhi even rushed to Hardwar to participate in the "*Asthapana*" function at the Bharat Mata mandir on May 15, 1983. It was during this period that Daudayal Khanna, a former Congress minister of Uttar Pradesh, "guided by some divine powers", wrote a letter to Mrs Gandhi arguing that Hindu holy places in Ayodhya, Mathura, and Varanasi should be "liberated" and given back to the Hindus. Following several *rath yatras* and mass pledges taken by lakhs of people all over India, the Dharmik Asthan Raksha Samiti was created with Khanna as convenor. "I persuaded the Dharma Sansad to accept this pledge and dedicate it to the VHP cause," says Khanna. "I helped bring the whole movement together and it will be my dying wish that we Hindus succeed."

Ultimately, according to RSS General Secretary Rajendra Singh, a former lecturer in nuclear physics at Allahabad University, "a Hindu nation which accepts all diverse religions as sects, but which does not give any special treatment to any sect, is our goal. We want a consolidated Hindu society, based on our national heroes, and it should be homogeneous." Singhal added that what is now occurring in India as part of the Hindu *jagaran* is the RSS and VHP's four-point plan of action. This consists of bringing all the different Hindu sects under one manch to fight for Hindu causes, uplift Harijans and tribals, ban proselytisation, promote Sanskrit as a uniform language, and back political candidates who support Hindu interests.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, when asked last fortnight about the new revivalism and the activities of organisations like the VHP, conceded that there might be a problem but argued that "by and large the Hindus will remain under control....They will not become fanatics." (*see interview on page 68*).

But the movement is not to be dismissed lightly, and if it succeeds, says Haksar, "it cannot create a Hindu India of anybody's dreams. If we organise ourselves as Hindus the inevitable reaction will be to organise others in serried ranks of Muslims, Sikhs, tribals, Christians", and, as he points out, a country besieged by revivalist fanaticism cannot produce a united India. If the country, he argues, is divided along religion, will not only have to contend with 100 million Muslims in India but also in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Arab world. "The East India Company," he says, "peeled our country like an onion. And now my fellow countrymen after 100 years of struggle have learned no lesson from this."



Barabanki after the riots: communal flashpoint

But easily persuaded into ascribing all their woes to creeping Christianity or insidious Islam, increasing numbers of Hindus are in no mood to listen to blandishments of old-time secular sanity. They are in no mood to listen to arguments that given the 1941 census base—and not the 1951 census in which Muslims

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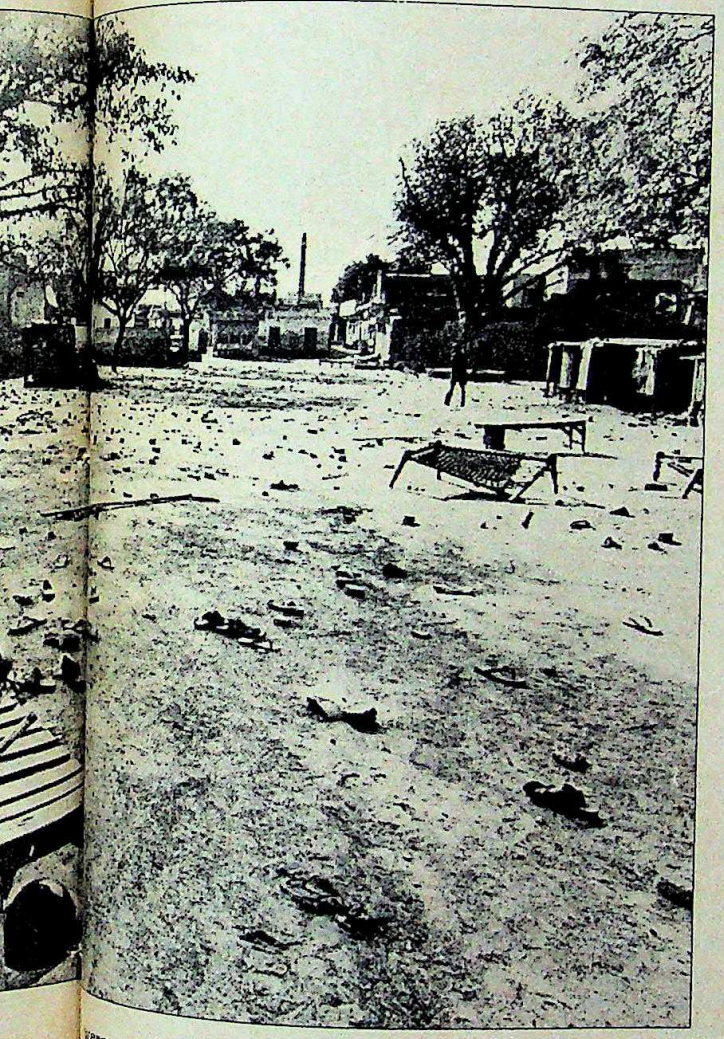
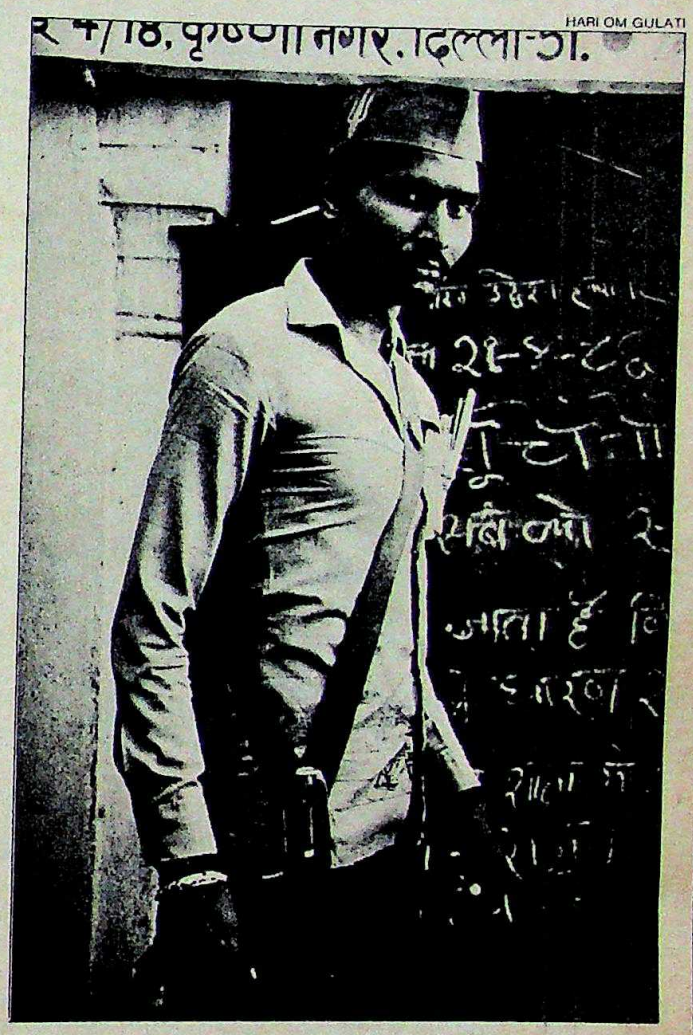
"Speak out fearlessly Hindu Braves, Glory to India, Glory to Hindus."

Battlecry of the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Shiv Shakti Dal



HARI OM GULATI



A member of the Shiv Shakti Dal: belligerent mood

were undercounted—the rate of growth in the Hindu and Muslim population has been about the same; that increasing the Muslim population on the basis of polygamy is an impractical exercise and is squarely restricted by the availability of women for each man; that Health Ministry statistics show that within given spheres of socio-economic strata the acceptance of birth control is roughly the same for both communities; that the rate of religious conversions now favours Hindus; that the VHP and Arya Samaj together run more minority-style institutions than other communities; that more than 60 per cent of Muslims live below the poverty line, are miserably under-represented in government jobs in relation to their population, and lag seriously behind in education.

But shibboleths die hard in a time of religious and emotional catharsis. Whether or not communalists and revivalists of all persuasions are propagating false dreams of Indian unity while actually promoting the death of secularism, one thing is certain: the country stands once again before the bar of history. On trial is nothing less than the appropriateness of the vision of India's founding fathers, who had dared to dream of uniting a country of diverse peoples and faiths along the precepts of Nehruvian secularism, not only because they believed it was the right and just path but also because it appeared to provide the only historical and practical answer to the problem of weaving a diverse people into the fabric of a nation state.

Now, almost 40 years later, India is once again to be judged on its ability to cope with the forces of irrationality and to sustain its vision of *manavadharma* and unity. And among all the slogans of hate and unity now being sounded across the country, the one that is conspicuous by its absence is the ancient and appropriate Vedic credo: *Atmavata Sarvabhuteshu*—He who looks upon all creation and living things as he looks upon himself, he truly is a great person.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR with PRABHU CHAWLA, FARZAND AHMED and bureau reports

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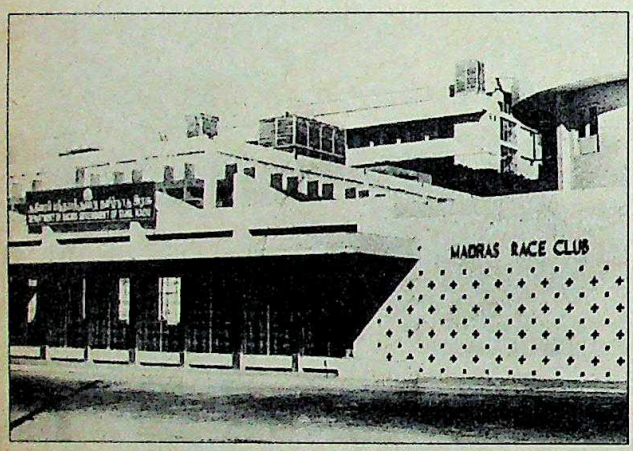
Betting Ban

LAST month the Tamil Nadu Government, in a surprising move, took over the reins of the horse-racing business in the state from the Madras Race Club with the avowed objective of running races in a fair and proper manner. But whether the Government's move itself was fair or proper, came into controversial question with the club management challenging the coup in court. But last fortnight, the state took the bull squarely by the horns by announcing in the Assembly that horse-racing was banned in the state with immediate effect.

What prompted the Government to take such a drastic step was not immediately clear. The state has been threatening to clean the Augean stables of the racing world, alleging mismanagement and illegalities. But even after taking over management, racing in Ootacamund continued under the government-appointed custodian and the sudden announcement came as a rude shock. What is at crucial stake is the fate of the 600 permanent employees amd over 1,000 seasonal



Closed Madras Race Club: rude shock

workers hired by the club, not to mention the fate of the 600 thoroughbreds stabled at Madras. To rub additional salt into the wound, state Finance Minister V.R. Nedunchezhiyan announced that the Government was considering putting up a new legislature complex on the 450-acre racecourse.

Party Bash

THE FACTIONAL infighting in the West Bengal unit of the Congress(I) has taken a deadly turn. Last fortnight, Calcutta's normally-deserted Airport Hotel became a bloody arena for a Chicago-type gangwar as two groups of Congress(I) musclemen, alleged to be supporters of two rival Congress dons, exchanged gunfire and hurled bombs at each other in the hotel lobby. The clash was the alleged result of an altercation between the two rival leaders

What made matters worse was that at the time of the shoot-out, AICC(I) Vice-President Arjun Singh was closeted in one of the hotel rooms discussing party affairs with state PCC(I) chief Priya Ranjan Das Munshi. Singh had to be 'rescued' by the police who escorted him out through the debris of the hotel lobby. Congress leaders have dropped a veil of silence over the sordid issue but party insiders disclosed that the state units leaders have abandoned their war for the time being. But bringing their goons to heel is a different matter and Calcutta could be the venue for an extended screening of Gang Wars.

Disappearing Daughter

Indra: mystery

OVER three months ago, Rajasthan's minister of state for animal husbandry, Ram Singh Vishnoi, was sacked from the ministry after his daughter, Indra Vishnoi, 20, had declared in a press interview that her father had tortured her for refusing to accept as her husband a boy she had been married off to when she was seven years old. Last fortnight, the Vishnoi saga resurfaced when Bhagiram Vishnoi, 27, a state electricity board employee at Ajmer, was stabbed by half-a-dozen attackers and greviously wounded. He is known to be emotionally involved with Indra and claims his attackers wanted to know where she was hiding out and that he recognised them, three of whom are relatives of R.S. Vishnoi.

The mystery deepened when, two days later, Indra's husband Mohanlal complained to the Jodhpur police that on April 25, four days before the attack on Bhagiram, some men persuaded Indra to leave with him, allegedly to meet Bhagiram. He named seven suspects against whom the police have registered a case of kidnapping, including Sanjay Sandaich, a reporter involved in the original story that led to R.S. Vishnoi's ouster. Even more intriguing is the question of Indra's whereabouts and the fact that Mohanlal only filed a complaint six days after she disappeared.

In-Law's Intent

IN-LAWS have always played a major—if dubious—role in India's political history. Now it is the turn of Orissa's beleagured Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik, whose ambitious son-in-law Soumya Ranjan Patnaik is making controversial waves. A university lecturer-turned-newspaper-owner, Ranjan, in his excessive zeal to help his father-in-law, has succeeded in doing quite the opposite. His latest crusade is an attack on Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi for "ridiculing the state's poverty". His outburst against Rajiv and party MP's at Rourkela recently elicited an angry reaction from loyalists.

Patnaik: tight spot

But Ranjan seems undeterred. He then circulated a questionnaire to the state's 32 MP's asking who they thought responsible for Orissa's poverty. Patnaik now finds himself in a tight spot after the Pranab Mukherjee expulsion. He is close to the former finance minister and had frequent meetings with him. Now, with his son-in-law adding fuel to the fire, Patnaik, say sources, has been expressing fears for his political future.

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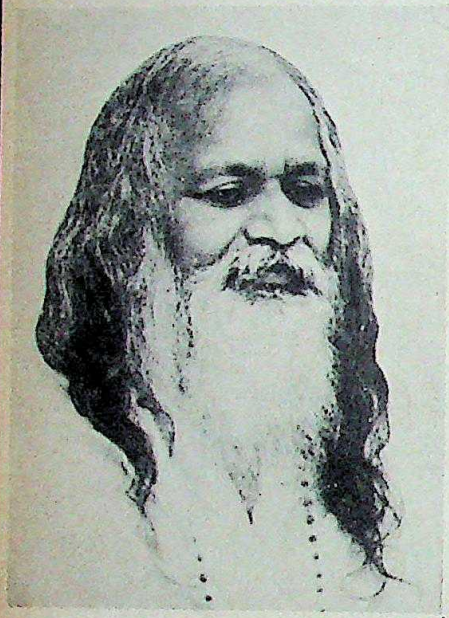

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GOING PUBLIC

ATOMIC energy will soon come under a corporate banner. The Government proposes to set up a public sector company that will run all the nuclear power stations in the country, taking them away from the Atomic Energy Commission. Two advantages will result: the nuclear power stations, which currently sell the energy that they generate at cost, will be able to charge commercial rates that are at least 50 per cent higher. Also, the atomic energy establishment hopes to see the investment of a mammoth Rs 45,000 crore in this sector before the turn of the century. But the Government is seriously short of funds, and the only way out is to approach the public with bond issues, as some public sector companies did recently. The forming of an atomic energy corporation, the Government believes, will help this process as well.

FIRE BRAND

SMOKE and fire are visible on the cigarette front. US tobacco giant Phillip Morris has hauled GTC Industries to court, charging that the Indian firm had violated trade mark laws by using the brand name Visa, which the US company had registered in India. The American giant has got an interim injunction against GTC, preventing it from using the brand name.

This has been followed by yet another American cigarette firm, R.J. Reynolds, which has filed a suit against ITC. Reynolds had registered the trade mark Now in India, but early this year ITC launched a fast-selling cigarette under the same brand name. When the case comes up for hearing in mid-July at the Delhi High Court, the Indian cigarette firm will adopt the defence that Reynolds did not use the trade mark in the country.

PUNCTURED HOPES

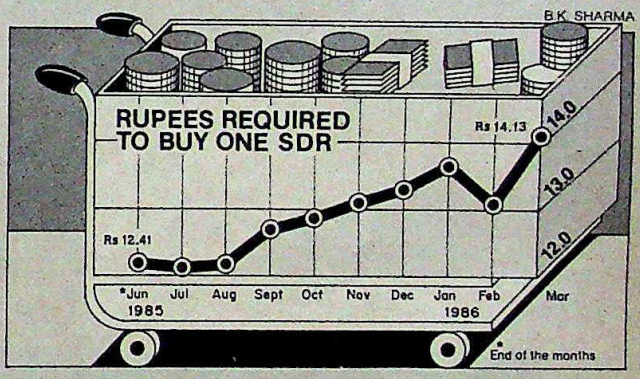
THE ESCORTS bid to get into the car market has been stymied, with the Industry Ministry deciding that the broadbanding of industrial licences did not permit tractor manufacturers to diversify into cars. The company had wanted to manufacture a small Citroen that would have been cheaper than the Maruti, and had argued its case by saying that the Citroen would function on rough roads and in rural areas unsuited for the Maruti. Earlier, the company had considered manufacturing a small Japanese car, but had been asked informally to stay off by ministry officials who wanted to give Maruti a clear field in the small car market. The same arguments may have applied now, apart from the limitations of the broadbanding policy decision. But the company has still not quite given up hope on a project that it has nursed for more than three years.

BACKING OUT

ORKAY Silk Mills has failed in its bid for the detergent unit of Ambalal Sarabhai Enterprises, which has been losing money in a competitive market. Orkay, which currently deals in polyester, has been looking for diversification opportunities and was willing to pay Rs 9 crore for the detergent unit. This, however, seems to have been unacceptably high and Orkay has backed out. A rival bid, however, has been made by detergent colossus Hindustan Lever, and this may well prove successful.

DEVALUATION DIP

THE RUPEE continues to be steadily devalued vis-a-vis a number of international currencies, and most significantly against the currency created by the International Monetary Fund, called Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). According to figures compiled by the Fund, in June-end last year, Rs 12.41 could buy one SDR; by September the SDR's value



had risen to Rs 12.70, by November to Rs 13.12, by January to Rs 13.66 and by March-end to Rs 14.13. The rupee's devaluation in nine months works out to 13.86 per cent. This is of course in addition to the devaluation that has taken place in the previous couple of years. In June 1983, Rs 10.79 could buy an SDR. The total devaluation of the rupee since then works out to 30.95 per cent.

WHARTON WAYS

IF AMERICA is increasingly interested in doing business with India, the surest proof is the Wharton School's decision to introduce a special India-oriented management programme from this month. Wharton ranks among the top business schools in the US and India will be the new area of specialisation at its Joseph H. Lauder Institute. The objective: get management students familiar with a country's business environment. India's complicated tax laws, for instance, are supposed to be scaring away American business. TELCO and TISCO have agreed to support Wharton students in India. The India-oriented course will include two sojourns in India: the first a three-week cultural orientation programme and the second a three-month summer internship with an Indian company. The hitch is that Indian companies who want to support the programme need Reserve Bank clearance, and this has so far not been forthcoming.

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TELEVISION ADVERTISING

Tapping Technology

WHERE would you like to be? Kashmir, Hawaii, or on the cover of this glossy magazine?" Shyam Ramanna, 27, sits like Prospero in front of his machines in his darkened studio, presses a few buttons, turns a few knobs and presto, there you are on the cover of the magazine. A few more light-fingered exercises on his machines and the faces break into mosaic, fly from one corner of the screen to another, change colour, change form. Reality never seemed so ephemeral, truth so malleable, illusion so much at the command of a button.

Image Video, of which Ramanna (son of Raja Ramanna, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission) is a partner with Sanjay Seksaria, is only one of the video studios mushrooming—as if there were no tomorrow—in Bombay to feed the insatiable appetite of the advertising agencies for television advertisements. At last count there were 89 studios and since 35 of them were raided this March, business must really be booming.

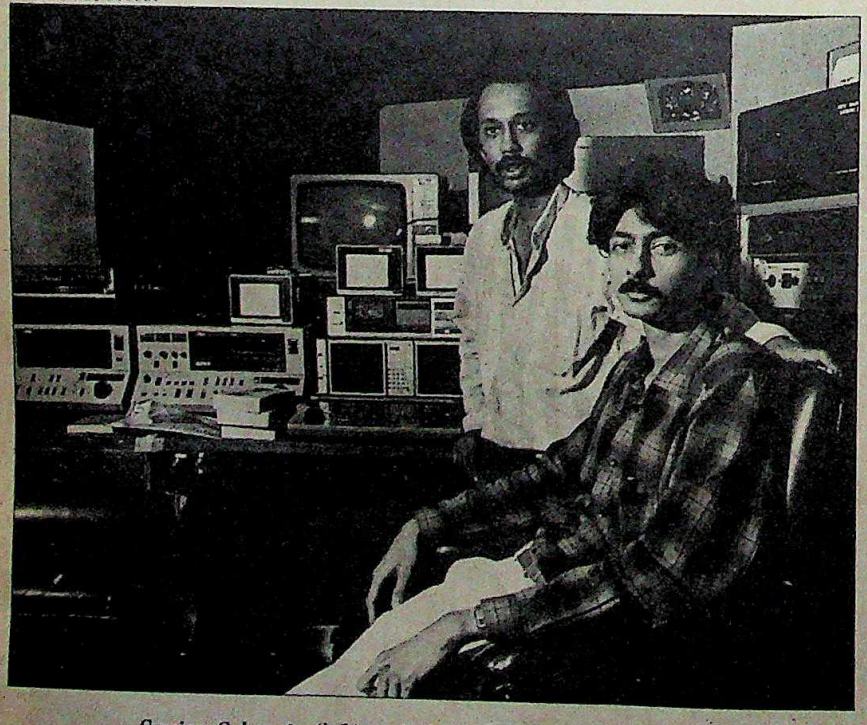
The post-Asiad age of colour television coupled with the onslaught of the sponsored programme and the installation of 183 TV transmitters have sent hundreds of people running after the video bandwagon. Instant ad films equal instant money. A journey through video ad land in Bombay can lead to a crumbling old building on the outskirts of Andheri, up rickety stairs, down smelly corridors and through a door into the electronic age. It can also lead to pokey one-room flats, transmogrified into sound-proof studios that are found all the way from the heart of the city to the distant suburbs. An hour in any of these can bring in Rs 700 to Rs 1,000; so the cash registers are busy ringing.

Video studios are mushrooming in Bombay to feed the insatiable appetite for TV advertisements. At last count, there were 89 studios and since 36 were raided this March, business must be booming.

Editing suites are even being found in bedrooms. In some cases there is no longer any room left for the bed, and sometimes there is no need for one because the young video freaks are too busy raking in the shekels to sleep: dark circles under the eyes are a common enough feature. The demand for television ads is so pressing that despite the number of television advertisement makers growing exponentially in the last two years, there is enough work and more for all of them. Some of the large advertisers are beginning to spend as much as 50 per cent of their advertisement budgets on TV ads or on sponsoring programmes. Both Richardson Hindustan and Tata Oil Mills spend 40 per cent of their budgets on television, and by '88 Hindustan Lever will spend half its total advertising outlay on the small screen. Says Pralad Kakkar, 35, of Genesis, one of the prima donnas of the ad scene: "A few years ago we were just about six or seven good production houses; and were we competitive! Today there are so many and we are still swamped with work."

The trendsetters of the late 1970's and 1980's, men like Kakkar, Kailash Surindranath, Zafar Hai, Suraj Rai and others, prefer to use 35mm film for their ads and then do post-production work in video film. They are not overly enamoured of

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Sanjay Seksaria (left) and Shyam Ramanna: a grand entry

NAMAS BHOJANI

Kailash Surindranath makes eggs

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the high-tech possibilities opened up by video, and they are still going strong. But the new breed of trend setters consists of those who think video and do video, such as Ravi Khote of Lintas and Shyam Ramanna. Waiting in the wings for the right moment and machines is yet another species—the computer men.

Kakkar, in fact, has another company called Computer Graffiti for which Ashish Khosla, fresh out of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Bombay, is working on computer graphics. "Eventually the camera itself might be eliminated and computer-generated images will go directly on to tape," says the ebullient Khosla. The combination of computer animation, computer graphics and video art is luring technology-oriented whizkids straight out of the IIT's and colleges to the glitzy world of advertising. Rahul Mehta, who graduated from Bombay IIT last year, already has a production company that produced *Live-Aid for Bhopal* this year, and he is now busy producing ads for television.

The rush into the world of video by these young men of science and management is easily explained by the pot of gold at the end of the video rainbow. And the arithmetic is quite simple: while an episode of a TV serial is generally made for about Rs 1.5 lakh, a 30 second ad can cost as much as Rs 3 lakh. The profit margin, of course, depends on the ingenuity of the ad-makers. Electronic wizardry can do away with sets and locations altogether; everything is flexible. And the advertising agencies are more than willing to spend larger sums because the intense competition can render ads effete if they are not good enough, or do not have staying power. The ad must shine and take root in the memory of the consumer, and for this it has to be better than the rest of the pack.

RAMANNA is a late entrant into this world, but it's been a grand entry. He and his school friend Sanjay Seksaria (from the family that runs Seth and Natraj Studios and Spectra Video) started Image Video less than a year ago, and they have already made or edited 197 advertisements. Ramanna puts in at least five ads a week. He has also done the titles and in many cases the editing and special effects for numerous TV programmes, the most recent being Shyam Benegal's *Kathasagar*, and the most memorable, the slick titles of *Karamchand*.

But Ramanna's magnum opus so far and his favourite piece of work is *Live-Aid for Bhopal*, for which he squeezed a mammoth 60 hours of tape into two: "I put in everything I knew." Live-Aid had dancing feet without torsos or heads, glowing bodies contorting, splitting into mirror images, bodies dancing in mid-air, bodies metamorphosing into bewildering mosaics. Many of those dancing feet actually did their numbers on the roof of the Nariman Point building in which Ramanna's studio is situated. Avanti Garelli mopeds and Bajaj scooters have also been taken all the way up the 17 floors, and after their brief sojourn at Image Video, revved full-throated across TV screens or roller-coasted along graphic streets.

Ramanna believes that although India might be years behind the West in video technology and special effects, a little ingenuity and common sense can go a long way. "With a combination of various machines and the computer we can get 80 per cent of the effects which are being done abroad using sophisticated machines." One of the major disadvantages in India is that most of the work being done is on low band tape, which is qualitatively poorer and slow motion and reverse are technologically impossible. Ramanna had to circumvent this for a soft drink TV ad in which bottle caps had to fly off and then float leisurely in slow motion. Ramanna just flung a few caps in a tank of water and filmed them gliding upwards. "Fish tank technology", as he describes his experiments.

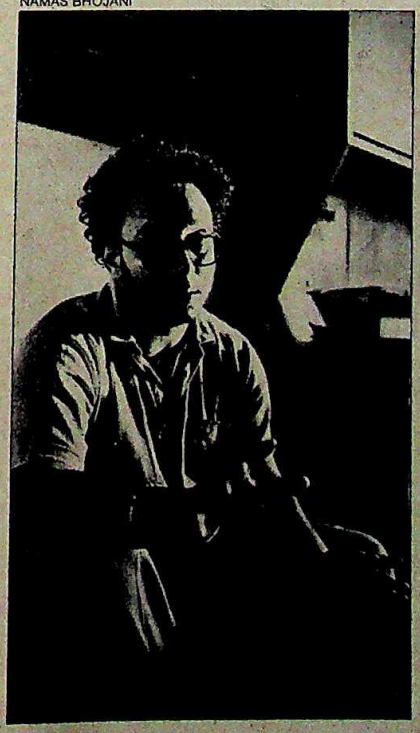
Tinkering with his machine, which he literally took apart as a tailor does a blouse, he found a way of achieving multiple feedback: objects, arms, blades, any of which can be made to leave a trail or streaks behind. "It is a bit like the Nataraj effect: look at this man dancing. His arms move and yet the previous movements also remain on the screen." Ramanna has also made his machines do computer-generated wipes, curl pages (for which producers send their films abroad), multiple frames and digital keying. "I have fixed the machines so that I can get an individual portion of a mosaic to move, such as an eyeball."

Reflecting a similar excitement is Ravi Khote, 26 ads and as many years old, who as a director of Lintas has worked quite closely with Ramanna. "People are soon going to visualise what does not exist. The role of the camera will diminish. In a way we could, with the use of computer-generated images, go straight from mind to matter. Unfortunately, there will be no more trips to the Bahamas or to Mauritius; sets and locations can be shelved." In other words, all one has to do is choose an object, select the locations and sets from existing footage and then let the camera do the rest.

The bubbling young ingenues apart, it is the large companies with their mega-budgets which will finally bring high-tech to ad-making. Mudra, Prasad Labs (who

dance for a shoe ad: trick technology

NAMAS BHOJANI



Ravi Khote: helping illusion along

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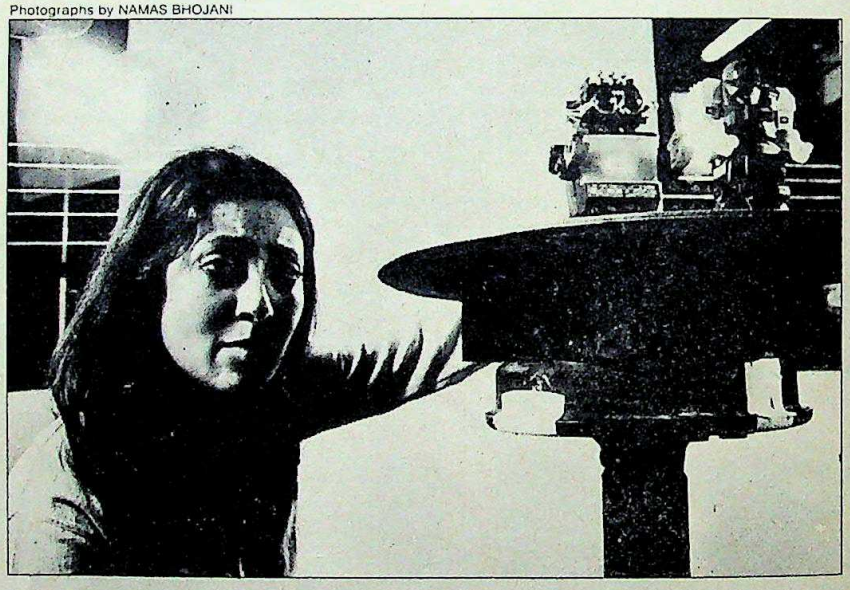
according to Ramesh Prasad want to do for video what they have done for film), BR Ads. and a few other companies are poised to cross the threshold into high-tech. Mudra, in fact, was the first to import high-tech with its Vimal ads, in which glittering models swooped into cubes that spun around or, even while moving, ended up on pages being turned: digital warping of images, done abroad. Mudra and a few other companies might stop this passage to the West for the added on special effects by importing the equipment. Plans also include a Rs 12-crore studio at Santa Cruz. Says Sashi Kumar, general manager of Mudra Video Tech: "With the one-inch C format we will have broadcast grade. We can close the gap with video technology abroad with our paint box, telecine, on-and-off line editing suites, outdoor recording vans with built-in-production consoles, as well as standards converters—in short almost state-of-the-art technology." Video graphics, digital effects, animation are all part of the package.

MEANWHILE, the young-old guard continues in celluloid, classical celluloid. Haimark's Zafar Hai, 42, continues to remain in quest of elegance and style. Mood, romance and feeling, as he says, are not for video: "Special effects are fine but should not be over-used. You cannot ignore getting to a person on emotion." Dimple Kapadia certainly emotes sensuously in Hai's latest ad, *Crowning Glory*. Special effects, in fact, leave Hai quite cold. "I put in all the elements of film: mood, the feeling level. The ultimate effect of the ad is to move people to buy...this is what is called rehearsal for purchase." The RFP factor, in other words.

For Kailash Surindranath too, with many block-buster ads behind him (including the evergreen Liril), film remains the real thing. "I would say that all the video work at present is amateurish stuff. It is not high-tech enough. It cannot be unless we have high band." But special effects are an important part of his work, including such tricks as making eggs dance. He shoots on 35mm, and does post-production on video. "I prefer the texture of film." With four or five ads a month, which is double the number he was doing two years ago, Surindranath seldom strays from his cameras. "We can do the special effects on film as well. I did them much earlier. Six years ago in the Thril ad I had a kind of star wars raging."

Pralad Kakkar in his studio: tactile experiences

Photographs by NAMAS BHOJANI



Ayesha Sayani directing a toys ad: gimmicks are afterthoughts

Like Surindranath and Hai, Pralad Kakkar too is heavily influenced by cinema. Kakkar is in fact ambidextrous, for he is at home with video as well. But he says: "Video leaves me cold; it is sterile. These pyrotechnics are super self-indulgent stuff." He believes in "tactile experiences" and says: "When I make a golden brown omlette I want to get the feel of it; it is the same with making ads. I can't touch video; it is a bunch of electronic signals. I would get a shock."

Siraj Ayesha Sayani is yet another ad-maker who is not overly fond of video gimmicks, as she calls them. "These are mostly an afterthought, slapped on at the end. Somebody says let's have this flipping; and so every other film flips." But she does use video often, especially to test her stars.

And so the video games continue at a furious pace, with both the celluloid *aficionados* and those with electronic palettes getting more work than they can handle. The effervescence might soon die down, when content catches up with form, according to Alyque Padamsee of Lintas. "I would say that the next phase of TV ads is the fusion of form and content. At the moment, videotronics is a new toy to play with, but fatigue might set in....At present of course we are still zapped by the high-tech aura of digital effects." Paper moons are now good enough, but when the magic of video wears off, will the consumer begin to ask for the real moon again?

—MADHU JAIN in Bombay

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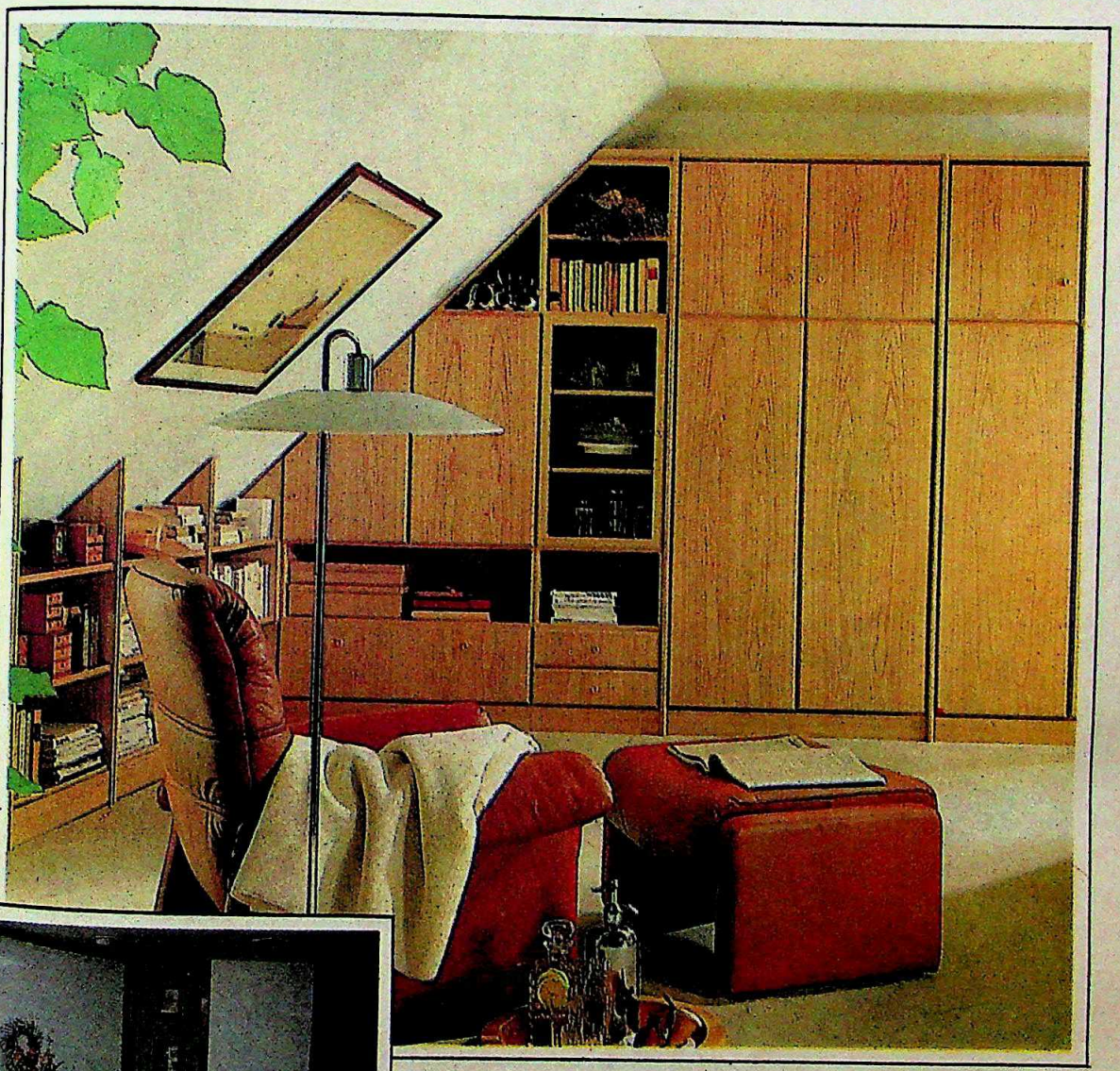
Plywood, Laminates, Flush Doors & Block Boards



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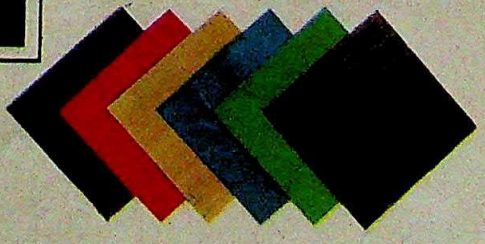

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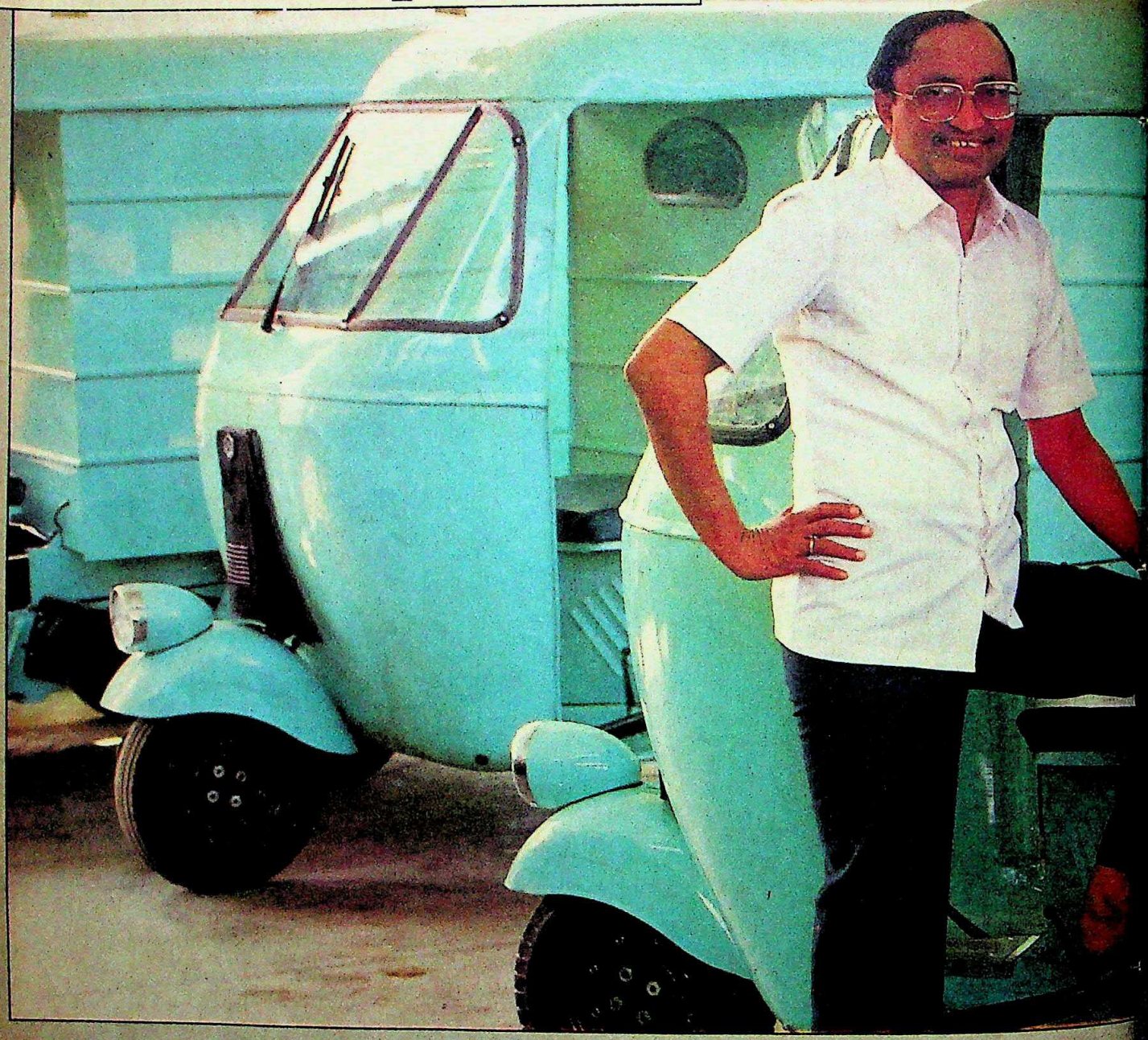

SKF and Bajaj have a great deal in common. Both are the foremost names in their respective industries – SKF in the manufacture of bearings, Bajaj in scooters, mini-motorcycles and three-wheelers. And both pride themselves on the exceptional reliability of their products.

Bajaj's annual ball-bearing requirement is over 3 million units. SKF supplies over half, so our Segment Manager Ashok Garg and his customer, R.A. Jain, always have a lot to discuss.

'Indian roads are often hot and dusty' says R.A. 'They destroy the performance of all but the most durable bearings. We come to SKF because their products are built to last.' 'But every bit as important is they're always there when you need them. Help with installation, new applications, fast back-up – SKF service is literally non-stop.'

With so much to talk about, it's hardly surprising the two men have become firm friends.

'Which is pretty fortunate', jokes Ashok Garg 'given the amount of time we spend together.'

Right down to the details

SKF in India are backed by the vast resources of the SKF Group, the world's leading manufacturer of rolling bearings.

But it's the efforts of our local people that have

Associated Bearing Company Ltd., Hoechst House, Nariman Point, Bombay 400 021

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SKF HELPS BAJAJ STAY STREETS AHEAD.

de us India's largest bearing manufacturer; making
y contribution to the economy for well over 60 years.
Producing an annual output of some 16 million ball
d taper bearings, as well as supplying steel, housings
d technical equipment – all to the standards that have
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For Ashok Garg and everyone at SKF, it's more
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It's a real question of pride. That's why you can
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How do SKF achieve such high standards of quality and service?
I'd like to find out more.
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☐ *Please arrange for me to receive your brochure.*

Name
Company
Job Title
Address
Telephone
Postcode

: 23 22 44. Telegram: PENBALL. Telex: 011-2657.

SKF

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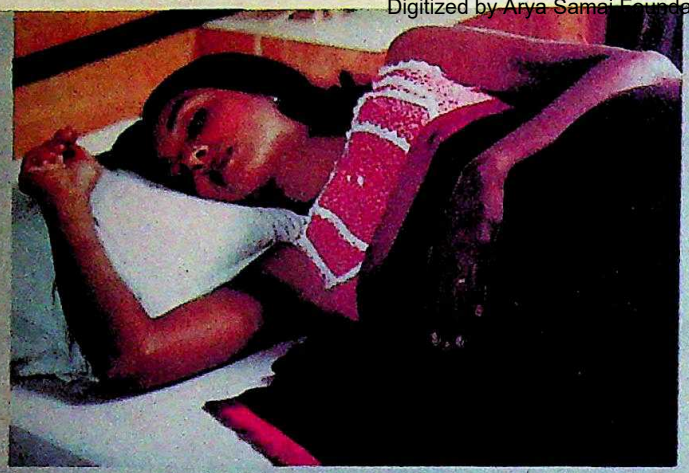

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Mattresses that are too soft can cause backaches. Those that are too hard, result in discomfort.

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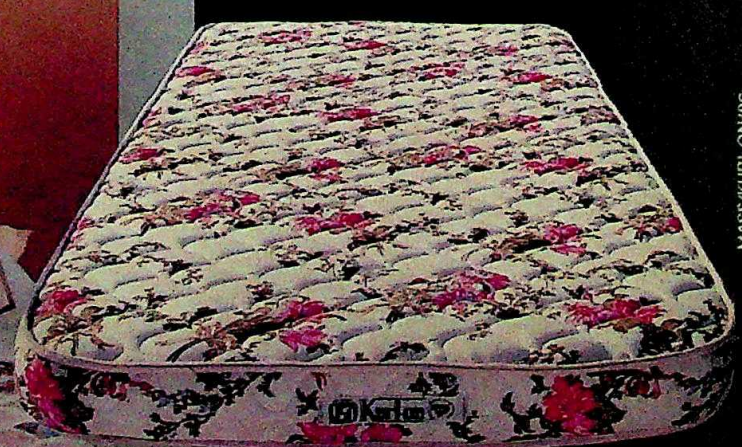

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MODVAT

Compounding Confusion

AN AUTOMOBILE components company in Himachal Pradesh may have to stock its raw materials at its factory instead of at its godown down the road, and find extra space in the factory premises. The reason: MODVAT.

An alarm clock manufacturer in the capital has stopped farming out orders for components to suppliers in West Bengal and Gujarat. The reason: MODVAT again.

Some 10 weeks after the Government kicked off its innovative scheme to reform the tax structure, reduce manufacturers' costs and curb corruption by bringing more transactions into the books, MODVAT—or the modified value added tax, meant to be a substitute for excise duties—remains a corporate bugaboo. Costs and prices have soared and confusion reigns in corporate boardrooms as companies struggle to come to terms with the new law. Perhaps the only people happy with the new tax regime are the lawyers, one of whom chortled in the capital: "We are assured of business for the next few years."

The Government launched the new regime in March to provide relief to companies whose inputs were taxed and then taxed again when the final product rolled out of factories. MODVAT would provide set-offs for the taxes on inputs, avoiding tax on tax. This also meant that less money would be required to finance inventories, thus saving on working capital costs. And so, in the final analysis, the end-product prices would drop.

But businessmen, who had been clamouring for just this kind of a package for close to a decade, and had found support for their case in the L.K. Jha committee report on indirect taxes in the mid-'70s, are now a suddenly disillusioned and befuddled lot. And the key question they wrestle with is whether the headaches are no more than teething problems, or whether there is a more basic problem at the root.

"As a concept, MODVAT is good. But its impact has been perverse because of the way it has been implemented. Everyone's gone MADVAT," complained a senior automobile company executive. Added K.N. Shenoy, president of the Association of Indian Engineering Industry (AIEI): "MODVAT has created procedural problems. The paperwork has increased but the government's attitude is encouraging. It has consulted industry and made a number of changes, which is a very positive sign." Hindustan Brown Boveri, the electrical equipment company that Shenoy heads, has deployed 40 per cent more staff to tackle the additional work-load. Chairman of the Delhi-based Trading Engineers International O.P. Raheja said his generator set and water pumping plant company would now send accountants to be educated in the intricacies of the new tax regime. DCM Executive Director D.C. Mittal pointed out that the chemicals and textiles firm has to issue separate excise documents to customers at its depots across the country for them to claim tax credits.

HARI OM GULATI

"MODVAT has created procedural problems. But the government's attitude is encouraging."

K.N. SHENOY
president, Association of Indian Engineering Industry

RANJAN BASU

"Many companies haven't yet passed on the benefits of MODVAT to customers."

ARJUN BATRA
vice-president, Gem India Limited

The chaos has been compounded by changes in the tariff structure that were introduced along with MODVAT. And while businessmen continue to be puzzled by the MODVAT rules, tax functionaries have been interpreting the regulations in contradictory fashion. Reports speak of an excise official in Lucknow passing a verdict on small units that was diametrically opposed to that handed down by a senior official at the Centre. And Subodh Bhargava, chief executive of the tractor company Eicher Goodearth, pointed out that Eicher was unsure of how much it would benefit from MODVAT because the Excise Department had not stipulated which weight—the gross weight of raw materials or of the final product—would be taken into account while assessing the MODVAT claims of ancillary suppliers. There is also some evidence that MODVAT's goals are not being fully met. Prices in many cases have not dropped, and more than one manufacturer complains that small-scale suppliers prefer evading taxes even though MODVAT would benefit them, simply because they want to avoid the additional paperwork.

The reason for the price rigidity is clear enough. To neutralise

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any overall revenue loss, the Government jacked up the excise duty rates on products like scooters, cars and generator sets. The higher tax brought on additional costs, often offsetting the gains from MODVAT. This also set off a downstream tax reaction. A Maruti Udyog spokesman said that while vehicle manufacturers used to get a drawback on the excise earlier, components have now been brought into the excise net. So the company has now to pay sales tax on the excise too, and therefore faces a higher tax burden. Maruti will have to shell out Rs 35 lakh a year more on tyres alone.

That of course is only half the story. Some observers believe that companies, quick to seize the opportunity to make fatter profits, have not passed on MODVAT gains down the line. Argues Arjun Batra, vice-president of the refrigerator and typewriter marketing firm Gem India Ltd: "Many companies haven't yet passed on the benefits of MODVAT to customers." Officialdom may well have bungled on this count. In presenting the case for MODVAT, the Government assumed that manufacturers aim at profit as a fixed percentage of sales. But when costs falls, companies tend to retain the windfall. And this is what has happened in many instances, often for perfectly valid reasons. Y.K. Kapoor, who is a partner in Northland Industries, the food processing company, parades figures suggesting that the higher excise on cans is more than offset by the MODVAT gains. Yet can-makers have so far retained these benefits, possibly because prices of imported inputs have soared in line with the surge in the yen.

Some of the turbulence in business circles is clearly because of unfamiliarity with a new tax system, but the scheme's several lacunae have also played no small role. Examples:

► When putting in MODVAT claims, manufacturers and traders have to produce bills to show that duty has been paid. This is not always feasible for small purchases from markets where regular accounting systems do not rule. Then, documentary proof ("gate passes") that the duty has been paid is issued for goods cleared at factory gates. But subsidiary documents can be handed out only a couple of times under the excise rules, creating daunting problems for middlemen. Surendra N. Parikh, president of the Bombay Metal Exchange, rightly says that "only 10 or 15 of the big non-ferrous metal wholesale traders will benefit from MODVAT since the actual user will want to buy from them".

► Inputs have to be ferried to factories where excise registers are maintained, to enable manufacturers to claim credits for the taxes paid on the inputs. This can lead to absurd situations. Purolator India, the automobile component firm, has a godown less than a kilometre from its plant at Parwanoo in Himachal Pradesh. Raw materials used to be stocked at the godown but may now have to be shipped to the factory to meet MODVAT rules, and the space will have to be found for them. The company can appeal to the excise authorities for special permission to maintain a separate register at the godown, but a Purolator executive said that the rules do not clearly state whether this is permissible.

► For companies to take advantage of MODVAT, excise has to be levied on both components and the finished product. But alarm clocks are exempt from duty, while their components are charged a 15 per cent tax if a clock manufacturer buys them. In other words, time piece companies are not refunded the tax they pay on parts bought from suppliers. The upshot: several of them have accelerated the process of manufacturing components in-house. Jaya Times Industries, for one, used to buy 10 per cent of its parts from small units in West Bengal and Gujarat, but stopped placing orders on them once MODVAT came into force. Said the company's Managing Director K.C. Jain: "We cannot buy components from outside sources because we are subject to taxes that are not refundable."

This gloomy picture has a bright side too. The Government has moved swiftly to rectify several anomalies and has lent a receptive ear to businessmen. Jyotirmay Datta, chairman of the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC), said that the Government is trying to cut the paperwork, that the chambers of commerce have been asked for suggestions on helping traders so that vouchers will be acceptable in place of conventional excise documents, that many of the tax exemptions which have broken the MODVAT cycle (the alarm clock case is a classic example) will be withdrawn. Finally, the CBEC will issue a printed booklet clarifying the rules, and businessmen can cite this to dissenting taxmen.

Clearly, some of this could have been done earlier. Even MODVAT's staunch supporters chide the Government for not having explained the procedures and held workshops before launching MODVAT. Datta however retorted that this would have constituted a breach of parliamentary privilege. He also argued that businessmen and tax officials are in a tizzy because MODVAT has squeezed illegal incomes by spurring more on-the-book transactions, and that the uproar over MODVAT is overblown. Said Datta: "Our excise collection in March is the highest in the year. If there's such a panic and a widespread (business) strike, where's the money coming from?"

He may have a point, but the initial days after MODVAT's introduction did see several companies closing shop. Hindustan Brown Boveri, for example, shut its shopfloors for a week. Nevertheless, last fortnight it looked as if businessmen were resigned to coming to terms with MODVAT. As Shenoy put it: "Industry has been pleading for an end to cascading taxes. MODVAT has to succeed." It will—if the Government finally irons out the wrinkles in its new tax programme. But at the moment, it has proved a rocky road to tax reform.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

BHAWAN SINGH

"Our excise collection in March is the highest in the year. If there's a panic and a widespread strike, where's the money coming from?"

JYOTIRMAY DUTTA
chairman, Central Board of Excise and Customs

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Tinplated food containers protect their contents from contamination and toxicity.

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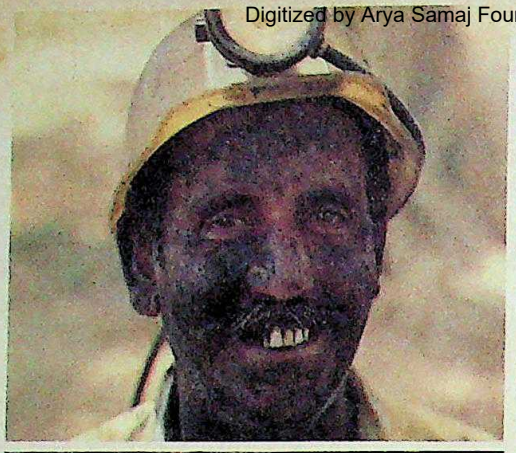

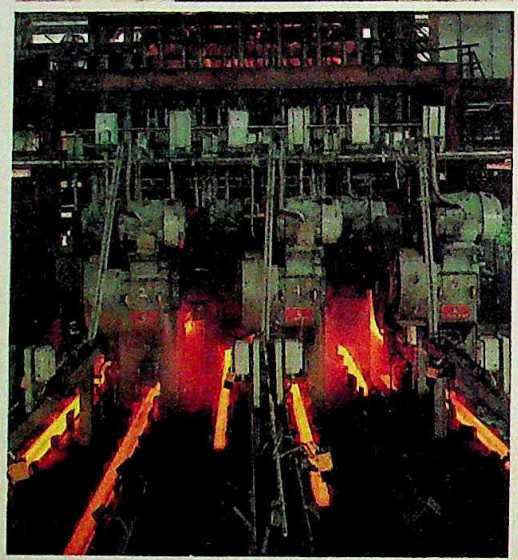

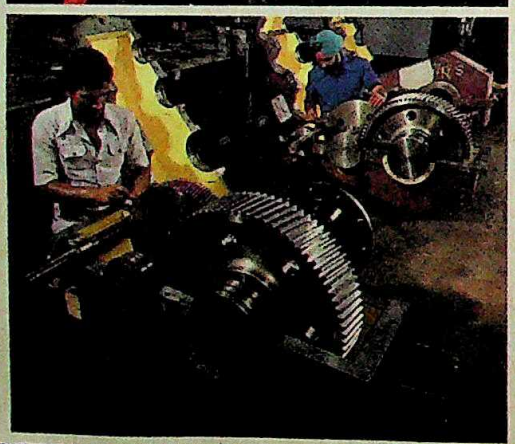

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An innovative company which lays emphasis on research and development, where a spirit of self-sufficiency led to the establishment of the Growth Shop—a unique facility with the most up-to-date technology to produce machinery comparable to any in the world.

A company backed by a talented pool of engineers and skilled technicians, with the expertise to handle any project—feasibility planning to mineral exploration, designing steel plant equipment to developing mines.

A company where closer association of employees with management has created a sense of belonging and pride—resulting in over 50 years of industrial harmony. A company that has given the lead in action and in ideas.

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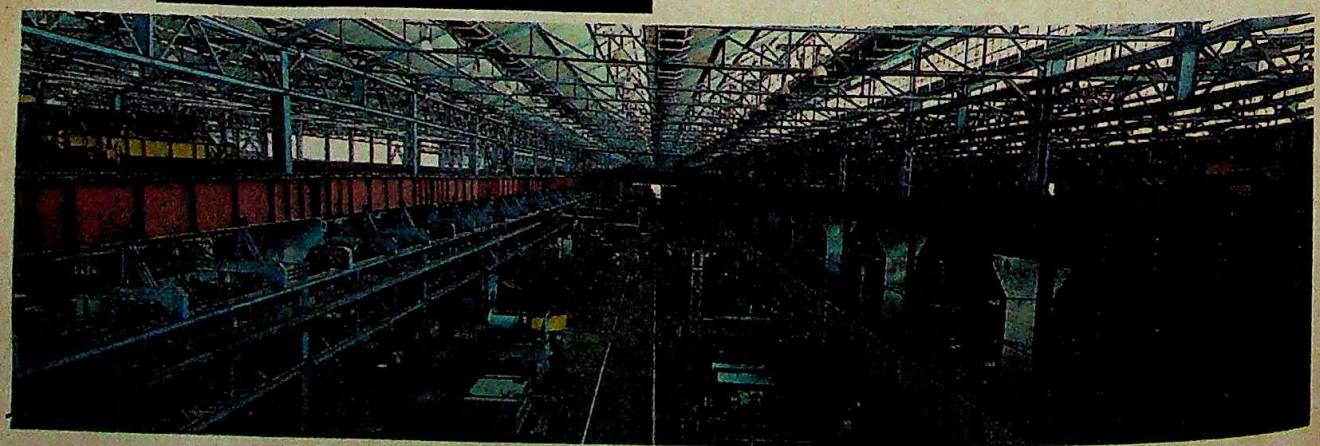

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BHEL

Thinking Big

WHY WOULD a power equipment giant stray into locomotives, leasing, programmable washing machines, solar-powered pressure cookers and domestic heaters? The answer: when the voltage is low on power equipment orders, wisdom demands that corporate eggs be put in many baskets. Last month, public sector heavyweight Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) announced that it would invest Rs 300 crore in many new baskets. The firm also declared that it would restructure its management and its business operations, offer financial packages to customers, and look for a hefty slice of the action abroad.

The plans to enter the electric dumper, washing machine and other consumer durable arenas are yet to be formally unveiled, but the profit-making company is clearly readying to become a widely diversified mega-corporation. It is shooting for annual sales of Rs 3,000 crore in three years, almost 80 per cent more than last year's figure of Rs 1,700 crore. Said recently appointed Chairman B.S. Samat: "I would like BHEL to be a company of international standing."

High on the company's agenda is an ambitious plan to hawk 20 per cent of its production in foreign markets three years from now. At home, it will dip into its Rs 285 crore cash kitty to bankroll credit packages for clients, hoping to match its foreign competitors in the power arena who offer soft loans. Also, BHEL plans to lease out equipment such as oil rigs, roll out 200 electric locomotives from its Jhansi plant over the next three years (production will begin this year), and is hungrily eyeing other opportunities in the transport field: electric dumpers for coal mines, for instance.

Before venturing into the new territory, however, BHEL has partly revamped its managerial structure. Over 20 senior managers have been told that each will be held accountable for one product, right from the manufacturing to the marketing stage. Explained M.K. Sridhar, BHEL's director (technical): "We have five major units and this is meant to decentralise them and further break up operations productwise."

The leap into new products clearly makes business sense. The company has spare production capacities at plants like the ones at Bhopal and Jhansi. Then, the power sector buys 64 per cent of BHEL's output and senior managers would like to see this dependency pared to 50 per cent by 1988-89. Says Samat: "The diversification is partly due to our lean order books and partly because we don't want to be overdependent on power."

Samat's strategy is understandable. The company's orders are only enough to keep it busy for another two years. And it needs orders worth another Rs 5,000 crore in the remaining three years of the plan, if production capacities are to hum along at the current 75 per cent rate of efficiency. "If the orders do not materialise, profits will be squeezed," says one executive. Officials reckon that by peddling thermal power equipment and industrial wares, the firm will be able to rake in around Rs 4,000 crore. The new businesses are meant to take care of the shortfall of Rs 1,000 crore.

Some company watchers are critical of this explanation for diversifying, charging that high costs and overheads have undercut BHEL's ability to compete with foreign power equipment suppliers. Says a senior executive of a power company who once worked for BHEL: "Last year, BHEL's Trichy unit farmed out fabrication work worth over Rs 80 crore to ancillary units in the region. Naturally, sub-contractors' profits add to BHEL's costs." BHEL officials contest the charge, but critics are rightly sceptical about its ability to meet its export target for the future. Power equipment markets abroad are sluggish and BHEL's export record is nothing to write home about. It exported products worth Rs 35 crore last year, and to expect this to balloon to Rs 350 crore or more in three years is rather optimistic. Samat and Sridhar counter that they will try for orders in several countries, including China, and can pull off the trick if a few big contracts are won. BHEL will also strive to get its 20-odd foreign collaborators to buy from it products they do not manufacture. Nevertheless, even senior executives admit that meeting the target will be a stupendous task.

The programme to offer loans to customers could also run into trouble. The state electricity boards owe BHEL about Rs 400 crore, many of them are deeply in the red, and loans to them could become bad debts. BHEL's solution is to offer loans selectively. Still, it remains to be seen whether its Rs 285 crore kitty will be enough to win orders away from foreign rivals who offer soft loans.

Company officials concede that the outlook on the power front is daunting, and stress the urgency of branching out. Senior executives like Sridhar are bullish on the washing machines venture. At around Rs 4,000 a machine, BHEL is aiming at the low end of the market and hopes to snare a 10 per cent share, which would amount to a neat Rs 90 crore.

So, in the final analysis, washing machines and locomotives may be the wave of the future for BHEL if it wants to stay in the big league. Even so, it will remain dependent on the power sector for half its business. As one analyst put it last fortnight, BHEL will have to keep its fingers crossed and hope its radical new business strategy pays dividends.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

"The diversification is due to our lean order books and also partly because we don't want to be overdependent on power."

B.S. SAMAT
chairman, BHEL

"We have five major units and this revamping is meant to decentralise them and further break up operations productwise."

M.K. SRIDHAR
director (technical), BHEL

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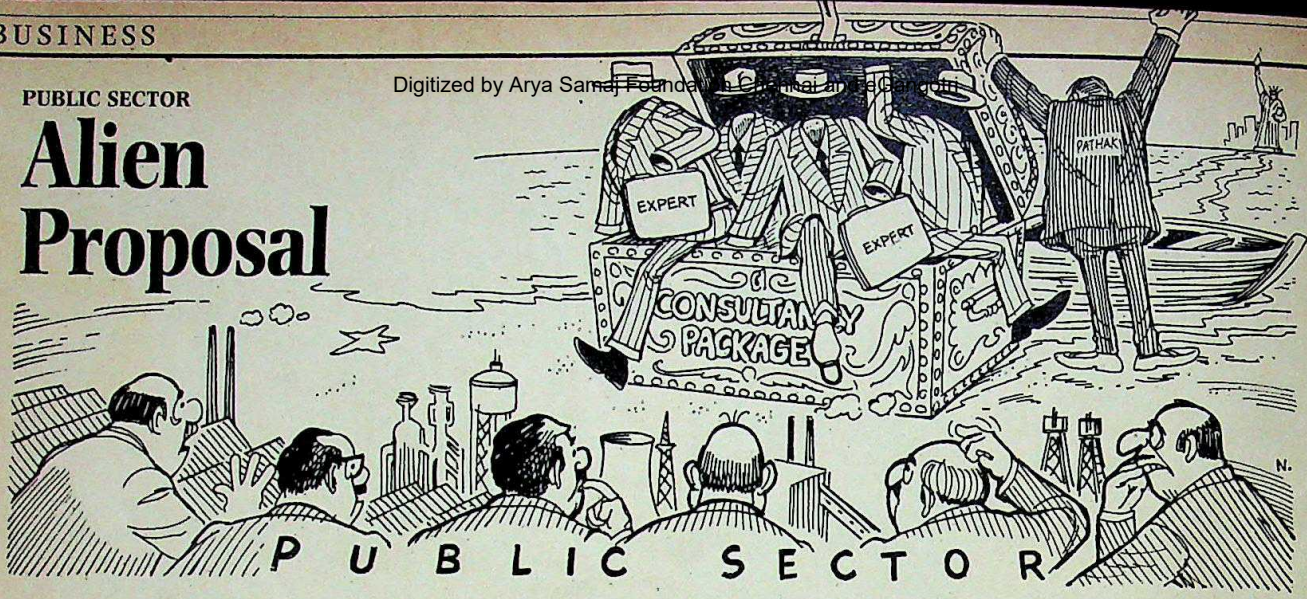
PUBLIC SECTOR

Alien Proposal



BUYING a pig in a poke is normally an expensive proposition. But the Government is at the moment tying up for not just one prime porker but a whole litter. The litter on offer is courtesy M.S.Pathak, former chairman of Engineers India and once a member of the Planning Commission. The issue in dispute is Pathak's efforts to wish upon the public sector the consultancy services of a yet unknown group of individuals in the US, and the belated attempts by the heads of public sector companies to scupper the very expensive deal.

Pathak, son of the former vice-president of India, left the country rather abruptly in the late '70s for medical treatment in the US, where he took up a middle-management job with Bechtel Corporation. Pathak resurfaced early last year with his proposal: many a public sector company was in urgent need of consultancy services. A group of patriotic non-resident Indians in the US, with no intentions of returning to this country, could provide just this.

In its basic form, the scheme involved the formation of a company in the US which would get together with selected public sector companies such as the Steel Authority of India, Bharat Heavy Electricals, the Oil and Natural Gas Commission and Coal India to set up a joint sector venture in which the non-residents would have a 51 per cent equity stake and management control.

The proposal found favour at the highest levels. The committee of secretaries nodded approval and set up an expert group under D.V. Kapoor, secretary, Department of Chemicals and Petro-Chemicals, to vet it. Early this year the Cabinet gave the green signal and in March, public sector enterprises were asked to take early action to identify projects suitable for consultancy.

As a paper plan it may not have raised many hackles: in fact, one of the surprising features is how it managed to clear establishment hurdles with nary a check. But now that the time for action has come, public sector bosses are busy consulting one another on how exactly to cope with the Pathak package. Their doubts are justified: nobody is quite sure of what exactly is on offer. None of the other non-residents, apart from Pathak, has been identified. But, explains Kapoor: "One can hardly expect them to risk their jobs and declare themselves until projects are actually tied up".

Kapoor says that some sort of foreign consultancy help is urgently needed (on which almost everyone agrees) and that Pathak is the best conduit (on which very few others do). "How can a group of stray individuals who are yet to reveal themselves set up a consultancy?" asks a public sector chief of long standing. "This will only shore up the impression that a consultant is just a lucky individual who has found a cushy niche. If the plan goes through, we will be killing consultancy in the country."

Moreover, once the new venture comes into being it is inevitable that all public sector projects will be channelled through it. And the amounts involved are revealing. The initial suggestion was that the non-residents be paid a yearly retainer of $3 million. This was later abandoned. Now, as the Government notification states, the advance fees and other payments will be settled on a case-by-case basis in consultation with Pathak. He himself is waiting for six or seven big projects, running into thousands of crores, to be identified before roping in his associates.

Pathak claims that his plan has two major advantages. First, the manhour rate of consultancy will be lower than its foreign equivalent. Secondly, because of constant interaction, much of the expertise will rub off on resident Indians. Contacted telephonically in the US, he was unwilling to comment on controversial aspects of the project. As proof of his own keenness, he cited the fact that he had already set up his US company: Management and Technologies International. Details were not forthcoming. The refrain was: "It is too premature."

But for the public sector, it may be a wee bit too late. Detractors were unwilling to speak in the early stages because of the project's political backing. Even now, opposition is being orchestrated mainly through leaks to the press.

Pathak's claims, say his ever-increasing critics, are still unsubstantiated. True, the manhour rates may be lower, but that is only because the joint sector organisation will employ Indians who do not have to be paid the same fat salaries as the non-residents. In fact, the shareholding pattern has been so adjusted to permit the payment of higher emoluments than allowable under public sector norms. "This business of transfer of consultancy expertise makes no sense either. For somebody to teach you anything, he must first have a modicum of knowledge. The Pathak brigade is very much an unknown quantity," says a top consultant who has worked in the public sector. "Couldn't they have been tried out first?"

That is a moot question. At the moment, however, the Government is going ahead with the business and going the whole hog too. When you do decide to buy a pig in a poke, that may well be the only way to do it.

—PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

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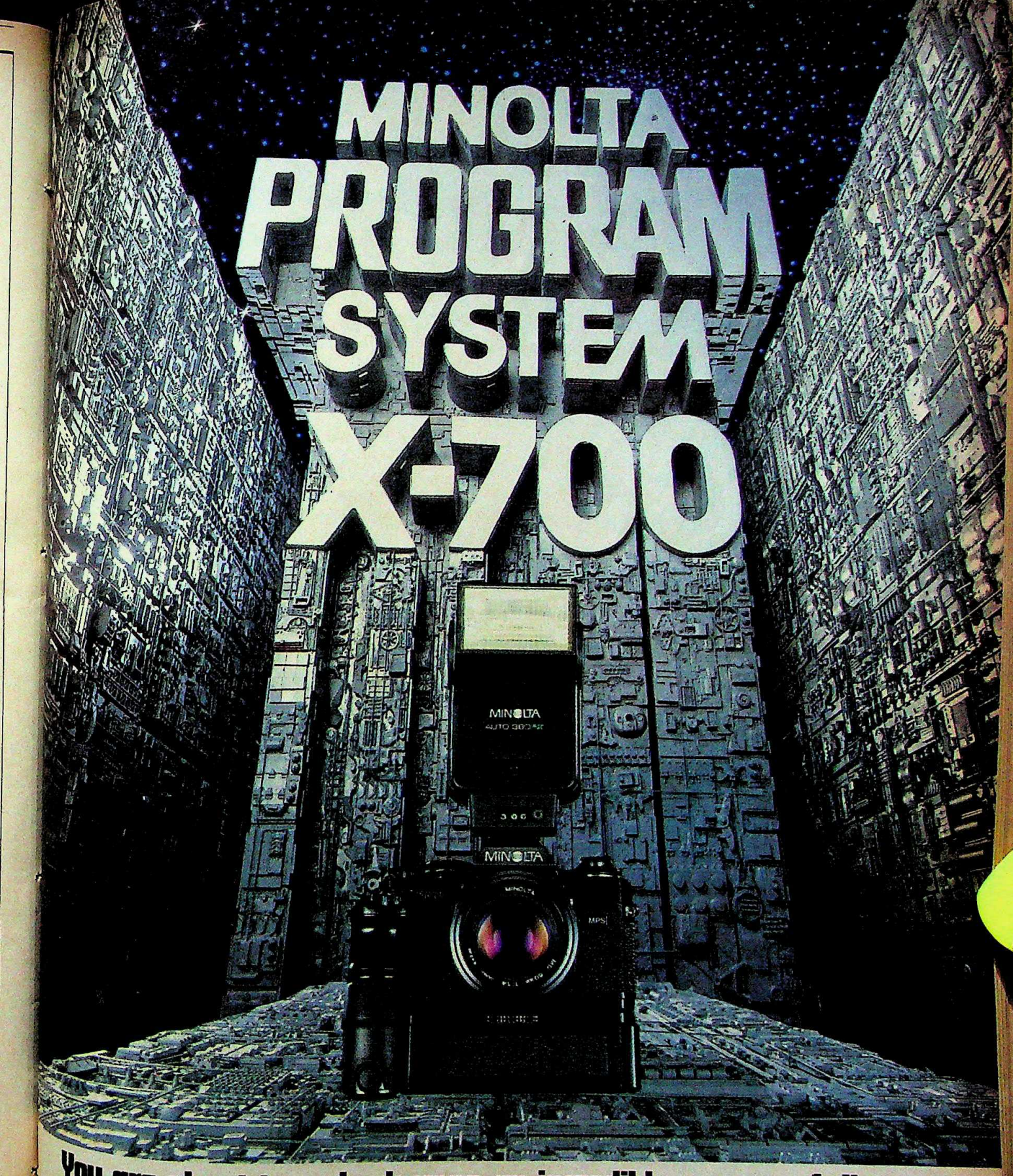

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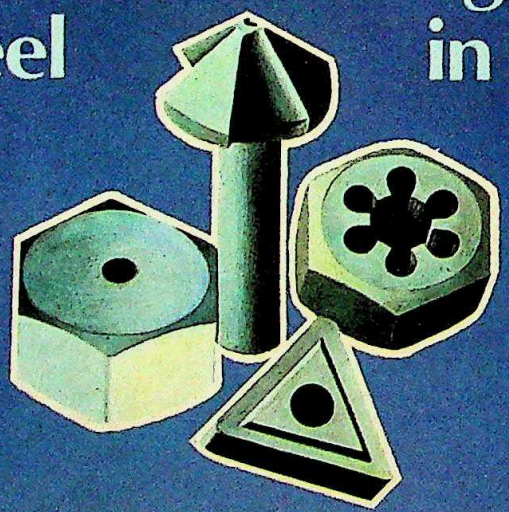

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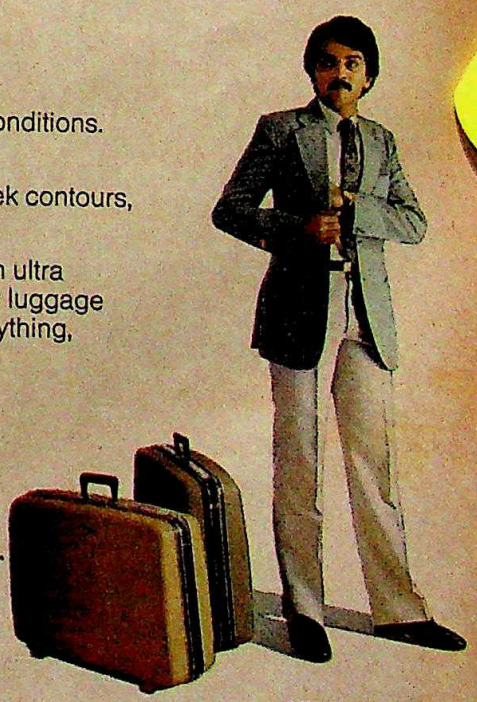
It's the luggage that roughs it out. Anywhere.

No matter how you travel, where and how often, Safari endures the worst conditions. That's the honest truth.

That's why we put so much into this luggage. The streamlined look, the sleek contours, the smooth finish are routine for our fanatical craftsmen.

Now consider the raw stamina of Safari. Made of the toughest material in an ultra modern plant, Safari endures shocks, rough handling, the pressure of other luggage on top of it, jerky take offs and turbulent landings. It never gets rattled by anything, anywhere.

Safari. It survives.



safari

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We put SAFFOLA, corn oil and refined groundnut oil into a freezer for 4 hours. And this is what we found:

Corn oil froze.

Groundnut oil froze solid.

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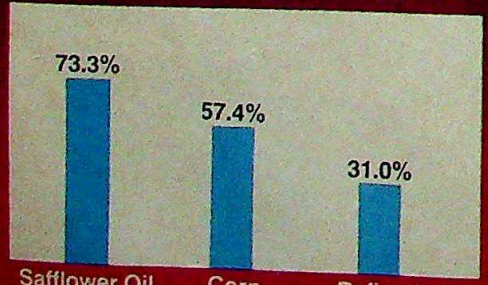
Yes, all vegetable oils are "zero-cholesterol". But only SAFFOLA, with the highest content of polyunsaturated fat actually brings down the cholesterol level in the blood. And that's what really counts!

Major research studies confirm that heart disease is directly linked to the level of cholesterol in the blood. "Lowering cholesterol levels markedly reduces the incidence of fatal heart attacks". So when you cook, fry or bake with SAFFOLA, you're doing what's best for the whole family.

The cholesterol lowering factor (polyunsaturated fat) content in various oils.



Saffola

Good for your heart. Good for your health.

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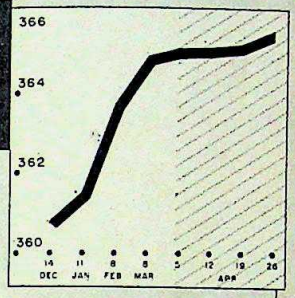
INFLATION HAS slowed down and industrial production seems to have picked up. While there is a marginal tightening of money supply, bank credit has increased. The stock exchange showed a dip in share prices, power generation is better than before and gold prices are again snaking up.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data to which a regression is fitted.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
4.8% p.a.

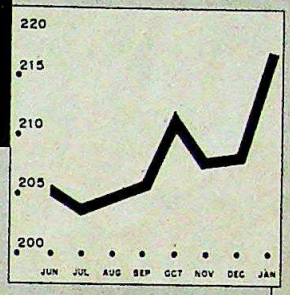


Wholesale prices showed remarkable stability in April and dampened the inflationary trend Inflation under 5% is nothing to worry about.

Industrial Production Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend
8.0% p.a.

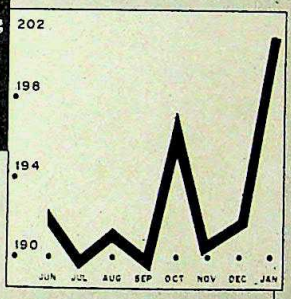


Industrial production shot up by 4.5% between November and January. This lifted the long-term trend to a respectable 7.98% per year.

Manufacturing Output Index

1970-100

Current Trend
5.5% p.a.

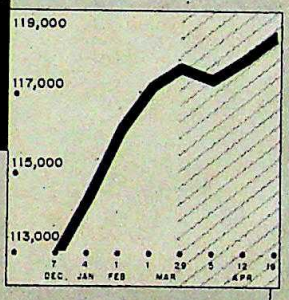


The growth of manufactures remains sluggish though the index rose by 5.2%. The long-term trend is uncomfortably modest.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
15.0% p.a.

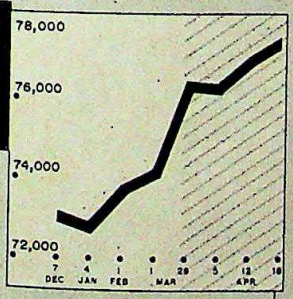


Growth in money supply has slowed down. Increased commercial bank credit has neutralised lower government borrowings.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
13.6% p.a.

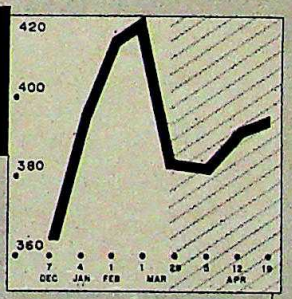


Between February and April, commercial bank credit has expanded by 5%. The long-term growth rate has therefore accelerated.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
31.4% p.a.

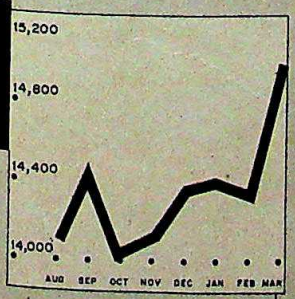


Share prices recovered somewhat in April, after the slump in March, only to be followed by another slump.

Power Generation

Million KWH

Current Trend
6.8% p.a.

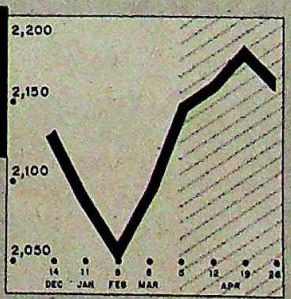


A jump of 4.26% between December and March has led to healthier growth in power generation but still below official targets

Closing Gold Price

Rs per 10 gm.

Current Trend
-.89% p.a.



A 6% jump in gold prices between February and mid-April further checked the declining trend. The signs of an upswing are visible.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of Items in March, 1986

	% Growth
Coffee Curing Works	80.05
Dairy Products	36.5
Internal Combustion Engines	33.92
Ferro-Alloys	32.61
Railway Locomotives	31.25
Dye-Stuffs	28.86
Salt	26.33
Electrical Machinery	25.03
Sugar Industry	24.56
Tea	20.94
Pens and Pencils	18.23
Railway Rolling Stock	18.14
Electrical Fans	15.96
Cement Machinery	15.02
Explosives	9.86
Drugs and Pharmaceuticals	9.51
Boilers Steam Generating Plants	8.55
Mining Machinery	8.53
Fertilisers	8.4
Tobacco Manufacture	7.85
Footwear	7.39
Linolium and Similar Products	7.37
Handtools and Small Tools	6.53
Paper Board and Straw Board	4.22
Hurricane Lanterns	3.53
Electrical Motors	3.47
Cement (Hydraulic)	3.24
Dry Cells	3.2
Synthetic Resins and Plastics	3.14
Iron and Steel (Metal)	1.9
Electric Light and Power	1.69
Telecommunications	1.66
Grain Mill Products	1.19
Motor Cars	1.14
Petroleum and Coal Products	1.03
Inorganic Chemicals	0.59
Mining and Quarrying	0.55
Typewriters & Duplicators	0.32
Paper	-.07
Generation and Transmission Equipment	-.39
Man-made Fibres	-.43
Met Prod Excl Machinery TPT Equipment	-.7
Construction Machinery	-.78
Agricultural Machinery	-1.15
Soaps and Glycerine	-1.39
Jute Textiles	-1.64

Of the 86 series considered, 40 of them with a total weight of 51.356 had a positive growth and 46 of them with a total weight of .619 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1986	1985
Crude Petroleum		
Thousand Tonnes, March	2893	2805
Petroleum Refinery Products		
Thousand Tonnes, March	4090	3591
Call Money Rate		
Percent, March	10.0	10.0
Revenue Earnings Goods Traffic		
Million Tonnes Originating, February	22.07	19.75
Rail Movement		
Net Tonne Kilometres, February	16502	14291

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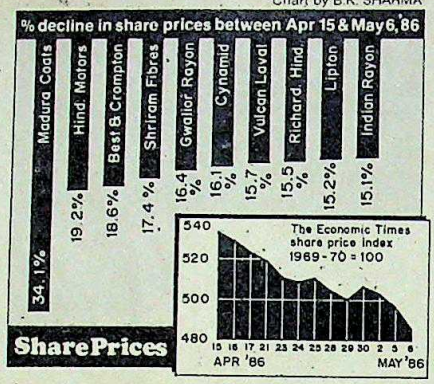
THE MARKETS

Sudden Slump

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



AFTER more than a month of sustained gains on the charts, the stock-markets nose-dived again last fortnight. Losses were recorded on virtually every counter, and the bulls were nowhere to be seen. The extent of the bearish rampage was evident in the drop recorded by the Sensitive Index of Equity Prices of the Bombay Stock Exchange: this fell from 626.05 in mid-April to 584.53 by the end of the month, and then searched for lower levels in the first few days of May. The index was still above the post-budget low of 525.02, recorded in March, but if this trend continues the market could plumb new depths in the coming weeks.

Several prominent scrips lost heavily, including textile companies like Madura Coats (34.1 per cent) and Indian Rayon (15.1 per cent), drug companies like Cyanamid (16.1 per cent) and Richardson Hindustan (15.5 per cent), engineering outfits like Hindustan Motors (19.2 per cent), Vulcan Laval (15.7 per cent) and Best and Crompton (18.6 per cent), and diversified corporate giants like Gwalior Rayon (16.4 per cent). Even Century Mills, among the bluest of chips on the market, took a beating when buyers liquidated their purchases after Chairman S.K. Birla warned shareholders at the company's annual general meeting that the inadequacy of levy cement prices might result in shrunken profits during the current year.

The big question, of course, is whether the market has now firmly entered a bearish phase, or whether the mood of pessimism will pass and optimism bound right back. Opinion among the experts is divided, as always. But the majority clearly feels that there is little room left for cheer. Indeed, even during the brief recovery that followed the post-budgetary slump, cash shares had continued to fall, signalling a lack of investor confidence in scrips that had been caught up in the general upswing that persisted through 1985. If this indicated that the brief upswing was without too much substance, the present slide in share prices only reinforces this reading of the market.

In many senses, the market is now at a critical juncture. So far there have been both ups and downs in the last four months. But a continued drop will establish that 1986 is vastly different from 1985. And that the bears are going to have it their way for some time to come. There could be a number of factors responsible for this: the dissensions in the Congress(I), the fresh uncertainty in Punjab, the straws in the wind which indicate that the Government might be reconsidering some of its policy liberalisations and the near certainty that, whatever happens, no fresh liberalisations of any substance are likely to be forthcoming.

ACTIVE STOCK

	1986 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 7.4.86	Change on Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	26.00	28.00	2.50 -
Associated Cement	389.00	236.00	238.00	13.00 -
Atlas Copco	92.50	65.00	65.00	8.00 -
Associated Bearings	990.00	720.00	725.00	25.00 -
Avery India	146.00	103.00	112.50	6.50 -
Bajaj Auto	2775.00	1950.00	2510.00	65.00 -
Baroda Rayon	490.00	316.00	362.50	17.50 -
Bata India	82.50	56.00	58.00	6.50 -
Bayer	680.00	445.00	510.00	15.00 -
Bharat Forge	86.00	48.00	59.00	6.00 -
Birla Jute	97.00	42.90	47.50	0.50 -
Blow Plast	160.00	98.00	108.00	5.50 -
Blue Star	110.00	75.00	82.50	12.50 -
Bombay Dyeing	120.00	77.00	102.00	5.00 +
Brooke Bond	96.75	74.00	83.75	7.25 -
Ceat Tyres	520.00	240.00	400.00	10.00 -
Century Spinning	1690.00	1220.00	1250.00	135.00 -
Chloride India	122.00	88.00	89.00	8.00 -
Citurgia	65.00	42.00	49.00	4.00 -
Colgate	262.00	200.00	205.00	12.50 -
Cyanamid	100.00	65.00	65.00	10.00 -
DCM	58.50	36.00	38.00	0.50 -
Dunlop	74.50	49.75	64.00	3.50 -
Elecon	117.50	80.00	88.00	3.00 -
Escorts	105.00	69.00	91.00	4.50 -
Food Specialities	300.00	215.00	268.75	1.25 -
Garware Nylon	61.50	36.00	41.00	1.00 -
Glaxo	87.00	62.00	69.00	2.00 +
G.E. Shipping	36.00	22.50	23.00	0.50 -
Gujarat St. Fertilisers	1700.00	925.00	1410.00	127.50 -
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	59.00	69.00	11.50 -
Hind. Cocoa	125.00	97.50	110.00	nil
Hindustan Lever	183.00	127.00	144.00	nil
Hindustan Motors	128.50	46.30	46.30	9.70 -
Hind. Dorr	505.00	380.00	440.00	20.00 -
IEL	84.50	64.50	65.25	7.25 -
Indian Hotels	157.00	115.00	135.00	nil
Indian Organic	90.00	63.00	68.00	6.50 -
Indian Rayon	151.00	100.00	118.00	17.00 -
Indrol	390.00	200.00	265.00	45.00 -
Ingersoll-Rand	480.00	360.00	420.00	15.00 -
ITC	76.50	53.00	68.50	5.75 -
J.K. Synthetics	132.00	90.00	105.00	13.00 -
Kinetic Engineering	325.00	220.00	265.00	25.00 -
Lakme	195.00	120.00	130.00	2.50 -
Larson & Toubro	204.00	157.00	175.00	10.50 -
Lipton	69.00	46.50	54.25	8.45 -
Lohia Machines	70.00	42.00	53.00	7.00 +
Madura Coats	92.00	55.00	58.00	30.00 -
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	52.00	59.50	4.50 -
Motor Industries	910.00	605.00	750.00	60.00 -
National Organic	777.50	530.00	615.00	15.00 -
Nirlon	77.00	47.00	49.00	4.00 -
Orkay Silk Mills	186.00	111.00	124.50	6.50 +
Peico Electronics	104.50	49.00	49.00	7.00 -
Pfizer	125.00	78.00	90.00	1.00 -
Premier Auto	840.00	555.00	715.00	90.00 -
Ranbaxy	160.00	105.00	121.00	1.00 -
Raymond	97.00	72.00	81.00	5.00 -
Reliance Industries	367.00	226.00	335.00	8.00 -
Shriram Fibres	88.00	49.00	53.25	7.75 -
SPIC	184.00	129.50	144.50	9.50 -
Tata Steel	1442.50	1090.00	1340.00	72.50 -
Telco	910.00	575.00	635.00	50.00 -
Vulcan Laval	162.50	85.00	107.50	17.50 -
Wimco	98.00	54.00	59.00	5.00 -

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	9.1958	9.1124
Austria	Schilling	100	80.8630	80.0029
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.2530	33.1915
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.0831	42.0610
Canada	Dollar	1	9.0763	9.0019
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.5340	1.5203
Egypt	Pound	1	15.1332	15.0181
France	Franc	1	1.7889	1.7857
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6071	1.5947
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.1120	1.0911
Iran	Rial	100	15.9910	15.6331
Italy	Lira	100	0.8210	0.8200
Japan	Yen	100	7.5365	7.3329
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7891	0.7780
Kuwait	Dinar	1	43.7610	43.5331
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.8903	4.8371
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9300	0.8919
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6030	0.5910
Netherlands	Guilder	1	5.0336	4.9893
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7693	0.7510
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.6960	5.6475
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0810	0.0800
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4499	0.4303
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.7667	1.7506
Switzerland	Franc	1	6.7855	6.7251
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6693	0.6500
Thailand	Baht	100	48.0000	47.9910
UK	Pound	1	19.0675	18.9447
USA	Dollar	1	12.4075	12.2925
UAE	Dirham	1	3.4130	3.3910
USSR	Rouble	1	17.6510	17.3220
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	5.7537	5.6116

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 6.5.1986.

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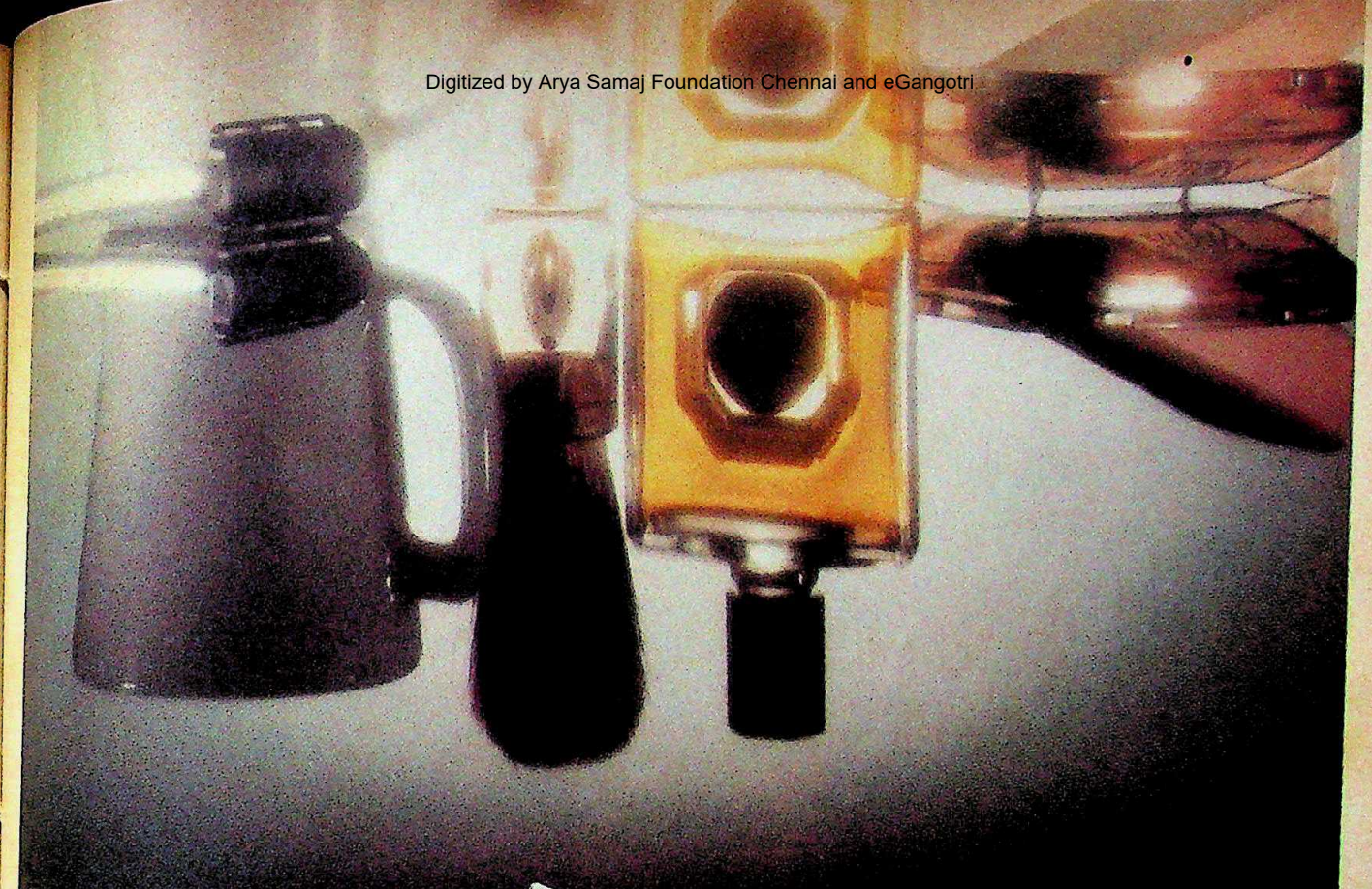

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We promised you higher fuel efficiency. The Hero Honda CD 100 gives 80 km/litre (at 40 km/hr with a load of 130 kgs.), **which is even less than 9 paise per km.**

HONDA R&D

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HONDA R&D

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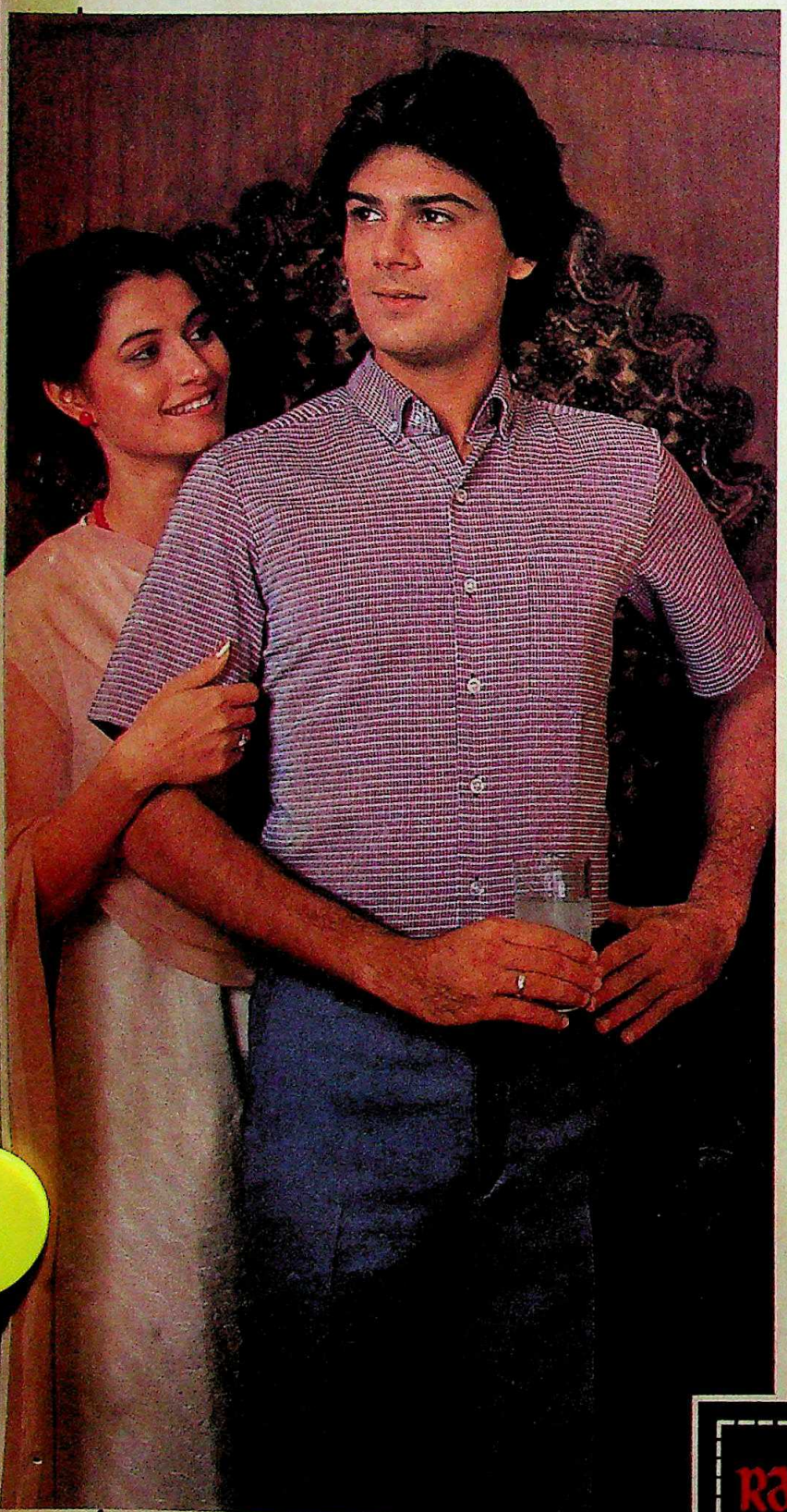
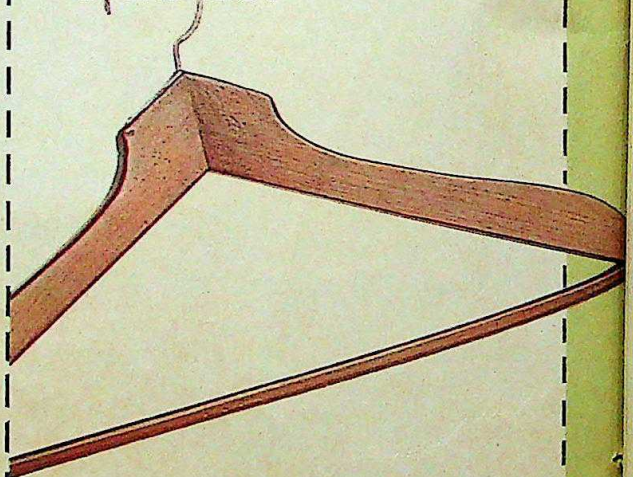


EVER SINCE I DISCOVERED RAYMOND'S READYMADES, IT'S GOODBYE TO STEREO-TYPES.



Trousers
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Safaris
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Shirts
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Suits
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Blazers

Raymond's Mens Wear

Location courtesy: The Taj Mahal Hotel, Bombay.

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AFGHANISTAN

Search for a Solution

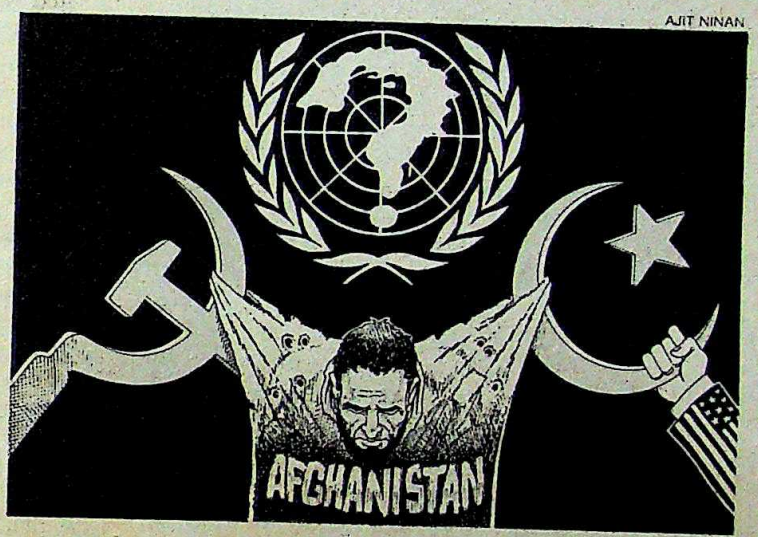
THE AFGHANISTAN problem may be finally approaching a solution, judging by the optimism on the eve of the UN-sponsored talks in Geneva on the possible pull-out of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Already, the seventh round of the Geneva talks which commenced last fortnight is being spoken of as being the last.

It is now six years since the night in December 1979 when the Russian army crossed the undefended borders of Afghanistan and toppled the Government that purportedly invited it in. Since then, the Afghan crisis has become one of the most unsavoury episodes in international affairs. Nearly four-and-a-half million refugees, constituting some one-fourth of Afghanistan's population, have sought shelter in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, whilst, according to at least one estimate, perhaps as many as 500,000 have died within the beleaguered country's borders. Afghanistan itself is divided by civil war, its major cities controlled by the Soviet-backed 'People's Democratic' regime whilst the vast majority of the countryside is in the equally unsettling grip of a fractured and unrepresentative Mujahideen, themselves influenced by outside agencies.

Periodically, efforts have been made by the indefatigable Diego Cordovez of the United Nations to find a solution that will facilitate the return of the Soviet Army and the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan. To this end he has coordinated indirect talks between the Afghan Government, who also represents the Soviet Union's interests, and that of Pakistan, which speaks for both the Mujahideen and their supporters, most particularly the United States.

From its outset, the United Nations' peace process set itself the task of securing a package deal comprising four separate but inter-related agreements. Two of these, between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, focus on the voluntary return of the Afghan refugees and the cessation of all interference or intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan from Pakistani territory. The third is a set of guarantees from the two super powers, while the fourth will be the interlinking document determining the date and timetable of the proposed Soviet withdrawal as well as the manner and timing of the implementation of the other three documents.

By the end of 1985 most of this package had been agreed to. Both super powers were also willing to act as guarantors. All that was left was agreement on the fourth instrument. So the issue was reduced to whether the Afghans would table an acceptable date and timetable for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and if this would be adhered to.



AJIT NINAN

It was at this juncture that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev publicly declared his commitment to a Soviet withdrawal "in the nearest possible time". He then went a step further and rescinded his stand on direct talks. Instead Cordovez was given a draft of the Soviet withdrawal plan and allowed to show it to the Pakistanis. As a result, the technical deadlock was broken.

Thus far the complex facts suggest a breakthrough, and one of significant proportions. Both sides have agreed to negotiate the crucial withdrawal instrument on conditions initially stipulated by the Pakistanis and since accepted by the Russians. But now the question really is: will the talks produce a mutually acceptable Soviet withdrawal and will it be sufficient for a solution?

Even if Gorbachev does offer a credible and mutually acceptable schedule of withdrawal, the present Afghan regime will still be there even without Karmal and the question of its acceptability to the Pakistanis and the US will remain—until either the Russians agree to get rid of the regime (which they won't) or until the Americans accept they have to live with it (which they show no signs of). At this more fundamental level, all that Cordovez's latest efforts can hope to achieve is to strip the issue of its diplomatic wrapping down to its essential conundrum, which is: Has the time come for the Americans to let the Russians off the Afghan hook?

As yet there are precious few indications that Washington has realised that the Afghan ball could soon be in its court. When it is, the American refusal to countenance the peace terms on offer could seem considerably less moral and righteous than it presently does. For a refusal to accept a Soviet withdrawal then would suggest a determination to inflict further suffering on the Afghans themselves simply because the deal does not accord with the Reagan Administration's new muscular view of the world.

The Soviets, meanwhile, have begun a process of modification of the Afghan regime to advance its chances of independent survival once they withdraw, thus increasing its prospects of future acceptability. They have sought to broaden the regime's base by inducting non-communist party members, increasing the involvement of the clergy and adopting softer policies, particularly towards the alienated border tribes. The removal of Babrak Karmal is part of this pattern. Should this process be pursued to the extent of involving some of the less fundamentalist Mujahideen factions, it might not only provide an Afghan government that will survive a Russian withdrawal, but one that could also prove tempting to the Pakistanis. But will the US accept it? No doubt such a government will not be to their liking—as it won't be to the Soviet Union's full satisfaction—but that could be the cost they both have to pay for a lasting solution. And it could prove acceptable to the Afghan people themselves. Maybe that is what ought to really count.

—KARAN THAPAR

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BANGLADESH ELECTIONS

A Tragic Farce

BANGLADESH'S hesitant experiment with democracy seems to have been a farcical failure. Last fortnight's parliamentary elections were marred by violent clashes and accusations of massive rigging and booth-capturing by President Ershad's Jatiya Party. TAVLEEN SINGH *was in Bangladesh to cover the electoral fiasco. Her report:*

The house in road number 32 Dhanmandi, where Sheikh Mujibur Rahman lived and died, has become a symbol of everything that has gone wrong with Bangladesh. It is a house filled with dreams and death, frozen in time at the exact moment of Mujib's murder in a dawn coup on August 15, 1975. Hasina Wajed, his daughter, uses the ground floor as an office but has left the upper two floors exactly as they were when the soldiers burst in and murdered her parents, three brothers and two sisters-in-law. The floors are covered with dark patches of dried blood.

The house is a macabre mausoleum not just for Mujib and his family but, in a sense, for democracy in Bangladesh. For with Mujib's death, came the demise of all hopes of democracy in a country that sacrificed more than a million lives in the name of freedom.

The past 11 years have been a period of military regimes and coups, counter-coups and assassinations. In such an atmosphere, it was easy for the President, Lieutenant-General Hussein Mohammed Ershad, to hammer one more nail in the coffin of democracy by turning Bangladesh's first parliamentary election in seven years into a shameless farce.

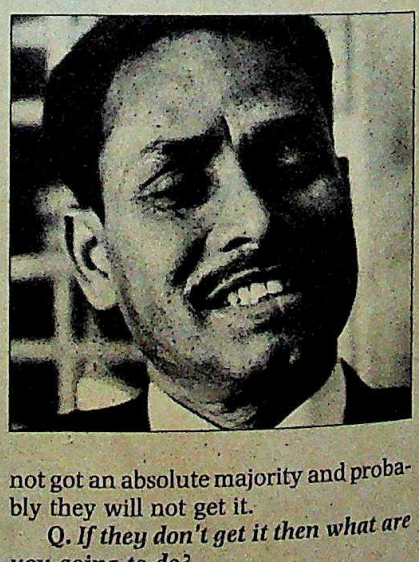
Ershad himself had raised hopes that the elections would be relatively fair. He had permitted political parties to contest as parties and during the election campaign gave them complete freedom. He threw open his country to droves of foreign correspondents. In addition, he permitted the People's Commission for Free Elections to invite a team of British MP's as independent observers.

But just when everyone was beginning to be lulled into a false sense of democracy, Ershad reverted to form. First came the arrest of Begum Khaleda Zia and the entire leadership of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party which had consistently opposed what they described as 'Blueprint elections'. Then, two days before polling, reports of sporadic acts of violence by members of Ershad's Jatiya Party began to trickle into Dhaka. The most ominous sign, however, was the appearance in the streets of goon squads who drove around in vehicles plastered with posters of Ershad. They tore down Awami League posters and smashed up election symbols. In some cases they even attacked candidates and threw Molotov cocktails into opposition party election offices.

Some opposition candidates, like former foreign minister, Kamal Hossain, saw the writing on the wall. Said Hossain: "We are receiving some very alarming reports. Jatiya Party thugs appear to be bent on terrorising voters to make them stay away from voting. Ershad didn't expect this election to go the way it has (in our favour) and he is now panicking and

GENERAL ERSHAD

"There was no rigging"



TO SAY that General Ershad fiddled while Dhaka burned would perhaps be unkind but it would be no exaggeration to say that the sound of bombs and shouts of 'We do not accept this farcical election' could not be heard even faintly in the rarefied atmosphere of the Dhaka Cantonment in which the President resides.

The day after the elections, the President appeared completely oblivious to what had happened beyond the whitewashed walls of the cantonment. He greeted reporters with the news that he had just completed a poem in praise of the elections and laughed off charges of rigging. Excerpts:

Q. *What would you like to say about the results?*

A. I am very satisfied, most of the parties have got seats and this is the first time it has happened in history. The Awami League has done very well, they never got more than 40 seats, Muslim League got seats so all the parties have their representation now in Parliament.

Q. *The delegation of British MP's said that they were so shocked by what they saw that they do not consider what happened yesterday an election?*

A. We are not bothered what they say. This is an independent country and they have no business to pass any remarks about an independent nation's elections. They are doubting the integrity of the Election Commission, which is an independent body, the whole thing is disgusting.

Q. *Would you say there was no rigging then?*

A. No, that's besides the point. You asked me something I have replied.

Q. *Yesterday we got the impression there was rigging by the Jatiya Party?*

A. Then they would have got more than 200 seats and how come the Awami League has got so many seats when they never got more than 40 seats ever, except in 1973. Even the people are surprised that they have got so many seats this time. And the Jatiya Party have not got an absolute majority and probably they will not get it.

Q. *If they don't get it then what are you going to do?*

A. The Jatiya Party will probably get 150 seats. There are independent candidates and women. We will make up.

Q. *What will you do if Hasina rejects the poll verdict?*

A. On what grounds?

Q. *On the grounds that it was heavily rigged.*

A. It is the Jatiya Party who should be saying that.

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sing terror tactics."

Hossain, an Oxford-educated lawyer who was responsible for drafting the Bangladesh Constitution, was tragically right. At about 10.30 on polling day, the whole of Dhaka seemed to explode simultaneously. After that it became virtually impossible to find a single polling station in the city where polling was continuing normally. The tactic used by Jatiya Party workers was simple and uniform.

In the Jatrabari Primary School polling station in Kamal Hossain's constituency, a Jatiya Party goon squad suddenly appeared and attacked an Awami League election booth that had been set up outside. Said Noor Hasan who was manning the booth: "There were about 25 of them. They came with sticks and *ramdaos* (axes) and smashed the table, then they pulled the voters lists from my hands and tore them to shreds, then they told me to get out and threw a 'cocktail'. They were armed so we did nothing even when they threw our polling agents out and started stamping ballot- papers."

A truckload of riot policemen arrived on the spot shortly after but did nothing to stop the Jatiya Party toughs. All they did

Sheikh Hasina: "elections were hijacked"

DOUGLAS E. CURRAN/AFP

Q. Will you have fresh elections?

A. That will have to be decided. I don't think any MP's who have been elected would want that. Elections are costly.

Q. Don't you need a two-thirds majority to legalise all the martial law ordinances?

A. You need a simple majority to ratify them but there is a very simple answer. Elections were held under martial law so if they don't regularise them then they don't remain MP's. So they have to vote for regularisation of whatever I did in the last four years and that includes elections, otherwise the whole election stands null and void.

Q. You said before the elections that you would remain neutral and yet your picture is on the Jatiya Party posters.

A. I gave it to the Awami League to put on theirs but they didn't use it.

Q. No, but you keep talking about the Jatiya Party as our party.

A. The Jatiya Party supports my policies, naturally I support them.

Q. Hasina has been saying that you said you would remain neutral and yet you have been campaigning everywhere for the Jatiya Party.

A. She is not telling the truth. I never said anywhere that I would remain neutral or that I wouldn't take part in the elections. My only comment was that my administration would remain neutral and they remained neutral. I never said that I would remain neutral. I have my policies, my programmes, my ideology which I have to sell to the people, as the head of government, the highest political office. I have to advise my people what to do.

Q. So you blatantly misused your offices for the benefit of this party?

A. I am not a caretaker President. I am an elected President of the Government. I am not worried. There is no rigging.

Q. But do you believe there was any rigging?

A. That you will have to ask the election commissioner. He conducts the elections. I don't.

Q. When will you lift martial law?

A. That will be decided after the presidential elections.

Q. What would you say will be the major changes for Bangladesh that will result from this election?

A. We will have an elected government. That's all. The policies of the Government would continue.

Q. That would mean no real change?

A. What is the aim of the Government? To give a better life to the people. So we have an elected government so the people's representatives will decide how to implement all these policies. In our Constitution the whole power is in the hands of the President. Parliament will have to decide if they want a major change in the 1973 Constitution. You know seats are not chocolates that I keep in my pocket to distribute to individuals, they have to be earned through elections.

Q. Are you aware that people don't like military rule?

A. I also don't like it. That is why I have had elections otherwise I could have continued like Zia-ul-Haq for 10 years, these people don't have the strength to remove me.

Q. Would you say it was a very successful election?

A. The result shows it to be so. All the parties fighting neck and neck and everyone getting some seats. It shows that the people have really got the chance to vote for the person they wanted to.

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was to prevent reporters going into the polling station on the grounds that it was not permitted. When reporters managed to enter an hour later, Maudodd Hassan, the presiding officer, a deputy manager in the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), said blandly: "Everything is normal".

Everything was also "normal" in another polling station where Jatiya Party workers were attacking Awami League workers with hockey sticks and brickbats.

AHMED/AFP

Police announce closing of polling booth an hour after voting started

Or in a polling station in which the ballot-boxes had been removed and voting ended an hour after it began. There was the occasional presiding officer who admitted that thugs had taken over the polling station and stamped ballot-papers forcibly. Said Mahfuzur Rahman: "I appealed to the police to fire in the air or do anything to get the thugs out of here but they wouldn't do anything at all, so I was helpless".

THERE was an additional method to the madness. In Bangladesh, polling stations (approximately 25,000 in number) double as counting centres. Counting begins immediately after polling ends and technically cannot take place unless all the parties have their polling agents in the centre. But by 5 p.m. on polling day, there were hundreds of polling stations all over the country in which there were no opposition party polling agents present.

Well before counting began, Ershad's extraordinary exercise in democracy had lost all credibility and it was clear that the results had been tailored to look as fair as possible with the Awami League and the Jatiya Party running neck and neck at one point. Before the counting started, Sheikh Hasina called a press conference and accused the President of piracy. "I will not call it rigging," she said. "Rigging is a very small word, what happened here was hijacking."

The next morning the British MP's who had been invited as observers, Lord Ennals and Brendan Bravo and David Lay of the BBC, expressed their opinion in equally strong terms. "We have listed specific events which led us to the conclusion that though the parties whose representatives we met put up candidates and fought the election in the hope that it would be free and fair, these hopes were cynically frustrated. From what we saw, the principle offenders in rigging the elections were the Jatiya Party. They were responsible for turning what could and should have been a historic return to democracy in Bangladesh into a tragedy for democracy."

Then suddenly the Government appeared to have switched strategy. The announcement of results which had been going on non-stop on radio and television was suddenly halted and the Election Commission announced that although they had received 293 results out of a total of 300, they were withholding them on account of complaints of rigging.

The Government's stand had by this time lost all credibility and few believed that the results were being withheld in the genuine interests of fairness. Then the Election Commission announced that they would be ordering a repoll in 99 constituencies, which was changed to a repoll in "only a few constituencies".

According to political observers, the main reason for the confusion was the bargaining that was clearly going on between Ershad and the Awami League. Sheikh Hasina had demanded a repoll in 100 constituencies. At first the Government showed all the signs of giving in to her demand and then quite abruptly, changed its mind.

The crucial factor appeared to be whether Hasina would agree to sit in Parliament or not. A total repudiation of the election would have seriously embarrassed Ershad but there was enough pressure on Hasina not to do this from her own party, and also due to the fact that if she decided not to take the seats her party won, she would have strengthened Khaleda Zia's position. And that is a highly unwelcome prospect.

The wrangling and confusion continued but Ershad was saved by two factors, the first and most important one being a cynical and apathetic electorate who have learned to expect the worst and secondly by Ramadan—the Muslim month of prayer and fasting—which began while the elections results were still being announced.

In the end, the elections have changed nothing in Bangladesh. Ershad will continue to be omnipotent and Parliament will exist merely as a sort of debating club which will begin by ratifying the martial law decrees that Ershad has issued in the past four years.

If the May election has achieved anything at all, it is the fact that it has proved to the Opposition that the only way to get rid of Ershad will be through another military coup. Said Hasina: "The army could get rid of him tomorrow if they wanted to. It is easier for them than for us." Obviously, as last fortnight's elections revealed, democracy in Bangladesh is still a very distant not to mention dangerous dream.

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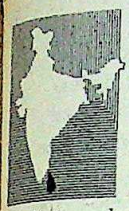
SRI LANKA

Ominous Portents



SRI LANKA'S ethnic crisis is rapidly starting to resemble a rugby scrum with the ball being passed from hand to hand with the objective of not letting the opposition know which player has possession. The trouble now is trying to decipher who the players really are. In the Jaffna peninsula, the two main militant Tamil groups have suddenly been pitched into a bloody fratricidal war, destroying each other's camps, killing key leaders and generally doing the job of the Sri Lankan army.

In New Delhi, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has introduced a new player into the protracted poker game between New Delhi and Colombo, P. Chidambaram, minister of state for personnel, who headed the latest Indian negotiating team to Sri Lanka in the hitherto-futile search for a mutually acceptable solution. And in Colombo, the political posture hardened considerably following a series of extremist bomb attacks in the capital that left 26 people dead, including 15 tourists.

With the situation starting to acquire the contours of a Shakespearean tragedy, the prospect of a solution has once again receded into a bleak background. The introduction of Chidambaram, 40, an MBA from Harvard, was a calculated gamble. Re-introducing a Tamil as head of the Indian negotiating team was New Delhi's way of semaphoring that it was determined to adopt a tougher stand in its dealings with Colombo. The original chief Indian negotiator, G. Parthasarathy, had been hastily removed from the firing line following objections by Sri Lanka to his Tamil antecedents.

Chidambaram, who replaced former foreign secretary Romesh Bhandari as delegation head, is a highly intelligent man not given to the kind of infectious optimism that forms part of Bhandari's extroverted character. In the event, he had little to be optimistic about. High-level sources say that "limited progress" was achieved in the Indian objective of pinning down the Sri Lankans to specifics on the key issues contained in the main demands of the Tamils, namely devolution of power, the law and order problem and the land settlement issue.

There were adequate indications that Colombo is still in no mood to make major concessions, thus giving the Chidambaram delegation little room for manoeuvre. Unlike previous parleys, this time there was no joint statement issued at the end of the talks. Further, the Indian side is still talking of "formulations" given by Colombo, and not "proposals", which implies that Colombo has still left its options wide open.

HARI OM GULATI

Chidambaram (top); and slain militant leader Srisabaratnam

Unfortunately for the Indian negotiators, the focus of the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka has suddenly, and dramatically, shifted—to the gleeful advantage of Colombo. Till now, it has largely been a guerrilla war between an indisciplined Sri Lankan army and the Tamil militants who had largely unified under the banner of the Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF). But even that wafer-thin veneer of unity was brutally stripped off last fortnight as the cadres of the two main groups in the ENLF, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) flung themselves at each others' throats in the Jaffna area.

What triggered off the fratricidal war is difficult to establish, but the LTTE, after a three-day offensive, claimed that it had wiped out TELO forces and destroyed their camps. TELO leader Srisabaratnam was among those killed in the encounters that wiped out an estimated 105 militants, a majority from TELO. Said A.S. Balasingham of the LTTE: "We are very sorry that Srisabaratnam had to die but then he wouldn't have been killed if he and his boys had surrendered instead of resisting our attack. When we take on a strong military force like TELO we cannot stop at anything short of a total offensive." Balasingham claims that the provocation for the battle between the two was the kidnapping of three senior LTTE commanders in Jaffna by TELO forces.

Spokesmen for TELO, however, deny charges that they started the conflict but whatever the truth, it has put India in an embarrassing position and given a moral advantage to Colombo. Sri Lanka can now afford to sit back and allow the two rival groups to wipe each other out without having to risk the lives of its own security personnel. Colombo has also used the opportunity to lay the blame on the bomb blasts in Colombo at the doorstep of the Tamil militants and claim that they are no longer interested in a peaceful settlement of the problem. Observes Charles Antonydas of TELO: "Our military struggle for Tamil Eelam is now in jeopardy." Added V. Balakumar of the Eelam Revolutionary Organisers: "Unless we can resolve our differences through discussions, there is no future for our struggle."

More important, the fratricidal fracas has put a serious spoke in the wheel of the Indian initiative. Any dialogue initiated from the Indian side is doomed without the active participation or association of the Tamil militant groups, specially LTTE and TELO, being the most powerful. Sri Lanka's National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali has already sounded the ominous warning that if the current negotiations failed, Colombo would "have to take the other path". Colombo has also resurrected the bogey of official Indian aid to the Tamil separatists, as evidenced by Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene's May Day tirade against the Eelam lobby's "Indian links". All this suggests that Sri Lanka's ethnic tragedy is rapidly and inexorably slipping out of the hands of those who could have controlled its impetus. It is now in the hands of an unknown fate. The consequences of that could be a prelude to disaster.

—DILIP BOBB with S.H. VENKATARAMANI

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MOUNTBATTEN

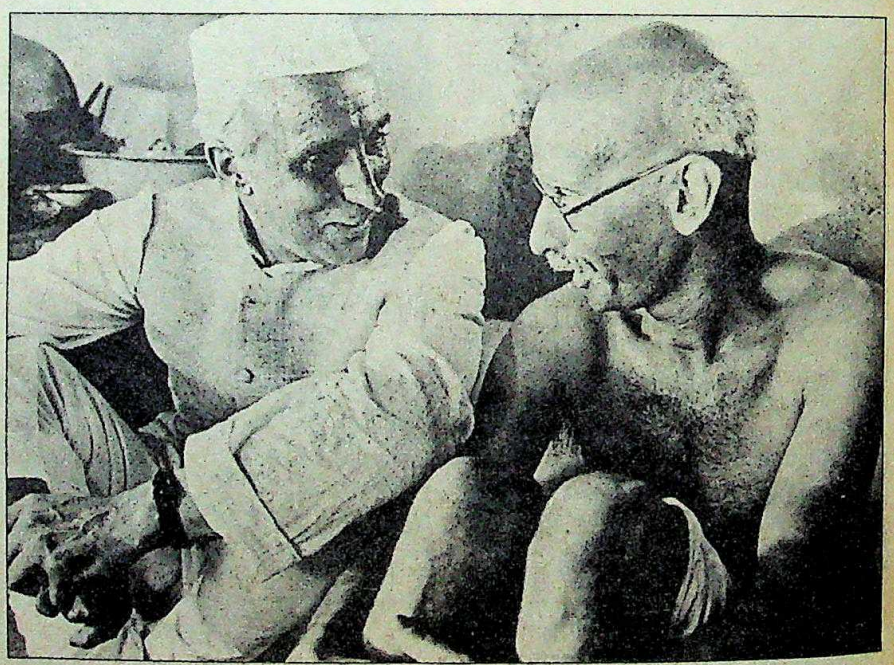
Lament for Lord Louis

THE ALMOST mystical hold of fabulous television and big screen epics about the twilight of the British Raj on audiences in Britain seemingly came to an ungracious end when *Lord Mountbatten: The Last Viceroy*, aired last fortnight, ran into a fusillade of scorching criticism. After interminable delays and tortuous negotiations for three successive nights, Britain's ITV channel unveiled on prime time, the long-awaited £ 9 million epic.

And for three nights, the screens were full of homicidal rioters, gruesome massacres, pole-axed corpses and streams of refugees trying to re-enact the enormous tragedy of the partition of India as make-believe Hindu-Sikh mobs battled Muslims. With exceptional unanimity, the British media across the spectrum dubbed the six-hour mini-series a "disaster". A reviewer in *The Times* wrote: "It was hard not to notice that it lacked the dignity of *Gandhi*, the scope of *A Passage to India*, the gusty vulgarity of *The Far Pavilions* or the humanity of *A Jewel in the Crown*. It also lacked a viable dramatic structure so that piles of blood-stained corpses and rioting mobs were called for so often that the sights became wearisome."

The series—already steeped in controversy—raked up more polemic. It triggered off an unseemly slanging match between rival channels, the BBC and ITV. The much-discussed romantic links between Pandit Nehru and Edwina, Mountbatten's glamorous wife—shown on the screen for the first time—inevitably raised fresh questions. However, the pivotal flaw of the series was the choice of Scottish-born actor Nicol Williamson to portray the charismatic, autocratic but much-loved Lord Louis. A woeful piece of miscasting, his performance was deservedly savaged by most critics. Williamson insisted that it is only the reaction of Britain's Royal family which would mean most to him. "If they can say, 'that's uncle Dickie', then I will have succeeded".

So far it is not known what the country's Royals think about the cosmetic Lord Mountbatten especially Prince Charles who was mortified when his "great uncle Dickie" was killed by an IRA bomb in August 1979. With a voice resembling a jammed foghorn and adopting a brooding, lugubrious manner, Williamson's portrayal of Mountbatten is a disaster, especially since Clement Attlee and Stafford Cripps between them make him out to be a remarkable man endowed with remarkable good looks. Says Attlee: "I suppose Mountbatten is the man for the viceroy's job? Many people in England are worried about his film star profile, his dash, the playboy image". "Surely," responds Cripps soothingly, "his success as supreme commander would settle all that. The man who accepted the Japanese surrender at Singapore". "Yes," says Attlee, brightening up a bit. "And for all that he's an aristocrat, he does have the common touch".



Williamson (Mountbatten) and Suzman (Edwina) and (below) Richardson and Dastor as Nehru and Gandhi

Right on cue walks in Nicol Williamson looking like an upwardly mobile bank manager who has been subverted by a financial trip-wire rather than a dazzling plenipotentiary. From then on the series is stymied by a dismal script and a gormless, impercipient dialogue ("when you started your speech you could have heard a popadum drop") which insinuates what should be made plain and spells out what is perfectly obvious. In his review titled 'A Viceregal Yawn', Byron Rogers of *The Sunday Times* complained that nobody talked in the series, they explained. "In 1946 nobody in England or India did anything but explain... When they weren't explaining they were introducing people to each other, at airports and council chambers."

With such tremendous potential about the momentous events of the transfer of power in 1947 at their command, the screenplay by David Butler based on Alan Campbell Johnson's book gives the impression of having been assembled from undigested fragments of history tomes. Any emotional dimension the drama could have achieved was nullified by the unimaginative, stilted and pedestrian techinques. Director Tom Clegg's plodding direction hardly recaptures the splendour and passion of August 1947. The Indian atmosphere is seen through

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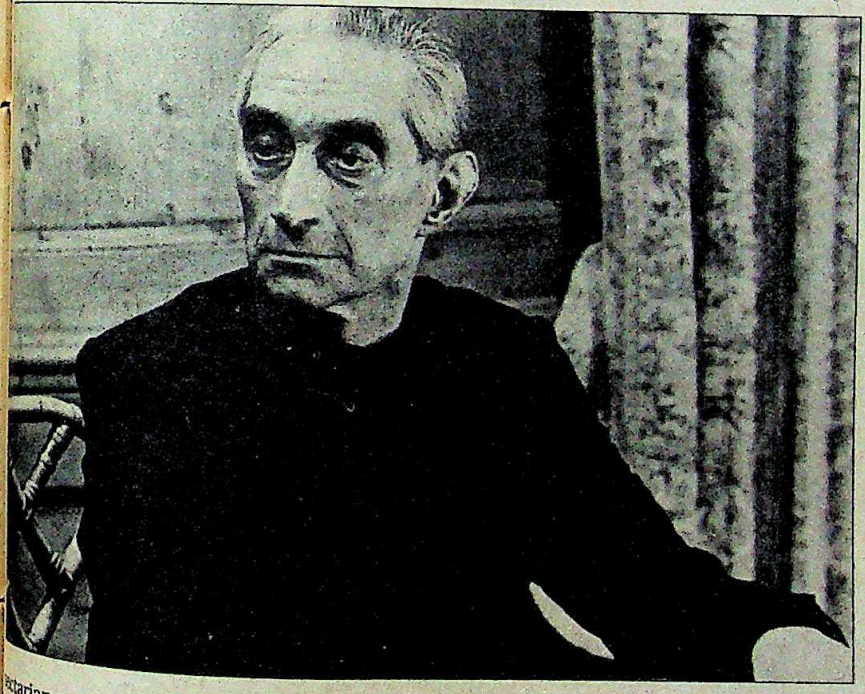
accuracy. The two chief protagonists of the film are played by local actors— Ian Richardson as Nehru and Vladek Sheybal as Jinnah. Julian Barnes, a critic for *The Observer* wrote: "A more serious ground for irritation is how in these subcontinental soaps, a tenacious imperialism haunts the casting...promotions for real Indian stops at the rank of second-in-command: though they can, of course, play as many poor, unruly, violent and superstitious natives as they like."

With his burnt-cork blackened face, Ian Richardson endows his Panditji with a lilting accent that takes on a myriad nuances. He even succeeds in making a shambling mess of Nehru's moving 'tryst with destiny' speech on the eve of Inde-

Vladak Sheybal as a baleful Jinnah (below): a grotesque caricature



tarian mayhem with scenes of horrific lence when Hindu or Sikh throats are shed or Muslim entrails disembowell- Invariably, as a ravaged village smoul- rs and a baby wails in bewilderment, dy Edwina chugs to the scene in a jeep der military escort to perform an act of mpassion on some dying soul.

With the exception of Shakespearean tress Janet Suzman's spirited portrayal Edwina and Zia Mohyeddin's effective erpretation of V.K. Menon, none of the her principal characters in the series— ehru, Jinnah, Gandhi, Patel, Lord ay, Winston Churchill, Sir Claude chinleck, all of them reciting vacuous logue—come across as real, believable racters barring for waxwork, facial

pendence. All this, however, pales into insignificance before the grotesque caricature that Sheybal attributes to Jinnah. In scene after scene, nursing a Scotch or belching cigarette smoke, Jinnah is seen with a baleful gleam in his eye, a hissing, slithery and malefic wrecker of plans in what is a thoroughly unfair interpretation.

After Ben Kingsley's finely-etched performance, Sam Dastor's Gandhi comes across as a wimpish, devitalised and powerless Mahatma, caught up in the inexorable tide of events. In a comment, *The Daily Telegraph* wrote: "Indian-born Sam Dastor contrives to make Gandhi seem like a refugee from dad's army."

The Nehru-Edwina romance as shown in the series elicited different reactions from English critics. Some found it 'touching' and felt it ought to have been the main focus of the film. A few found it difficult to believe that it ever happened. Mountbatten's executive producer George Walker told *The Daily Express* that the romance was never proven. Offered Walker " I have never met anyone who was under the bed at the time." Whilst Ian Richardson who plays Nehru had this gem of an explanation: "The whole thing was handled with extreme delicacy. Men and women never embrace publicly in India. Though they get up to all sorts of things in private as all those erotic statues show".

Flaunting their ignorance of Pandit Nehru's character, the *Daily Express* reporters wrote: "Actor Ian Richardson as the known womaniser Nehru shows the full force of his feelings only through his eyes and a most seductive sight it makes too." The Indian High Commission promptly dashed off a letter of protest to the paper at the slur on the late prime minister. The mini-series reveals nothing more explicit than Nehru cradling a shocked Edwina in his arms after she had witnessed a massacre or the exchange of long lingering glances between the two.

Mountbatten was initially offered to the BBC and it failed at its quality control. The channel's argument was, "It had dull performances" and requested "Too much money". ITV's chief buyer Leslie Halliwell reacted by arguing that the BBC's reaction was an "insult to Lord Louis". Halliwell said: "The critics may have been antipathic to the series. But if we had nine to 10 million viewers who tuned in, I would consider it a success. I grant that the principal character's role was flawed or that the riot scenes were gory. But Butler's script is realistic and effectively tells an important story of our times".

The executive producer, George Walker is an East-End boxer-turned-tycoon hitherto renowned for making Joan Collins sex epics like *The Stud* and *The Bitch*. The chief producer is a brash American Judith De Paul who tells interviewers, "You must want to win. You must. You must be fearless. And you must have an unstoppable drive to close the deal." Her current project is the story of Nazi hunter Beate Klarsfeld. She apparently admires Indira Gandhi. So the next Judith De Paul epic is on Indira Gandhi. It will be interesting to observe if her 'unstoppable drive' can overcome any objections that New Delhi's power-brokers might raise about her credentials or the project.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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UNITED STATES

Academic Stir

THE CASE has dragged on for nine months. The defendant, looking visibly haggard and tormented, leans back over his chair and with a red pen scribbles "Om" on his wife's hand, then on his own. When the time comes to defend himself, he searches the faces of those who sit in judgement and says hoarsely, like a troubled hero portrayed by Amitabh Bachchan: "Ask me for what I am guilty? Will somebody please ask what I am guilty of?"

What he is accused of is "gross neglect of duty". But the defendant, Pawan Kumar Sawhney, associate economics professor at Boston's Northeastern University, claims he is a victim of discrimination. The episode has created a stir in the academic circles of Boston, long regarded as a Mecca of higher learning in the United States.

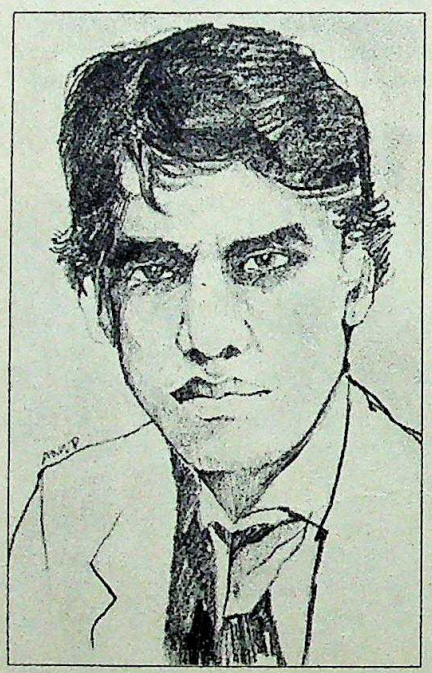
Clinging to coveted tenure rights in the face of dismissal proceedings, the 44-year-old educator is claiming victimsation by "racists" at Northeastern, the largest private university in the country, with 38,000 students and 2,500 faculty members. "They think they are God!" he told INDIA TODAY in a telephone interview: "They must be proved wrong...I have dedicated my life to this profession. I shall die defending it!"

Sawhney, a graduate of Agra and Delhi Universities demanded—and got—open hearings which landed him on the front page of the state's largest newspaper, the *Boston Globe*. He has vowed to fight dismissal with all his physical and financial resources, borrowing money and selling a side business to pay his attorney.

Dismissal actions against professors with tenure, are extremely rare at American universities except in cases of sexual harassment. It is the first case of its kind at Northeastern since the university's founding 89 years ago and the most sensational in Boston since Harvard expelled psychology researcher Timothy Leary in the '60s for espousing use of LSD to attain self-awareness and shortcuts to Nirvana.

Embarrassed Northeastern officials flatly deny the racism charge. They maintain the economics department is one of the most racially mixed on campus. (Aside from Sawhney, there is one black and one Korean out of 19 professors). But several witnesses—all students—testified to hearing department members say they wanted to get rid of "that god-damned Indian". Some said they had been asked to spy on Sawhney, who has taught full-time at Northeastern since 1971 and was tenured three years ago, to learn his political leanings and treatment of women students.

This raised the ethical question of how far a university should pry in order to investigate allegations against a faculty member. Northeastern said it resorted to monitoring his behaviour because he failed to attend meetings called



Sawhney: defiant stand

to redress complaints. (Sawhney claims his students found the administration spies so obtrusive that they plastered classroom windows over with paper.)

Charges against Sawhney include unwarranted absence from class, repeated tardiness, misuse of graduate assistants as lecturers and exam proctors and bribing students with high grades to forestall criticism. The charge of sexual harassment of two female students—was tossed out because the complaints were lodged after a two-year statute of limitations. Sawhney claims that the allegations are "pretexts" to remove him.

University Provost Arthur Smith insisted the action was not "frivolous", maintaining that Sawhney had created a situation where one professor was responsible for repeated instances of misconduct. Northeastern sought to rid itself of him because of the "totality" of these transgressions, he added.

Sawhney's ability to lecture and research was never called into question. In fact, Dean of Northeastern's Arts and Sciences College Richard Astro wrote to the university president that Sawhney "is an effective teacher, apparently well liked by most of his students".

But the dean went on to attack Sawhney's "persistent and apparently unremorseful gross neglect of duty (and) unremitting lack of cooperation with his department colleagues." And he called Sawhney's presence in the economics department "distinctly disruptive."

"The entire economics department could be populated with angels or devils and it wouldn't make a difference," said the university's attorney Jerome Medalie. "No amount of departmental hostility is responsible for his being consistently late." One semester, he was a no-show for the first week of classes for an important course on economic principles, keeping 82 first-year students sitting idle. He said he was busy helping a Ph.D. candidate and that the teaching assistant he dispatched to the class was late. His lawyer, a feisty man named George Deptula, argued that university regulations permit the use of graduate assistants to teach and nothing in the rules says a faculty member is responsible for his assistants' tardiness.

But are tardiness, asking special tasks of teaching assistants and easy grading, grounds for sacking a tenured professor? To determine this, a six-member faculty senate committee has sat through 37 hearings and taken testimony from 52 witnesses. During the emotion-packed hearings, charges of improprieties were flung back and forth.

Last fortnight, the six-member faculty panel unanimously voted that "severe disciplinary action other than dismissal" be imposed on Sawhney. They also recommended that he be placed on a two-year probationary period during which his attendance could be officially monitored. But the final decision on dismissal—which is expected around mid-May—rests with the university's board of trustees which may sack Sawhney even if the faculty panel recommends no such action.

In the end, as one faculty member who has attended most of the hearings put it, Sawhney's saga is "very sad—from every point of view". And unlike Bombay's escapist fantasies with their invariably rosy finales, no one in this drama is likely to emerge unscarred.

—AMRITA CHATTERJEE in Boston

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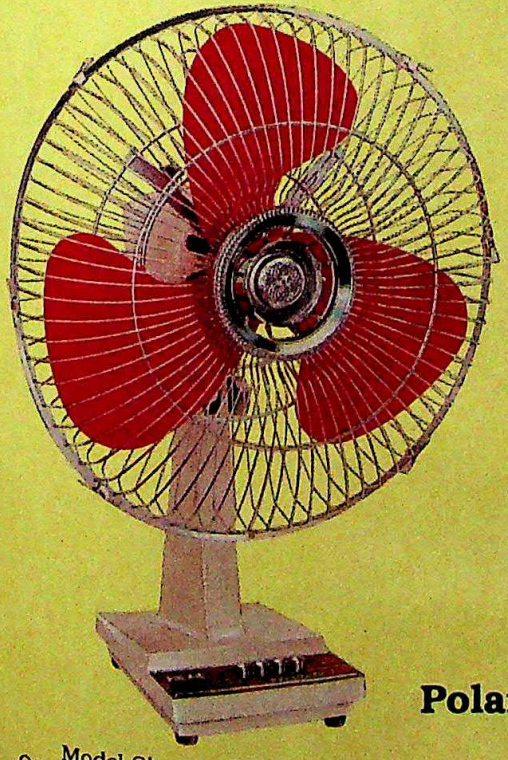

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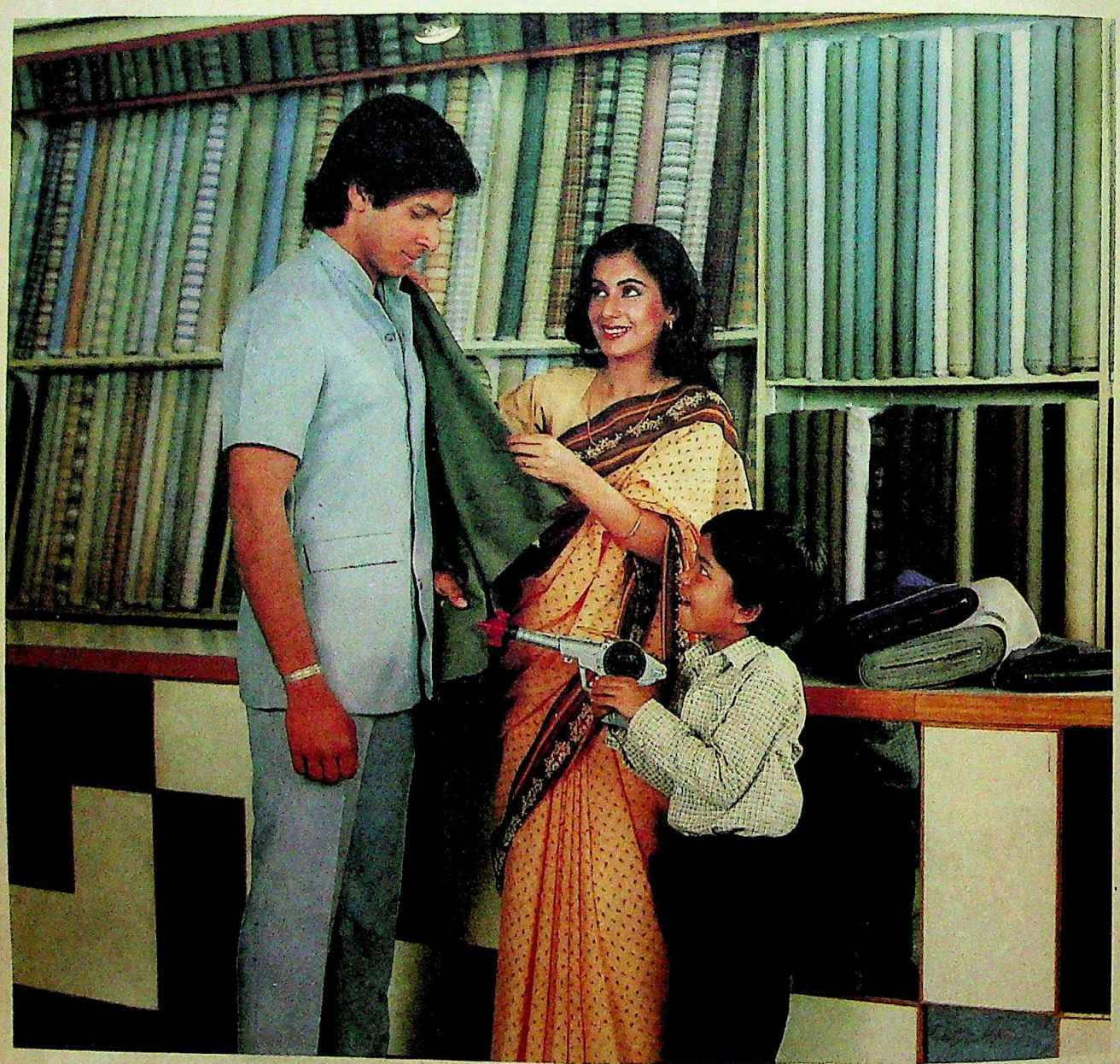

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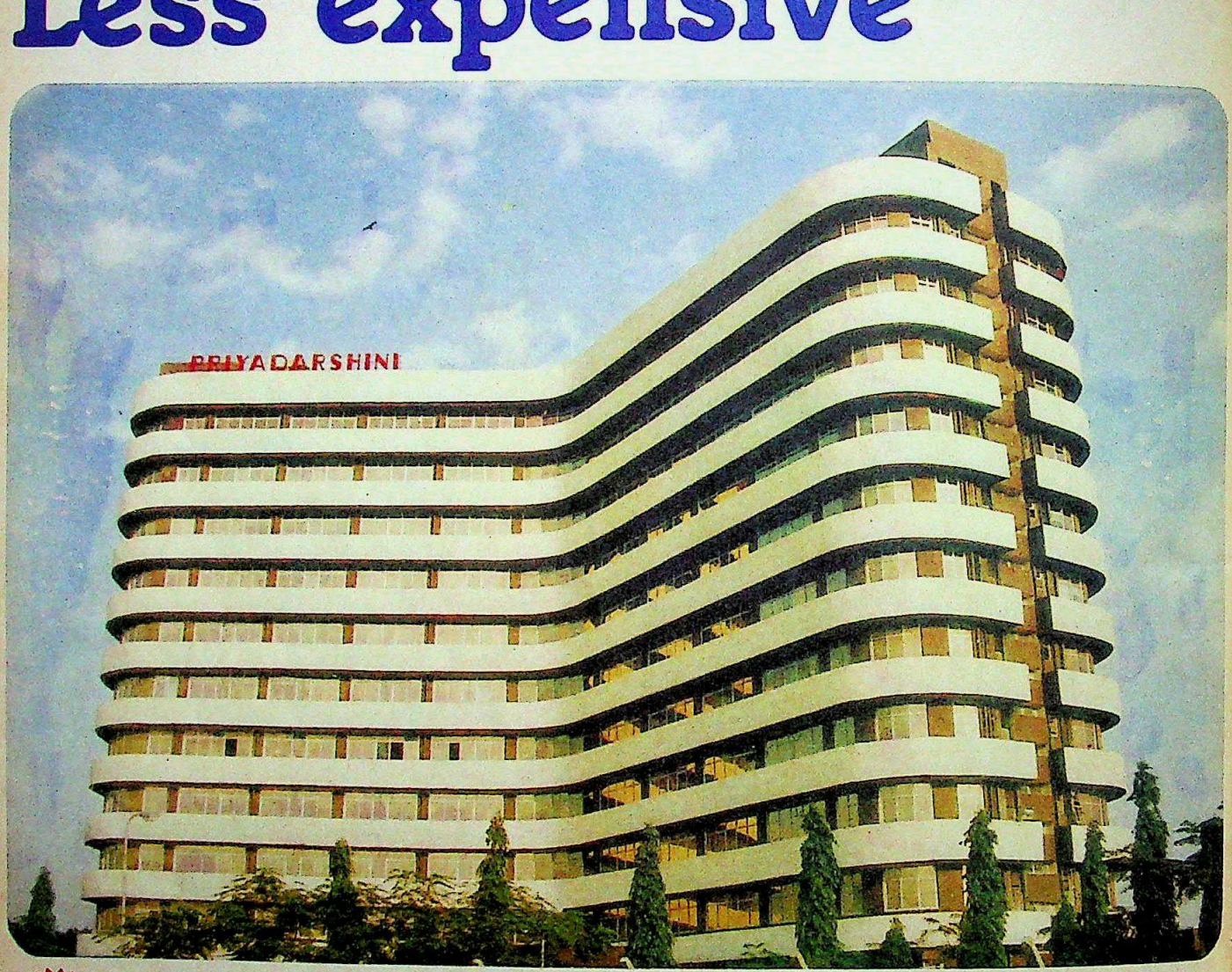

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TAMIL NADU

The Aids Scare

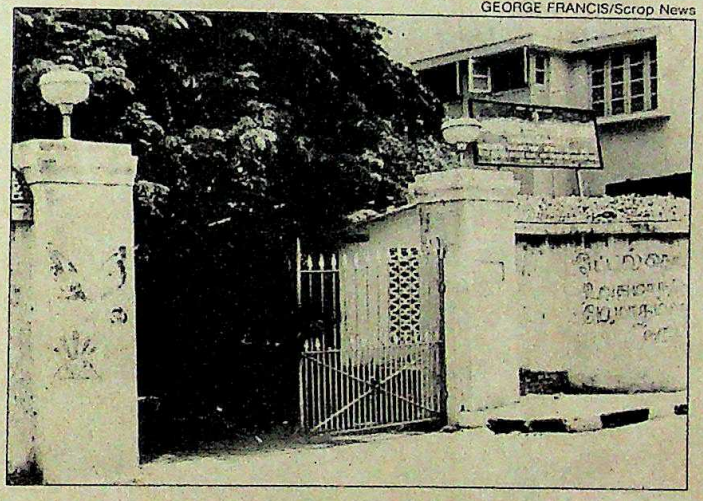
LIKE THE dreaded disease itself, it struck suddenly and without warning. Last fortnight, the news that six cases of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) had been detected in Tamil Nadu sent siesmic waves through the country. But the truth was somewhat less dramatic: blood sample analysis by the state medical establishment and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had confirmed the presence of AIDS antibodies, and not the virus—which is the real killer—in the six patients, all of whom happen to be prostitutes. What added to the panic and raised nightmares of an AIDS outbreak in the rest of the country was the fact that Tamil Nadu is perhaps the only state which has an active AIDS-detection programme.

Union Health Minister Mohsina Kidwai's devastating revelation in Parliament last fortnight destroyed the myth that AIDS is confined to the western hemisphere. First reported in 1981, AIDS (or more particularly the Human T-Lymphotropic Virus III (HTLV) and related viruses) destroys the body's natural defence system. A cure has yet to be found for the disease which has afflicted 22,000 people the world over.

In the Indian context, there was some comfort in the fact that only antibodies were present in the blood samples of the patients. Said Dr S. Arumugam, dean of the Madras Medical College (MMC): "What we have so far sighted is the shadow of the thief and not the thief himself. The presence of the antibodies only indicates that these women had been exposed to the virus at some time in their lives. It does not prove that they have been infected by the virus."

Credit for detecting the cases goes largely to the state Government, which in mid-1985 constituted a five-member committee headed by Dr C.P. Lakshminarayanan, director of the Institute of Microbiology attached to the MMC, to collect blood samples from high-risk sections of the state population and analyse them for AIDS. Even before the Central Government's circular to the same effect was sent to the state governments late last year, the committee collected over 200 samples from prostitutes, suspected homosexuals, drug addicts and patients who had undergone multiple blood transfusion.

GEORGE FRANCIS/Scrop News



The vigilance home in Madras (above); and (top) Hande and Ramalingaswamy

After preliminary screening, 126 of these were sent to the special AIDS reference laboratory at the Christian Medical College (CMC) in Vellore. Antibodies were detected in 11 samples. The findings were reported to the ICMR. The ICMR conducted a few more tests and passed them on to the National Institute of Health in Bethesda in the US, which confirmed the presence of antibodies in six samples taken from prostitutes now remanded to Tamil Nadu's vigilance home for women in Madras

The institute is trying to culture the virus to prove that it exists in the blood samples. It will take six weeks to confirm the presence of the virus in the women. Fortunately for the women, doctors attending on them have not found any of the common symptoms of AIDS—weight loss, fever, cough, skin lesions and overwhelming lethargy. Assured a doctor: "They are leading very normal and healthy lives in the home." He, however, admitted that the virus takes between one to five years to manifest itself. But it may well be that the HTLV-III is not present in them, or that it is a related virus which has gone into their systems.

But what has soured the AIDS drama and upset the Tamil Nadu Government is the seeming attempt by the ICMR and its Director-General, Dr V. Ramalingaswami, to take the credit for the efforts they had put in. State Health Minister Dr H.V.Hande was also piqued with Dr Ramalingaswami for having broken the news in Delhi after expressly requesting the state Government not to make the matter public because final confirmation was awaited from Bethesda. Charged Hande: "It was the ICMR director-general who asked me not to publicise the preliminary findings at Bethesda but to await the final results of the attempt to isolate and culture the virus. And then he returns to Delhi and makes the announcement himself without having the courtesy to inform me." Ramalingaswami, however, maintained that he kept Hande informed of developments right through.

The sense of injury deepened when Ramalingaswami told a news agency that two of the women had escaped from the remand home. The state Government promptly denied this and investigations confirmed that the women were still in quarantine.

Whether the six women are really harbouring the AIDS virus or not, the scare it has created has prompted the Central and state governments to tighten safety measures. As a first step, a high-level committee under the cabinet secretary has been set up to decide whether foreigners entering India should produce an "AIDS-free certificate" or face tests in this country. Blood banks have already been advised to screen all professional donors with special AIDS detection kits which are likely to be imported. If all this smacks of overkill, the heavy toll in AIDS-related deaths abroad is a pointer to the fact that India, having partly joined the dubious club, can no longer afford any complacency on the issue.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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WATER SCARCITY

The Great Th

DESPITE massive efforts to develop rural India, hardly any effort has been made till recently to provide India's teeming millions with a basic necessity—drinking water. A devastating drought and a blistering summer have only aggravated their miseries. To assess the magnitude of the crisis, Principal Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA *and photographer* PRASHANT PANJIAR *toured several districts in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka while bureau reports from Jaipur, Madras, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad added a national perspective. The report:*

AT DAWN the tabled plateaus of central Maharashtra, stripped bare of tree cover, look like windblown sphinxes. A flock of parrots wings its way into the distance. A frisky pup teases a buffalo but is discouraged by the shake of its horns. Outside the thatched huts in the hamlet of Peth, 50 km from Pune, men sleep sprawled on the ground, their faces covered with torn sheets in an attempt to shut out the sun. But even as they snore, the women are up, the bronze *matkas* on their heads glinting in the sun as they trudge across barren fields. The jingle of their anklets is soon joined by the harsh rhythmic clang of a nearby handpump.

Silhouetted against the early morning sun, Savithri Bai Sabajikala grips the handle of the pump and begins her macabre dance. She uses her body weight to push the handle down, her feet dangle in the air momentarily, then settle on the ground for the next heave. Up. Down. Up. Down. The clang of the handpump keeps beat with her gasping breath. After 20 such heaves, one brass pot is full. Another 20 pushes and the next *matka* is full. Savithri Bai has to make eight such trips daily to collect enough water for her family of three and their four bulls, two cows, two hens and a dog.

At noon, about 500 km north from Savithri Bai's hut, the sun is like a fireball over Razia, a tribal village perched on a series of hillocks in Madhya Pradesh. Balancing two pots on her head and sweating profusely, Shobli Bai wends her way to a 50-ft-deep well, 2 km from her home. She walks down roughly-hewn steps to the bottom of the well where a small puddle of dirty green water is all that is left. It takes 15 minutes for her to fill her two pots, then she makes her way up the precarious steps. Shobli Bai makes this trip three or four times a day. She washes clothes only once in a fortnight and a bath is a distant monthly luxury. Because of the constant trips down to the well she cannot work, and this denies her needy family the nine rupees a day that she would otherwise have earned.

By evening, 1,000 km from Razia, the setting sun, still uncomfortably hot, tinges the giant boulders in Avani with a reddish hue, making it look like a Martian landscape rather than a hamlet in Karnataka's Kolar district. Chennamma, Lakshmi, Shantamma and Kalpana, all daughters of Lingamma Seshappa, walk up a steep slope to a small pond in the crevice of two giant boulders. They cover their pots with a strip of torn saree that acts as a crude filter and scoop the water with a plastic bowl to fill the pots. Then they wend their way slowly down.

For millions of women in the country, from the rocky mountains of the Himalayas to the barren table lands of Central India and the denuded forests of the Western ghats, the day begins and ends with the endless struggle for water. Dried up by a devastating drought that has laid bare half the country's parched land area and by a remorseless summer, water has become a precious and increasingly scarce commodity.

As the summer advances, the misery rises with the mercury. In villages and towns, almost every vessel—from jerricans to kerosene tins and drums—is used to store water. In Manchal near Indore, Chain Singh uses his bullock-cart to bring two drums of water every day from a pump house 4 km from his home because all the borewells in the village have dried up. In Kutheri village in Karnataka's Kolar district, Lakshmiamma Gopalappa has to stay awake for most of the night to get water from the village well, because there is an endless queue waiting to get at the small puddle which is all that is left. In Konri Ki Dhaani, a desert town in Rajasthan, Kalla Ram buys a tanker-load of water for Rs 80 to provide water for his family of 10 every fortnight. And half the

Women drawing water from the depths in Madhya Pradesh

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at thirst

Dried up by a devastating drought, water has become a precious and increasingly scarce commodity.

ple in Narayangao, in Maharashtra's district, are digging holes in a river to fill their pots with the trickle of er that seeps through.

As the problem has worsened, state rnments have resorted to desperate asures to provide water for the thirsty ons. For the badly-hit Rajkot town, Gujarat Government has commis- ed special water trains at an annual of Rs 7.5 crores to supply 6.5 lakh ns a day. In the dry deserts of Raja- an, tankers cart water to 650 villages y day. In Maharashtra, 200 tankers been hired to pump water into dried in 950 villages. And in many dis- of Madhya Pradesh bullock-carts, primarily used to transport grain, been hired by the Government to water.

The search for water is feverish. Every droves of geologists in jeeps move into ges surveying potential sites for sink- borewells. Trucks equipped with borewell equipment have become almost as ubiquitous as bullock-carts. The steady thud of borewells being sunk mingles with more familiar rustic sounds. In the past six years, more than six lakh borewells have been sunk by various state governments at a staggering cost of over Rs 2,500 crore in what has been the most massive attempt ever in the country's history to provide essential water to India's 600 million-strong rural population.

And yet, in what seems to be one of the biggest paradoxes, the great thirst for water only increases. Despite such massive investments, almost half the total rural population still does not have adequate and safe drinking water facilities. Even for the other half that does, the supply is a measly 10 to 20 litres per head per day. That is only half the national standard of 40 and way, way below the World Health Organisation's recommendation of 70 litres. In more usual terms, every time someone in a city pulls the flush he uses up the amount of water that a villager gets for his entire day's needs.

Only last year the Union Government boasted that it had provided 2.91 lakh villages with drinking water, out of the 3.01 lakh villages that had been declared 'problem villages' in 1980. But even as state public health engineers patted themselves on the back, the Planning Commission came up with the astounding discovery that one lakh more villages had become waterless: because of the dropping water table, the drought and the drying up of traditional wells.

Last fortnight it was not just Bombay's humidity that was making Maharashtra's Rural Development Secretary P. Subrahmanyam uncomfortable. Before him lay the results of a survey of villages in the state suffering from acute water scarcity: the number was a staggering 22,639. Only last year, Maharashtra had reported that it had provided water at a cost of Rs 350 crore to 12,016 of the 12,935 villages that had been declared problem villages. Shaking his head in sheer despair, Subrahmanyam said: "It looks as if we are back to square one." The worst irony of the situation is that even as central and state governments pour more money than ever before into water supply schemes, new developments render waterless even those villages that never had a water problem.

It is a situation that has cropped up repeatedly in state after state. Madhya Pradesh, for instance, said it had provided drinking water to 23,845 (or 95 per cent) of its 24,944 problem villages. But early this year, the state Government admitted that the number had again ballooned to 19,723 villages. Uttar Pradesh, which had provided 27,143 villages with drinking water facilities and has not been hit by drought, found to its dismay that 19,023 new villages had turned problem ones.

As the number of villages suffering from an acute water scarcity has mounted

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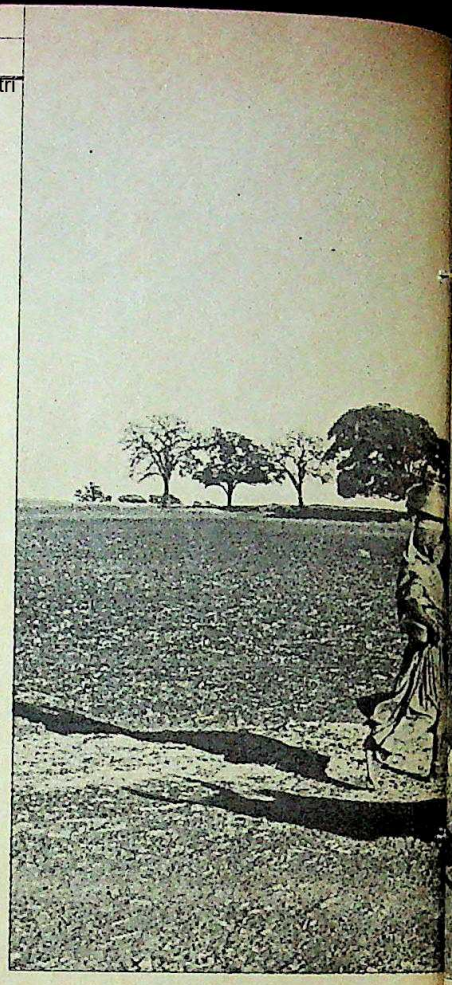
with alarming rapidity, the country's goal of providing safe drinking water facilities for the entire rural population by 1991 is turning out to be a hopeless mirage. Early this year the Government was forced to concede that it could cover no more than 85 per cent of the rural population by the end of the decade. And even then the water supply provided would "just meet the bare necessities", as N.K. Seth, Planning Commission adviser, admits.

Probably no official feels the heat of the water supply problem as much as Rural Development Secretary D. Bandyopadhyay, who said frankly: "It isn't as if we are not doing anything about the water problem. We are. But to say that we have solved it is all hogwash. The problem is so huge and resources so scarce that it seems only to grow." While his department pressed for Rs 7,500 crore to be allocated in the seventh plan to provide water in all the villages, the Government sanctioned only Rs 3,500 crore. Naturally only half the target will be met.

It is not as if the Government's massive efforts in the past six years have gone waste. In fact, the handpump programme has been the single most successful method for providing villages with at least one safe water supply source. Since groundwater is usually uncontaminated, it saves engineers the trouble of installing a purification pump and also ensures perennial supply. Thousands of villages across the country are already benefiting from this, and in many drought-hit districts where all the traditional water sources have dried up the handpump is the village's most precious asset.

A rural woman trudges miles for water in Maharashtra



A typical example of how the handpump has brought a quiet revolution into the lives of many women is at Madhurghatta, in Kolar district. Before the Government installed two handpumps a couple of years ago the women had to trudge two km to fetch water from a distant well. But now Yellamma, a mother of two, said: "It now takes me only five minutes to get water from the handpump and I find time to cut grass, feed the cattle and work in the fields."

So in some ways the situation is getting better. After all, half the rural population does have drinking water today, against barely 31 per cent six years ago: the reason for India's performance being rated as outstanding midway through the United Nations' International Drinking Water and Sanitation

WATER-BORNE DISEASES

Heavy Toll

WHAT happens when there is no safe drinking water? Every year, nearly 1.5 million children die in India from diarrhoeal diseases. The World Health Organisation points out that water-borne diseases like diarrhoea, cholera and guinea worm result in the loss of three million mandays every year, while the cost of medical treatment and the production losses due to these estimated at a staggering Rs 450 crore.

That's not all. Eighty per cent of the communicable diseases in the country are spread by contaminated water supply. Some 13 million people in 11,736 villages spread over seven states run the risk of contracting guinea worm, an obnoxious parasite that lodges itself in the skin and then erupts painfully after six weeks. In addition, a large number of villages in 10 states have a high fluoride content in their water, causing malformed bones and broken teeth.

An old woman struck by fluorosis

BHAWAN SINGH

Nowhere is the threat of fluorosis greater than in what is known as the "Banka Patti"(bent strips) belt, spanning eight districts in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Roughly 3.5 lakh inhabitants have already been crippled and the only way to prevent the malady from claiming more victims is to sink borewells in freshwater sites. But that is easier said than done.

On the guinea worm front, the news is more heartening. In the seven affected states—Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu—measures are being taken to convert the large number of step wells responsible for the spread of the disease into pulley wells. But the task is stupendous, because there are 11,736 villages in the country affected by guinea worm, and the water scarcity has hampered efforts.

—RAMESH MENON

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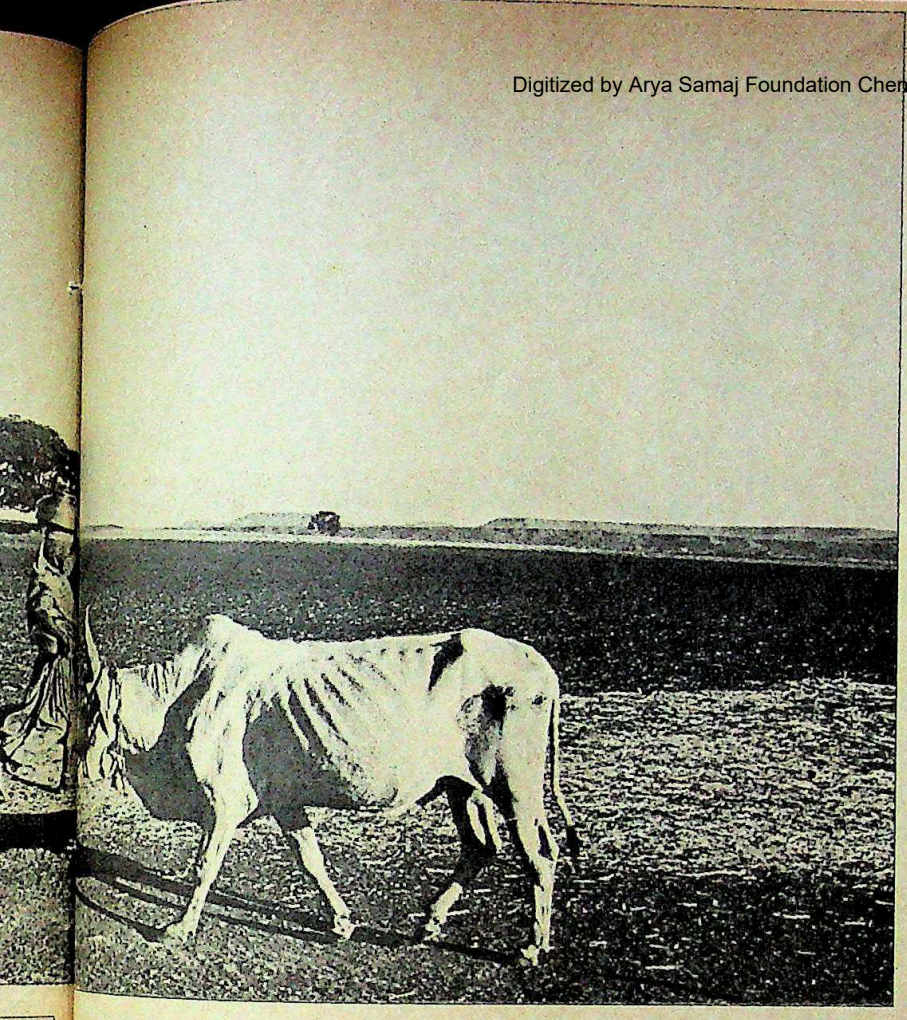

Despite massive investments, almost half the total rural population still does not have adequate and safe drinking water facilities.

ale. But the statistics can be misleading what use is one well in a village of a thousands and an area that could be ad over as much as 14 sq km as is metimes the case in Rajasthan? In any the statistics mask the fact that gh there is water, it is only five or 10 s per head per day. Finally, of course, ces that were once wet are going dry. Reclassifying the statistics often gives a r indication of the ground-level truth. es of water supply, collected on the of not villages but hamlets, showed in Karnataka (which has the most ssful borewell programme in the ntry) 6,458 hamlets had no water ply. In Maharashtra the figure was 16 hamlets, and in Tamil Nadu 00. And if there was only one dpump in the village in many inses Harijans were not allowed to use it. Government is now trying to provide a dpump for every 150 people in a ge, and to try and ensure that no one walk more than half a kilometre (the r goal was water within 1.6 km). tics compiled on the basis of these criteria will almost certainly show r less than half the rural population proper access to water.

The handpump scheme itself, meane, has run into problems because of the severe drought, which has resulted in the water table falling in most states. In Rajasthan, the water level in borewells has dropped by more than 20 metres, in Karnataka it averages five and in Madhya Pradesh it is as much as 10 to 15 metres. Now, in a development that would be funny if it wasn't so tragic, the Government's engineers are busy painting the words *Paani Kam* (little water) on many of the handpumps. In Maharashtra, where the water table has dropped by eight metres, engineers estimate that 25 per cent of the borewells have gone dry, while still others yield very little water. In Tamil Nadu 10 to 15 per cent of the handpumps yield no water.

EACH handpump costs Rs 25,000. In Maharashtra alone, with 20,000 borewells dry, that amounts to a colossal investment of Rs 50 crore gone completely waste. And with drought almost becoming the rule rather the exception (there have been seven droughts in 20 years), the implications for the future of millions of villagers who now have water and soon won't are frightening.

For villages that have come to depend on handpumps, the effects of the great dry are devastating. Water queues have become a common sight, with people waiting for hours for their turn. At Rasta Jakkasandra in Karnataka only one of the two borewells works and water is pumped from it round the clock. Fights among the women over water have become so frequent that the panchayat arbitrates on these disputes and levies fines up to Rs 25 on those who jump the queues. At Amzera in Madhya Pradesh, water is now rationed and each person is allowed to fill only a meagre two pots. Kashiram, who is in charge of maintaining a numbering system said: "We get five litres of kerosene and five litres of water."

The queues and limited availability at each well mean that in most villages people are forced to go to three or four sources to meet their water needs. They use the handpump to get water for drinking and cooking, while for bathing they go to a distant well. For washing clothes the women go to still another well.

Planners have also realised that the problem of providing water for domestic needs is far, far more complex than just ramming borewells all over the country. Although engineers argue that the drinking water schemes will tap barely 5 per cent of the country's total ground-water resources, already there are worrying reports from several districts that irrigation tubewells have made several handpumps go dry.

Last fortnight Sunil Kumar, the bearded collector of Dhar, was roused at 5 a.m. by a caller who complained that he could not use his toilet because there was no water. Kumar, retaining his sense of humour in a situation where most collectors would have called for the superintendent of police, told him: "Hang on, I'm bringing you a bucketful." Kumar could have done little else because the four deep tubewells sunk years ago to supply the town its water have gone dry after farmers sank irrigation tubewells near these.

With the villages being electrified in a

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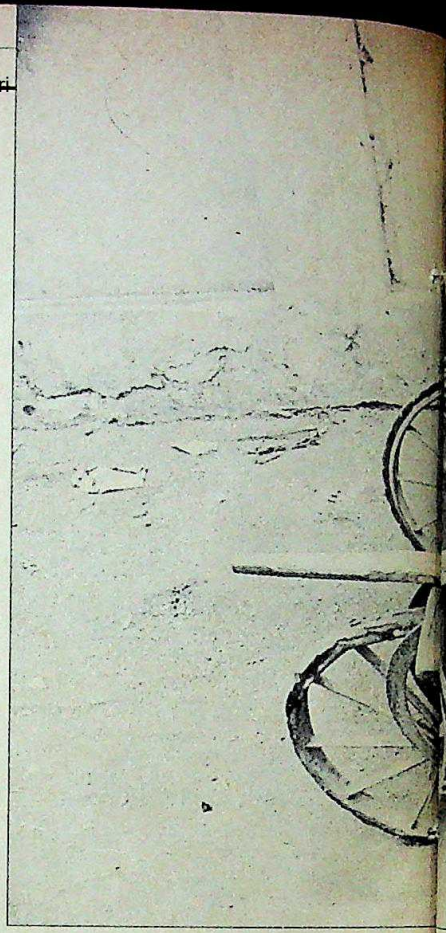
big way, many of the rich farmers now sink irrigation wells regularly. In Gujarat's coastal districts, over-exploitation of ground-water resources for irrigation has led to almost half the handpumps yielding saline water because of an ingress of sea water. In all, 1.2 million hectares of land have turned saline, affecting 1.3 million people in 779 villages. In Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district, which saw 8,000 irrigation pump-sets energised last year, officials simply could not strike water in Hingangaon town, where a large number of irrigation tubewells exist. The town now spends Rs 9 lakh a year to bring water by tankers.

The conflict between irrigation and drinking water is certain to grow. Ground-water is the most widely tapped source for irrigation, accounting for half the country's total irrigated area. In the past six years, 1.25 million irrigation tubewells have been sunk all over the country. Already farmers have tapped 25 per cent of the total groundwater resources available, and in the next five years the Central Groundwater Board plans to tap another 15 per cent.

Several officials are now pressing for a law that regulates the digging of tubewells. Says Bandyopadhyay: "The time has come to treat water as a mined commodity. We can't afford to have a laissez faire policy for water." But getting the states to pass laws is going to be difficult when big farmers form a powerful lobby. And although Gujarat and Tamil Nadu have passed laws to regulate the digging of tubewells, neither state has enforced the law.

Two major problems negate the efforts to provide drinking water. One is the burgeoning population that adds more thirsty mouths every year than the Government can quench. The other is the massive deforestation all over the country, which has resulted in a frightening 1.3 million hectares of forest being mowed down every year. Nowhere is the devastation of forests so visible as in the villages, where the swathes of bare land stretch endlessly. So heavy has been the tree cutting in places that there is no shade for either man or beast for miles on end, and stretches of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra that were lush with tree cover now look like the deserts of Rajasthan. With the foliage gone, the rainwater runoff is high and the recharging of both borewells and old dug wells has dropped considerably. Most of the rivers go dry in summer and are now used as public latrines. And the wells get steadily deeper: 100 feet, 200 feet, 300 feet, even 600 feet. At Machar near Pune, the levels have dropped so low and the rope used to draw water so long that people have to run 70 feet with the rope to pull the bucket out.

With the traditional sources of water, like rivers and wells, drying up six months after the monsoon, most villages face a shortage of water for the rest of the year on a recurring annual basis, and as a permanent feature of their changing lives. Indeed, while many villages have lights in



Father and son collecting water in Rajasthan

HYDERABAD

Bucket Battle

HOUSEWIFE Shobha Rao calls it the battle of the buckets. Ali Pasha, an ageing cycle mechanic in the old city, describes it as the "the curse of the Gods". Hyderabad is going through the worst water crisis in its history, and the city's 2.5 million residents get water for two hours every second day. For a while, it was even as bad as once in three days. The authorities had said that a rotation system would ensure sufficient pressure in the water lines, but what has been going up is the Hyderabadis' blood pressure.

An overwhelming majority of Hyderabadis now depend on 4,000 public taps for their water, while 170 tankers ply the city supplying water. All manner of touts have surfaced, charging 50 paise for a bucket. "Water rickshaws" sell a barrel of water for Rs 3. The enterprising have mounted tanks on lorries and are doing brisk business by selling a full load for anything between Rs 100 and Rs 250.

The repeated failure of the monsoons has resulted in a sharp drop in the water level in the the Osmanagar and Himayatsagar reservoirs and in the Manjira river barrage. But the waterworks authorities are to blame too. They made no move to improve their services in the past decade. Manjira was intended to be the main source from 1983. But heavy silting and erratic flow have made it an undependable source and another dam has to be built upstream. The flow of funds for it, however, has been extremely slow. Now they have to spend Rs 130 crores to improve the water supply by 1991. But that is still five years away and till then there is no relief.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

Crowds at a water tanker

RAJASTHAN

Deser

A VILLAGE has its o over s ng the official each villag fficials may c ave "covere ius, but this to the families ant hamlets.

In Agolai, adhpur, the sible from th obviously a v een "covered milies have to on one way ori ki dhaa m the villag s a water pip

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One reason for this acute situation has been the failure of planners to recognise the problem and tackle it early enough.

r homes and even television sets in e cases, most of them do not have per water supply.

One reason for this acute situation has n the failure of planners to recognise problem and tackle it early enough. Drinking water got virtually no money through the first few five-year plans—less than 1 per cent of the total outlay, in some cases—and even when the money was provided, most of it went to the cities. The disparities are shocking. Madras, which has only 10 per cent of Tamil Nadu's population, has spent Rs 50 crore on water supply since 1980. Per head, those living in the state's villages have got barely a tenth of that in the form of investment in drinking water supply. And the water used by city dwellers is heavily subsidised. While it costs the Bombay Municipal Corporation Rs 8 to supply 10,000 litres of water, Bombayites have to pay only Rs 3. In the next five years Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Bangalore and Madras are going to spend Rs 2,000 crore to augment their water supply needs. That is half the total amount set aside in the seventh plan for rural water supply for the whole country.

The irony of it all is that despite these massive investments in the cities, places like Hyderabad face unprecedented water

RAJASTHAN

Desert Mirage

A VILLAGE in the Thar desert often has its *dhaanis* or hamlets spread over several kilometres, mak- ng the official goal of one water source n each village a mockery. fficials may claim that they ave "covered" a village hus, but this brings no relief o the families living in dis- ant hamlets.

In Agolai, 47 km west of adhpur, the water tank is isible from the main road. It obviously a village that has been "covered", yet half its mmunities have to go seven to 14 m one way to get water. Konri ki dhaani, is 10 km om the village proper and as a water pipe from Agolai. But the pipes have been dry since they were installed a decade ago. In Manmoron ki dhaani, the government-constructed underground tank is bone dry. So half of Agolai's population has had to buy water for most of the year ever since they can remember. The village even has three privately-owned tractor tankers. Kalla Ram of Konri says he pays Rs 70 to Rs 80 every fortnight for a tanker-load of water to meet the needs of his family of 10.

The Government is supposed to provide tankers, but supply is erratic. Of 39 tankers, 12 are perennially out of action. Handpumps invariably fail and piped water is at least 30 times costlier. In many areas tube-wells have to be sunk to a depth of 600 feet, double that of other districts. A common sight in the region is people putting their mouths to leaking pipelines for a little water. Relief for Rajasthan's woes may come with the seven lift schemes of the Indira Gandhi canal, but this vision of abundant water is several years, perhaps decades, away.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

Transporting water in the Thar desert

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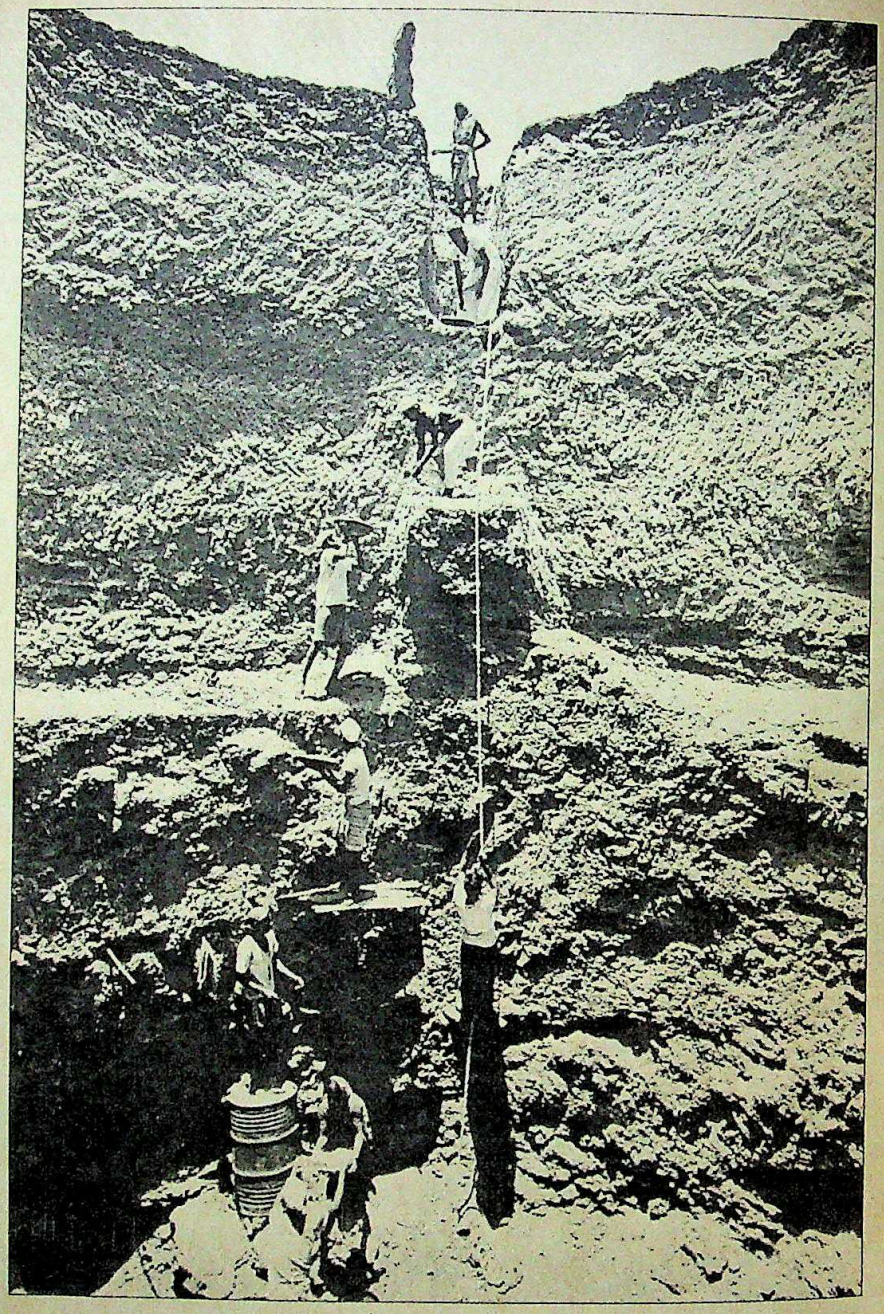
If the drought keeps recurring with the present frequency, the water table in the country will continue to drop and more villages may, in fact, be waterless than is the case today.

shortages *(see box)*. And the smaller towns are in many cases even worse off. In Rajasthan, for instance, a survey done in June 1985 showed that out of its 192 towns only two were providing 40 litres of water per capita daily. In Karnataka, two-thirds of the 243 towns fail to meet the minimum supply standards.

But even the habitations that are supposedly well off in relation to water, according to official statistics, face problems that few governments can handle. In Kishangarh in Rajashthan's Ajmer district, for instance, water was piped five years ago from tubewells bored 16 km away. But this year the source has dried up and the pipeline had to be extended by another 17 km to another source.

Realising that the problem is getting out of hand in both villages and towns, the Government recently launched a "Technology Mission" comprising 22 agencies that includes planners, engineers, environmentalists and scientists to work out low-cost methods for providing water supply. Among their plans is to revive the vast number of traditional sources that have gone dry, apart from devising cheaper ways of providing water as well as purifying it. Said Bandyopadhyay, whose department is the nodal agency for the mission: "It's a bid to stretch the rupee a little longer."

Meanwhile, measures to conserve water are already under way in several states. In Madhya Pradesh, officials have realised that the only way to increase water supply is to have the land afforested and to build small tanks that will catch the water when it rains. In Karnataka, engineers are now devising mini-piped water schemes in which deep tubewells with a discharge equivalent to four handpumps are being sunk, and the water is supplied to villages at the same cost as handpumps. And in Andhra Pradesh, officials have got down to one of the most crucial aspects of the borewell programme: maintenance. Women and youth in villages are given postage-paid green cards to inform engineers when a borewell breaks down; a mobile mechanic team is supposed to reach the village in a couple of days. Engineers now boast that 90 per cent of their borewells are in reasonable working condition.



Digging deep in Maharashtra: falling water level

But even the most optimistic planner is unwilling to paint a rosy picture. Projections into the very popular 21st century suggest that villages may finally get the stipulated per capita supply of 40 litres a day, but will still stay well short of the WHO standard of 70 litres. And they will still be using handpumps. In other words, each villager will have to fill four pots of water and carry it home every day. Sanitation facilities will remain minimal. And, of course, if the current rate of deforestation continues, and the droughts keep recurring with their present frequency, the water table in the country will continue to drop, and more villages may in fact be waterless than is the case today.

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S.V. ANJAN BABU

Students at the closed college gates: "financial misadventure"

MEDICAL COLLEGES

Test Case

WHEN medical students at the Central Christian Institute of Medical Sciences in Hyderabad showed up for classes last fortnight, they found the gates shut and armed police standing by. In a swift and sudden move the previous day, the Andhra Pradesh police had 'sealed' the college after the Supreme Court, in a damning verdict, described it as a "financial adventure" for its sponsors, the Andhra Pradesh Christian Medical Education Society (APCMES), and a "financial misadventure" for its 177 students.

In their ruling, the three-judge bench comprising Justices O. Chinnappa Reddy, G.L. Oza and N.K. Singh, summed up the attempt to run the college as a "brazen and bizarre exploitation of the naive and the foolish ready-to-be-duped aspirants for admission to professional collegiate courses, behind the smokescreen of the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice". The judges said the state Government had done right in refusing permission to start the college or grant it university affiliation.

But an incensed APCMES Chairman C.A. Adams charged that "the Government and the police have no right to interfere as the college represents the wishes of the 45 lakh Christians in the state. While respecting the courts, we will appeal to the president and the prime minister to show how we are being deprived of the rights of the minorities." Trapped in the middle were the students. As one student, Rahmatullah, protested: "We have paid huge donations ranging between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 2 lakh to learn medicine. Our hope is that Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao will show some mercy."

The appeals were eloquent enough but failed to address the fact that APCMES is a classic example of a college being launched without official sanction, and with no affiliation to any university. More important, there was no recognition from the Indian Medical Council—which alone can certify that the college has the requisite facilities. APCMES had claimed recognition on the grounds that it was a minority institution.

The dubious nature of its claims was set out in blunt prose by the judges, who noted in their judgement: "Every letter written by the society, whether to the Central or state Government or the university contained false and misleading statements."

Unfortunately, the unscruplous sponsors can only be charged with taking capitation fees—which are banned in the state—and cheating. Police said that "advance deposits" collected from students were never refunded and an officer observed: "Parents knowing fully well that the college lacks recognition or affiliation, pay the money and get their child admitted. They should be booked for abetting this crime."

In fact, the capitation fee was banned in 1983 by the Telugu Desam ministry which made it mandatory to admit students from the merit list of a common state-wide examination. Said state Health Minister Dr M.S.S. Koteswara Rao: "Our interest is to produce good doctors and not costly quacks. This is possible only by improving medical education and that is why all nine colleges which we took over in April, are part of the University of Health Sciences."

The Deccan Medical College, started in August 1984 by the Darus Salaam Education trust of the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM), also took hefty fees. MIM President Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi got permission for starting the college from the short-lived Bhaskara Rao ministry and Osmania University. Subsequently, university officials found the facilities offered by the college inadequate and compelled them to cut the student intake from 100 to 50. Results improved but the fee was also hiked from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh.

Later however, investigations by the crime branch revealed a transfer of funds from the college accounts to the MIM. Said a police officer: "Although the transfers are on record, some of them were apparently done to siphon funds out of the college accounts. Even admissions were not wholly on merit or confined to those from minority communities for whom the college was started."

The Government is dead set against any addition to the nine private colleges. Said Koteswara Rao: "There are 2.3 seats for every 100,000 persons in the state as against the national average of 1.75. Among those who have passed out, about 5,000 are jobless. We have no great demand for doctors to increase the number of seats." So if all goes well, the two private managements will not be let off the hook unless, of course, the chief minister's fear of alienating the state's Christian and Muslim communities takes precedence over other factors.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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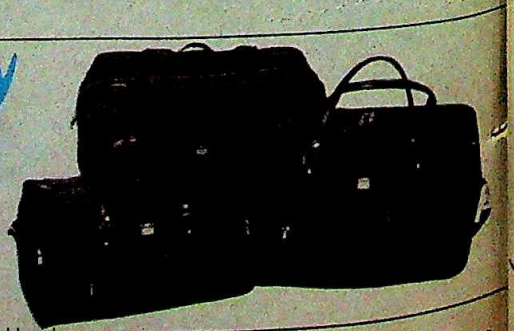

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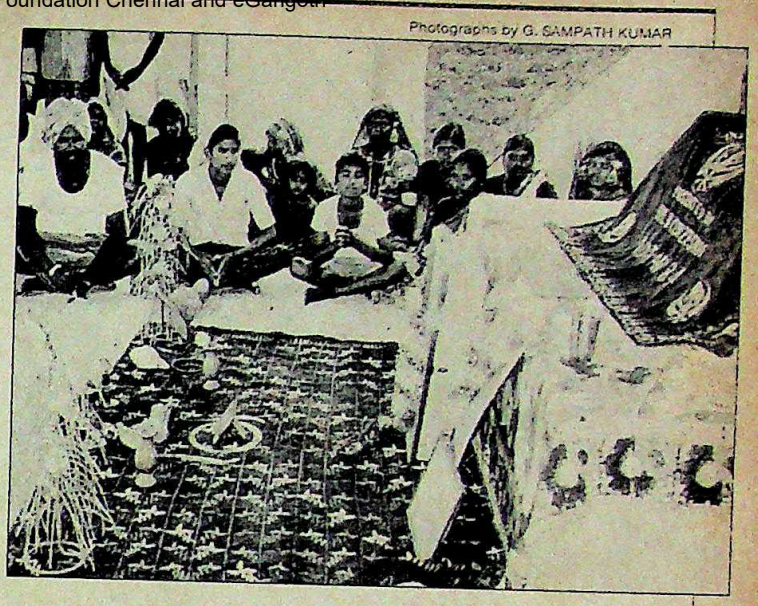

Photographs by G. SAMPATH KUMAR

Banjara Sikhs (left); and Pritam Singh's family at prayer: social stirring

BANJARAS

Embracing Sikhism

LINGAYA Naik, 14, religiously attends the local gurudwara though, as he admits: "I do not know what Sikhism means." His ignorance is understandable. Naik is a young banjara boy, one of a growing number that Sikhism is slowly but surely drawing into its fold from the three million banjaras of Andhra Pradesh.

The predominantly pastoral banjaras have kept a low profile for centuries, despite isolated cases moving to towns for a living as cheap construction labour. And life has remained unchanged even for them—just above or below the poverty line. Now, however, they seem to be in search of a new identity, and increasingly turning to Sikhism.

Surprisingly, the phenomenon is not sudden or catalysed by any social happenstance. According to Pritam Singh, the illiterate banjara-Sikh strongman of Raja Naik Tanda (Tanda being the normal Banjara habitat distinct from a village): "We have been told that the ninth and tenth Sikh gurus, Tegh Bahadurji and Gobind Singhji, are our own gurus and that is why we have adopted Sikhism." Ravindra Naik, a former Congress(I) minister and a banjara, agrees, but maintains that "nothing substantive has been found in historical records" to support this.

At the same time, the banjaras-turned-Sikhs continue to offer prayers to the silver figure of Maramma, a malevolent deity who may or may not ravage the Tandas by spreading epidemics at will. However, Bahadur Singh, a college drop-out of Somal Naik Tanda in Warangal district, is more positive about conversion. Says he: "Sikhism teaches us to be disciplined and we banjaras have a lot to learn from it."

Sociologists investigating the unusual phenomenon of a community adopting a religion quite alien to its culture, suspect a social rather than political or religious stirring. According to Ravindra Naik, the real cause is the banjaras' poverty-stricken condition. Since they live isolated lives in Tandas, making themselves relatively less accessible to government developmental agencies, Tandas like Raja Naik have begun to boast of a new gurudwara while residents are yet to get ration cards.

That the phenomenon is entirely self-induced can be judged by the fact that there is no distinct upswing in the geographical spread of the process of conversion. According to the General Secretary of the Hyderabad Sriguru Singh Sabha, Surjit Singh Bagga: "It has been a trickle for the last 10 to 15 years." Neither he nor the banjara Sikhs nor even tribal welfare officials have any estimates of the number of converts. In fact, several officials were unaware of this development until asked about it.

Most converts, however, do seem concentrated in Nalgonda and Warangal districts. And Sikh organisations in Hyderabad are now taking notice of the latest recruits to their religion. Last January, in a whirlwind tour of the two districts, Baba Joginder Singh of Nanded's Huzur Sahib Gurudwara promised any help that might be needed. And says Bagga: "The belief that there is no social inequality has attracted them to Sikhism and it is in our religion to make sure that no Sikh begs in the streets. So, we help them in many ways for better education, religious training and gurudwara management."

All this is very well, but the conversion seems to be robbing the colourful banjaras of their cultural identity. Their women have started discarding their hallmark three-piece cotton skirts embroidered with tiny round mirrors, as also their traditional ornaments, including the cord of cowries and beads that hang from the waist and the *chodus* or horn bangles that completely cover their arms. Instead, they have switched to cotton or cheap polyester sarees and glass bangles. And the men have added the turban and the *kara* to their dress.

Some of the banjaras have even changed their names—Hamja is Rattan Singh and Khimma is Khadak Singh. As primary schoolteacher Somi Reddy of Raja Naik Tanda says: "These banjaras do not want to be ignored. After all, they were denotified as tribals in the Northern Telengana region in 1956 and recognised officially as tribals only since 1976." With a slow but distinct increase in the number of converts, the question of whether the outward changes in looks and names are a lasting socio-religious phenomenon is merely academic. The banjaras are a community in search of itself and the growing ranks of converts suggest that their search has ended at the doors of the gurudwara.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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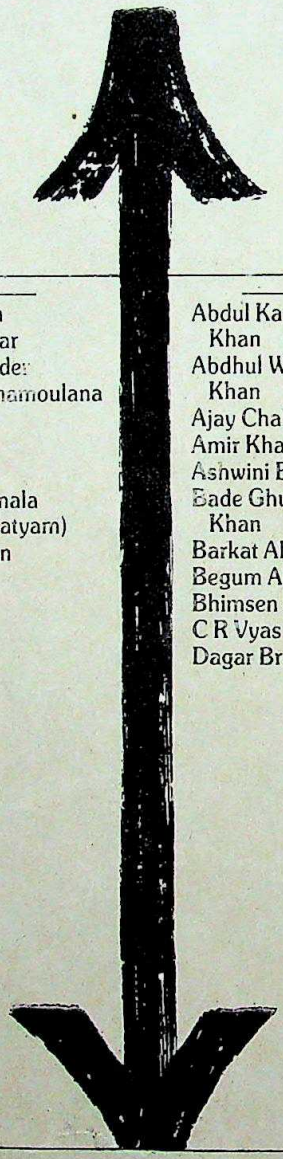

Instrumental

Abdul Halim Jaffar Khan
Ali Ahmed Hussain
Ali Akbar Khan
Alla Rakha/Zakir Hussain
Allauddin Khan
Amjad Ali Khan
Arjun Shejwal
Bhajan Sopari
Birju Maharaj (Kathak)
Bismillah Khan
Brij Bhushan Kabra
Buddhadev Dasgupta
Budhaditya Mukherjee
Chitti Babu
Hafiz Ali Khan
Hariprasad Chaurasia
Imrat Khan
Jnan Prakash Ghosh/V Balsara
Kunnakudi R Vaidyanathan
Lalgudi G Jayaraman
Manohar Chimote
M S Gopalakrishnan
Nikhil Banerjee
Dr N Rajam
Pannalal Ghosh
Ram Narain
Ravi Shankar
S Balachander
Sheik Chinnamoulana
Shivkumar Sharma
V G Jog
Vyjayanthimala (Bharat Natyam)
Vilayat Khan

Vocal

Abdul Karim Khan
Abdhul Waheed Khan
Ajay Chakraborty
Amir Khan
Ashwini Bhide
Bade Ghulam Ali Khan
Barkat Ali Khan
Begum Akhtar
Bhimsen Joshi
C R Vyas
Dagar Brothers
Dinkar Kaikini
D V Paluskar
Faiyyaz Khan
Girija Devi
Hirabai Barodekar
Pt Jasraj
Jitendra Abhisheki
Kesarbai Kerkar
K G Ginde
Kishori Amonkar
Kumar Gandharva
Lalith Rao
Madurai Mani Iyer
Malini Rajurkar
Mallikarjun Mansoor
Manas Chakraborty
Dr M Balamurali Krishna
M S Subbulakshmi
Mughubai Kurdikar
Nazakat Ali/ Salamat Ali
Nirmala Devi/ Laxmi Shankar
Omkarnath Thakur
Parween Sultana
Prabha Atre
Rajan/Sajan Misra
Sankaran Nambudiri
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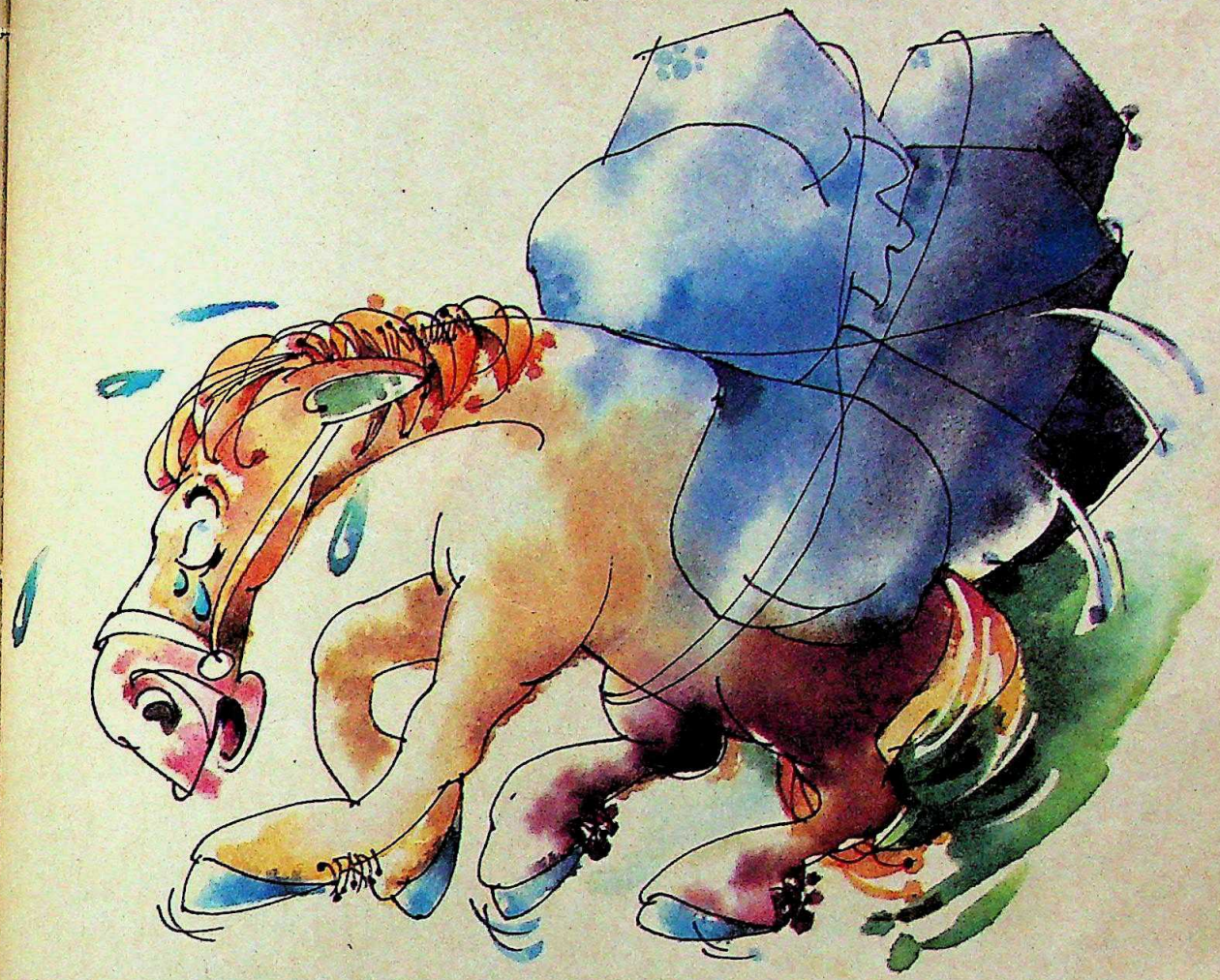

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FILMS

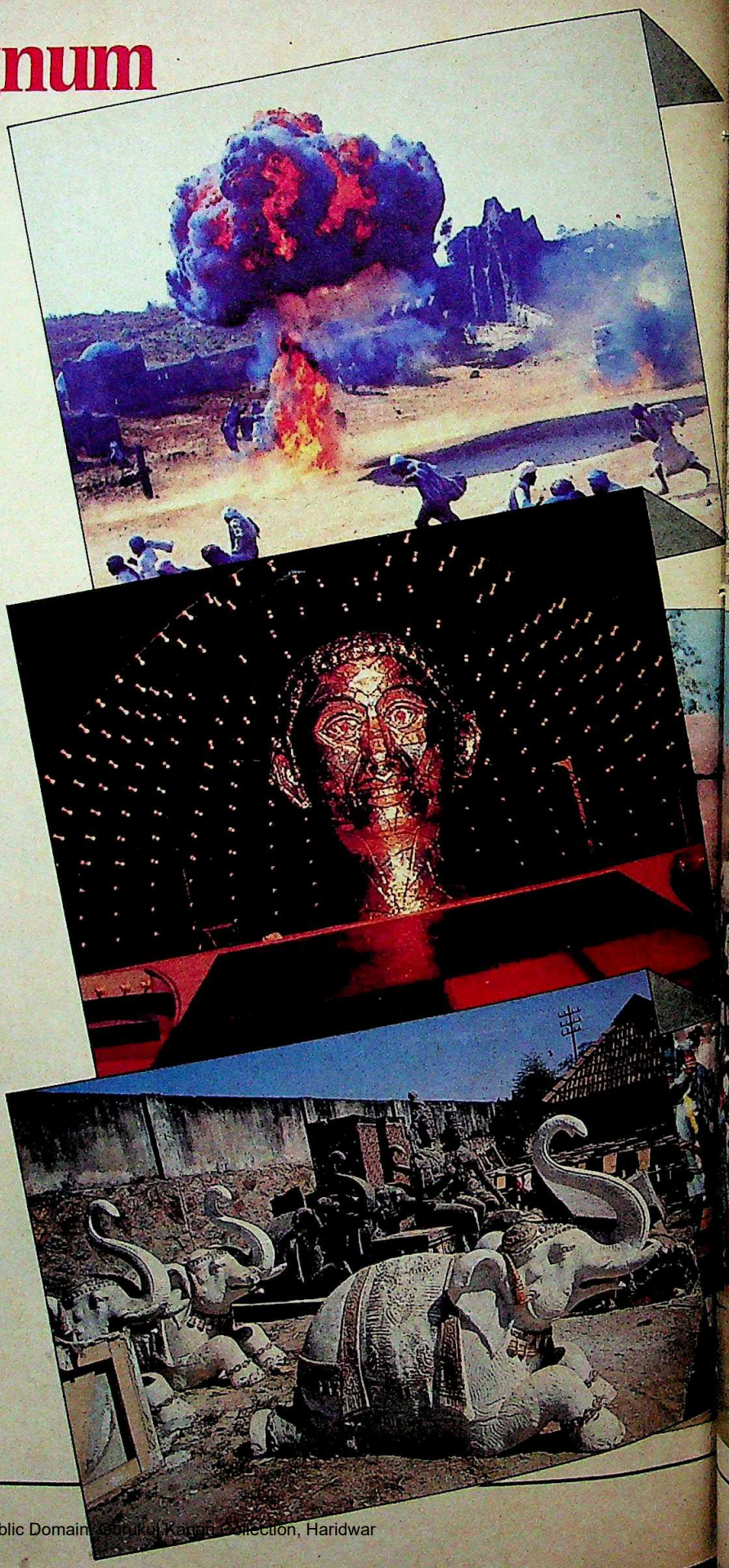
Opus Magnum

BEJEWELLED kings and queens quick-stepping their way through gargantuan palaces and arenas. Camels galloping across endless deserts, and horses pounding across rocky Afghan landscapes. Caves and caverns, domes and pleasure gardens. India's film producers have transported themselves into a Brobdingnagian world—albeit of plaster of paris—where the ghost of Cecil B. De Mille smiles benignly down as the sweep of a director's wand commands megasets to instantly appear.

Big is now beautiful, and the bigger the better. In the studios of Bombay, Madras, and now Hyderabad, it is magnum opus time. Prodded awake by the myriad television soap operas and the raiders from the video world, movie moghuls are hitting back through studio-generated, sheer outsize fantasy. In *Sultanat*, acres of sand has been trucked in from Juhu beach to transform the studio into a vast desert. A huge arena resembling the Colosseum in Rome dominates the sets of *Singhasan*. Domes and minarets and rocky crags tower over the cast of *Paley Khan*. And in the Hyderabad-made block-buster *Pataal Bhairavi*, a series of huge caves forms the main backdrop for the film's story-line.

Construction work never ceases at Bombay's Film City Studio to create new worlds. For *Sultanat*, producer Arjun Hingorani hired two bulldozers to clear about 16 acres in Film City, after which 400 truckloads of sand were brought in to create a desert in the middle of Bombay. Ramesh Sippy carved out a slice of Lahore life with his huge magnificent sets for his TV serial *Buniyad*, the solid wood for which came from the huge bridge from his film *Saagar*. The 'Lahore ki gali' will dominate the studio for quite a while: *Buniyad* has 104 episodes.

Other Amazonian-minded artists, who have also been quick to cash in on the new trend, are concentrating on more permanent structures. The hauntingly-beautiful, salmon pink palace made for *Nagina* dominates the entrance to Film City Studio in Bombay. A massive, but ancient-looking bridge is being built a few hundred yards away. Astride a small hill, a 40-foot plaster of paris and wood temple is under furious construction. The universe is now for hire. As is religion. The carved temple dominates the undulating



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...scape of Film City; it would not be at ...surprising if people begin to flock to this ...le and worship for real, so complete is ...llusion. Bits of the universe are also ...portable. Film City Studio has just ...ght a complete courtroom set from ...i Narang for Rs 1 lakh and is in the ...ess of transporting it from Delhi—...re the film for which it was con...ted was shot—to Bombay. Courts, ...les, exteriors of jails and hospitals—...e are all necessary ingredients for ...ma.

...But big is also mammothly expensive, ...the new urge for megasets is making a ...kery out of film budgets. *Sultanat* cost ...n Hingorani nearly Rs 3 crore—the ...alone added Rs 25 lakh to the final ...ng. G. Hanumanth Rao's *Singhasan* ...a Rs 3 crore indulgence and the sets, ...a permanent fixture in his Padmalya ...ios in Hyderabad, set him back by

...mes from the new blockbusters ...vealing the new trend in indoor ...ing on gigantic sets; big is beautiful

nearly Rs 50 lakh. Shakti Samanta spent over Rs 10 lakh to erect his Afghan village in Bombay's Film City Studio. And just the palace for *Nagina* cost a mind-boggling Rs 4 lakh. The bridge will eat away Rs 25 lakh; the contractors of illusion in Bombay have begun to build more permanent assets for the dream machine that Film City Studio has become.

BUT THE moghuls seem oblivious to the expense in the belief that what the audience wants, and the way to beat the video invasion, is to return to the '50s, the once forgotten era of gigantic sets and the sweeping grandeur of mythology and romantic history, as best illustrated by block-busters like *Mughal-e-azam* and *Pakeezah*. Says Hanumantha Rao: "We think that costume dramas and historical films are the next popular phase." His next film, about the Vijayanagar empire, is estimated to cost Rs 2 crore.

In Madras, the budgeting is more systematic with the concept of time-sharing having been worked out down to the last detail. In Kodambakkam, where gargantuan studios like Vijay-Vahini, AVM and Prasad studios are lined up end to end, myriad films revolve around one community set. On one morning last fortnight, the sets originally made for *Dwarka Chitra* had already since been used for three Telugu films and one Tamil film. The Rs 50 lakh sets of *Singhasan* in Hyderabad's Padmalaya Studios are now being used for the Kannada film *Luv and Kush*. South Indian producers can thus afford to be lavish with their sets, complete with winding staircases, genuine antique chandeliers, and lavishly-decorated rooms. There is more of studio props and less of the painted backdrops which Bombay often tries to get away with. The wood and chintz are for real.

Madras also offers outsize and expensive fantasy in its sets. Those gigantic, almost blinding sequined billboards with shimmering mermaids in bottles, the twinkling earrings of Sridevi which can make you miss a turn, tears so large a person can drown in them are only mirror

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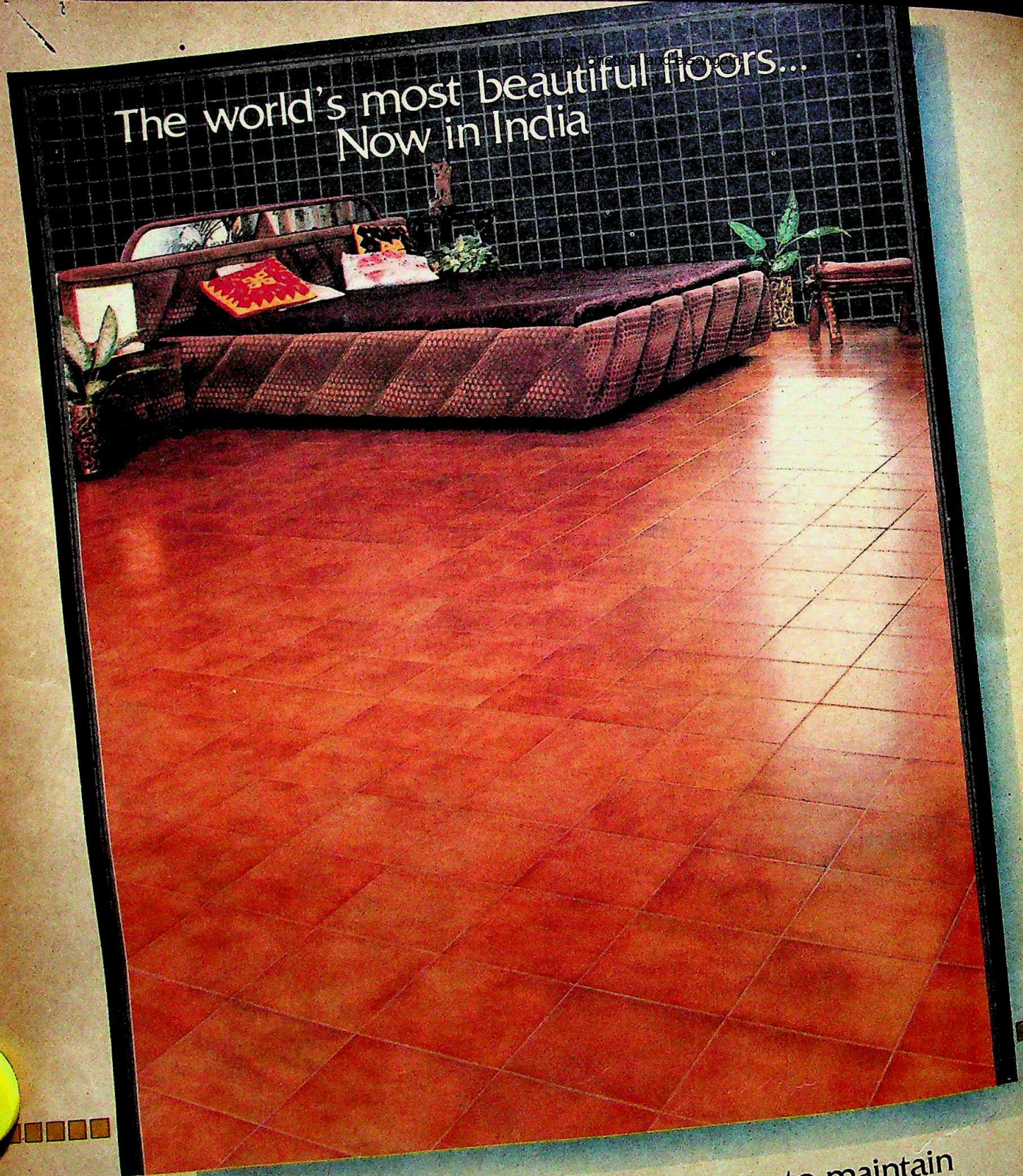

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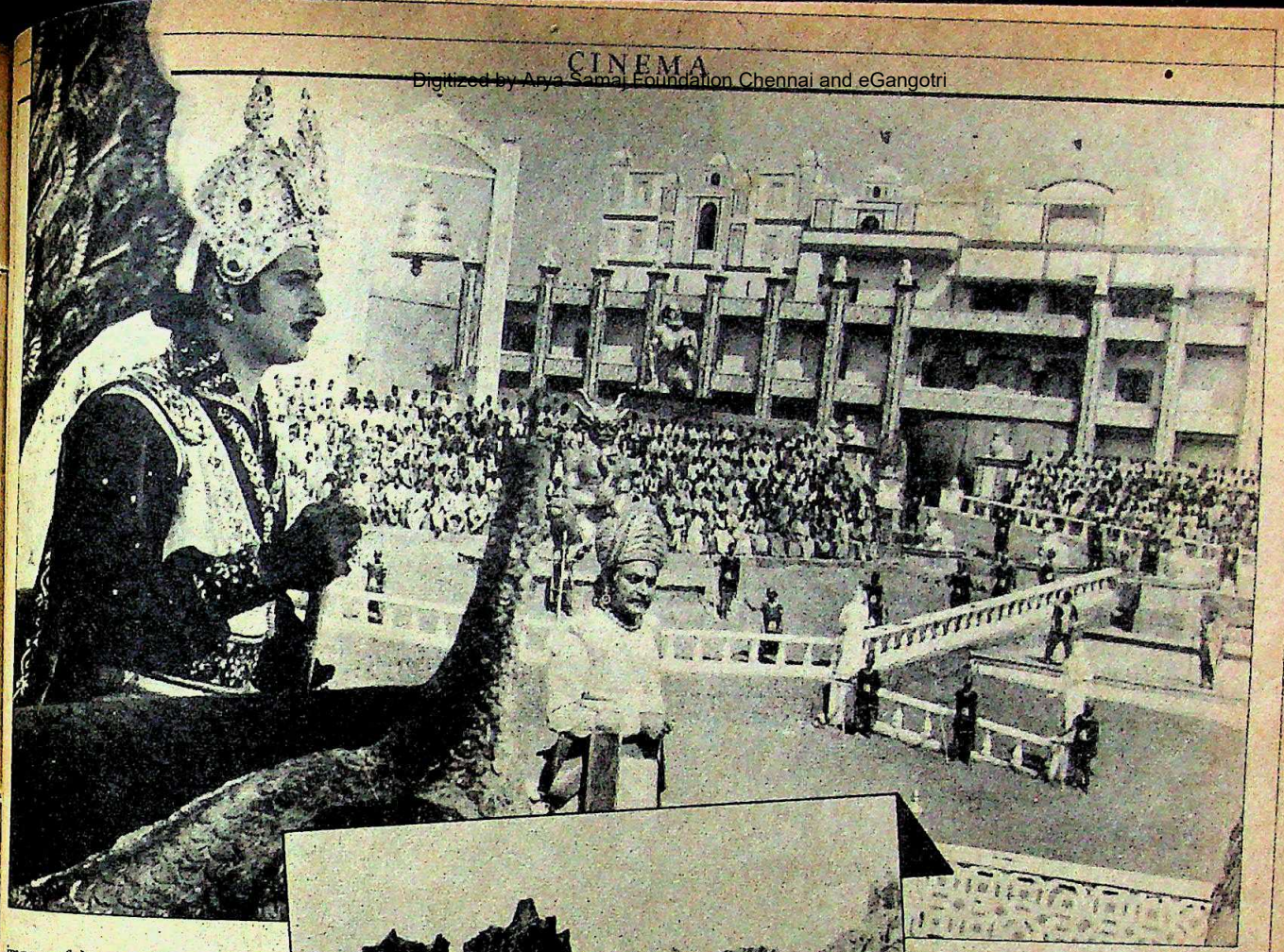

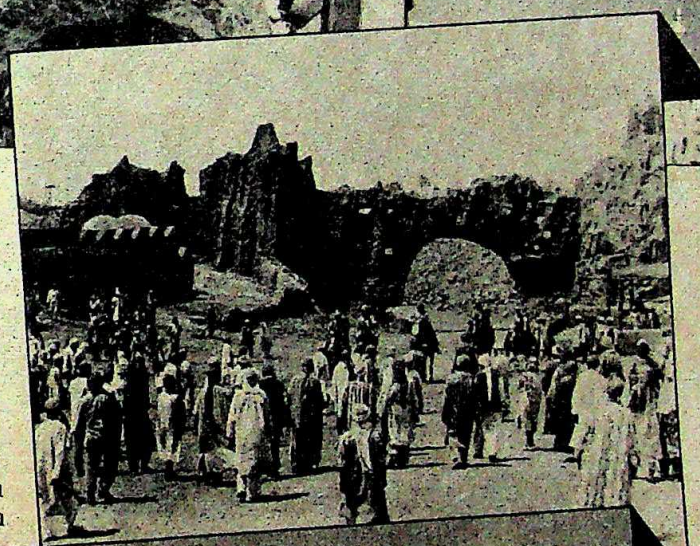

The sets for *Singhasan* (top) *Paley Khan* (centre) and *Nagina:* back in business

images of the sets. Most irresistibly outlandish is AVM's 12-ft-high silver head around which the nimble-footed Kamalhaasan dances for a Telugu film; before him another hero pranced under it for a Tamil film. The head, made out of aluminium foil that is wrapped around mud and plaster of paris, looks like a cross between a Buddha and a Martian. The jigsaw puzzle face with its luminous red eyes and outsize ears with the Greek god curls at the back stands under twinkling green lights, a hallucinating vision in which Greco-Buddhist kitsch has become mixed up with creatures from science fiction films.

But the big question is whether big will prove bountiful as far as the box-office is concerned. *Sultanat* and *Paley Khan* were made on the same site with different sets. Hanumantha Rao's *Singhasan* in Hindi as well as *Sultanat* have fared poorly. Says Ramgopal: "Since we needed to make an Arabia we needed big sets and grandeur. We had to have a desert, a fort...I have spent so much on this film, it will either break or make me."

Whether that happens or not, the magnum opus syndrome has breathed new life back into the Bombay film studio industry. Until a few months ago, these studios wore a rather desolate look with the film industry in a period of crisis. With a host of Bombay directors switching to the more lucrative television serials, the studios received a much-needed transfusion just in time and are now back in business, dividing their time between serials and the big screen. With the new trend towards megasets, more and more directors now prefer indoor to outdoor shooting. Or at least re-creating the needed bits of the universe outdoors, within the confines of well equipped Film City. After all, why go to Arabia when it can be brought to the studio floor? The Indian film industry, despite the hiccoughs induced by the small screen and video, seems all set to quite literally hit the big time.

—MADHU JAIN in Bombay

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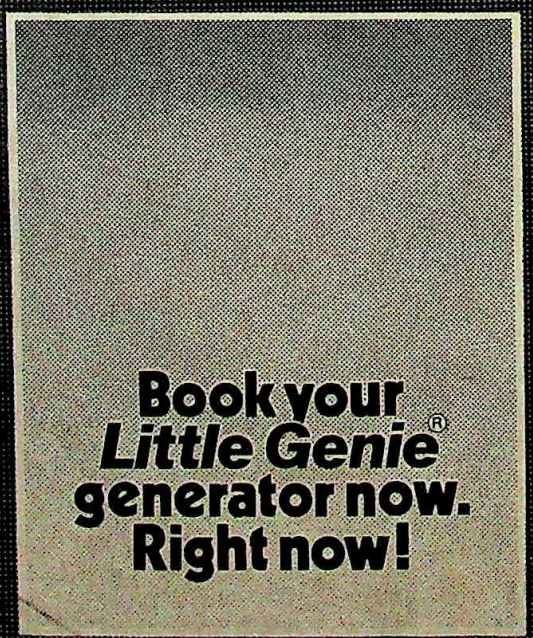

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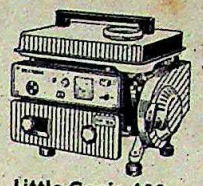

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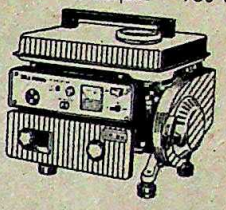

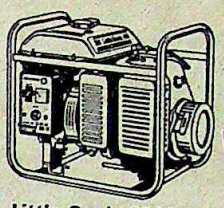

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HOUSE OF JAIPUR

The Royal Rift

ANOTHER royal rift is in the making—this time in the legendary house of Jaipur. Gayatri Devi, the erstwhile queen mother and 'Bubbles'—Lt-Colonel Bhawani Singh—appear to have parted ways. A recent suit filed in the Delhi High Court by Jagat Singh, Bhawani's stepbrother and Gayatri Devi's son, for partition and rendition of accounts, signals the beginning of a right royal battle that will effectively split one of India's best known former ruling families.

The battle lines are already drawn. On one side, Bhawani, recognised as ruler of Jaipur by the President of India in 1970 before the abolition of royal privileges, and his wife Padmini Devi. Ranged against them are Gayatri Devi, the queen mother and a former parliamentarian, and Bhawani's stepbrothers Jagat Singh, Jai Singh and Prithvi Raj. The bone of contention is a property whose value simply defies imagination.

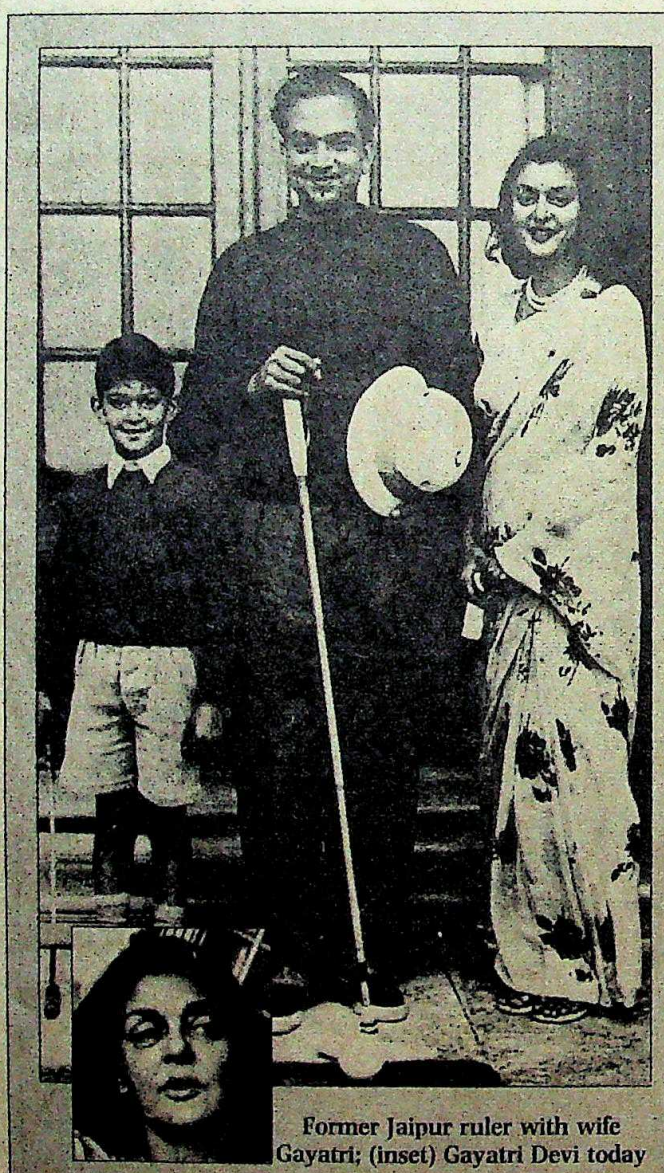
The 121-page long list of moveable properties accompanying the petition makes fascinating reading because it gives some indication of the wealth accumulated over the centuries. Some of the more priceless assets are:

- Thirty-six diamond, gold, emerald and ruby objects, categorised as dynastic jewellery.
- Ten items for which exemption has been sought under the Wealth Tax Act. Among these is a pair of emerald drops (74.75 carats); two carved emerald beads (732 carats); two pieces of gold and enamel pendants studded with 18 pieces of emeralds, 16 flat diamonds and "some very cheap pearls and rubies" (gross weight 82.200 gm).
- The tally of objects for which exemption has been claimed under the Estate Duty Act includes more than 175 daggers, expensive walking sticks, mirrors, pendants and even a back scratcher.
- The sum of disputed cash and bank balances amounts to about Rs 83 lakh.
- Shares in about a dozen firms plus Rs 62.20 lakh as capital balance in the Jaipur Land Development Corporation.

Also under dispute are Jaipur House in New Delhi, Jaipur House in Mt Abu, Viman Bhavan in Sawai Madhopur and a portion of the enormous City Palace in Jaipur. However, of considerably more value are vast chunks of land scattered in prime locations within Jaipur, which are disputed but cannot be touched because nearly all of the plots are locked in land ceiling disputes with the state Government. The Urban Land Ceiling Regulation Act barred the holding of more than 1,500 sq metres by anyone in Jaipur. To get around this clause Bhawani showed almost all the property as owned by the Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) with himself as the *karta*. But with intra-family disputes sharply escalating over the last few months, he was forced to write to the urban land ceiling authorities claiming that all the lands were owned by him personally and not by the HUF.

Quite predictably, the authorities asked the former maharajah to explain why he was claiming a change of ownership 10 years after filing the initial returns. They have also demanded a reply to whether there has been any concealment or wrong provision of information about ownership in the past. The authorities claim that Bhawani's land holding within the city amounts to an incredible 4.33 million sq metres. Bhawani, however, insists that it is much less.

The immovable property under litigation also includes a centrally-located 10-acre plot gifted by Bhawani Singh to the state Government during the Janata years to build a conference hall for the 250th



Former Jaipur ruler with wife Gayatri; (inset) Gayatri Devi today

A recent suit filed in the Delhi High Court by Jagat Singh, Gayatri Devi's son, signals the beginning of a right royal battle that will split one of India's best known former ruling families.

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niversary celebrations of the Pink City. t as it transpired, the Government ed out the plot to the Birlas at an surdly low rental to construct a plane- rium and research centre. The matter of e allotment is also in court.

Though the family feud has become blic only over the last nine months, the gins go back to three years ago when dmini Devi moved to Jaipur from Delhi. e grapevine has it that relations be- een the mother-in-law and ughter-in-law, the former ncess of the ruling family Sirmur in Himachal Pra- h, have been strained for a g time, and trouble was ected when they became ighbours.

Soon after, Padmini i's brothers Amarendra ingh Pal and Prabhu Jyoti gh also arrived in Jaipur. arendra became Bhawa- controller of properties, a ion of enormous clout, rally resented by other y members. Matters e to a head in late August when the former maha- gave Padmini Devi a ral power of attorney regard to all properties. months later, on Octo- 1, Padmini Devi wrote to dministrator of the Jai- Municipal Council com- ing that bogus *pattas* issued by "unauthoris- ersons" for land owned r husband.

ile none of the family ers were available for ent, according to Ja- plaint, Bhawani has naged and misused operties, and as a result financial liabilities accrued.... The deman- the Income Tax and Tax Departments vis the suit properties have p over the years to the crores of rupees."

senting the power of ney given to Padmini Jagat has expressed at "the suit properties be frittered away and . He has also made ther plaints: one for a sale of any property has been granted by elhi High Court and another for the appointment of a court receiver to manage the properties.

According to insiders, attempts were made before the suit was filed, to negotiate a compromise. Gayatri Devi and the other complainants wanted Bhawani to fulfil three conditions. They demanded a say in the management of the assets, revocation of the power of attorney to Padmini Devi and the literary banishment of Amarendra and his brother from court.

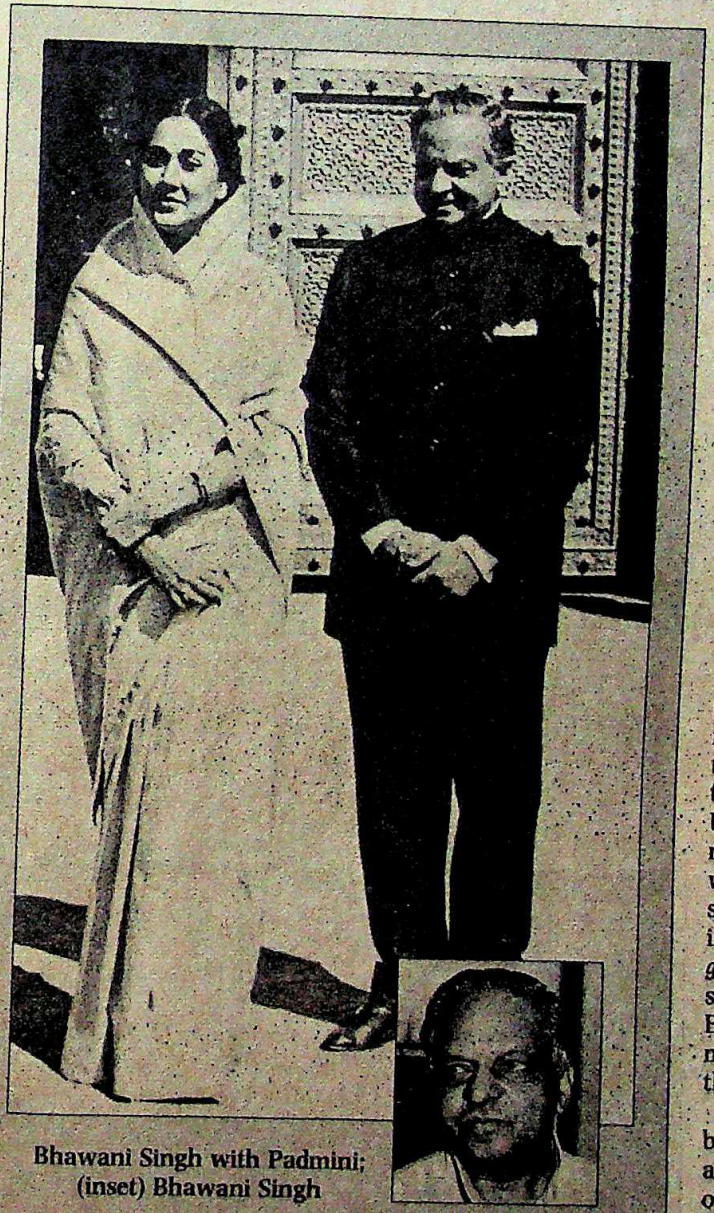
But negotiations broke down as Bhawani was unwilling to concede to the demands. Contributing to the deadlock the former maharajah's adversaries attempted while the negotiation process was on to partition shares in five companies—shares which they said were held by the HUF. To stall proceedings Bhawani was forced to take the decison of the board of directors to court. Amarendra claimed that in spite of the court order, the board meeting (a council of all family members) was held and a resolution for the transfer of shares passed. "This amounts to contempt of court," he charged, adding "action may have to be taken accordingly."

The whole point of the dispute is whether or not the property worth millions of rupees belongs solely to an individual or the family. Jagat argues that when their father, Sawai Man Singh died in 1970, Bhawani took possession of the assets on behalf of all members as the *karta*. The property he says has been assessed on the basis of this claim.

However, Bhawani's supporters dispute this pointing out that their candidate was recognised as Jaipur's ruler in mid-1970. They reimpose their claim by quoting from the white paper issued by the Union Government on the merger of princely states which specifies that succession will take place "according to law and custom, to the *gaddi* of each covenanting state". Going by custom, Bhawani, recognised formally as Jaipur's ruler, has the right to all properties.

The struggle is bound to be protracted and debilitating as is customary in anything of this magnitude. Old timers who have been close to the family are appalled and saddened at the turn of events, torn as they are between their loyalties. Says one, reflecting perhaps the feelings of others: "They have embarked on the path of self destruction. At the end of it there will be no winners."

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR



Bhawani Singh with Padmini; (inset) Bhawani Singh

Bhawani Singh and his wife Padmini Devi are ranged against Gayatri Devi, the queen mother. The bone of contention is a property whose value simply defies imagination.

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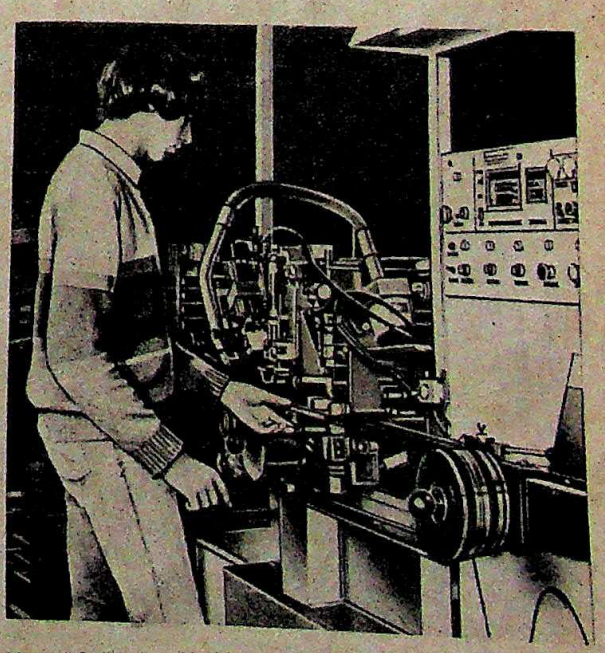

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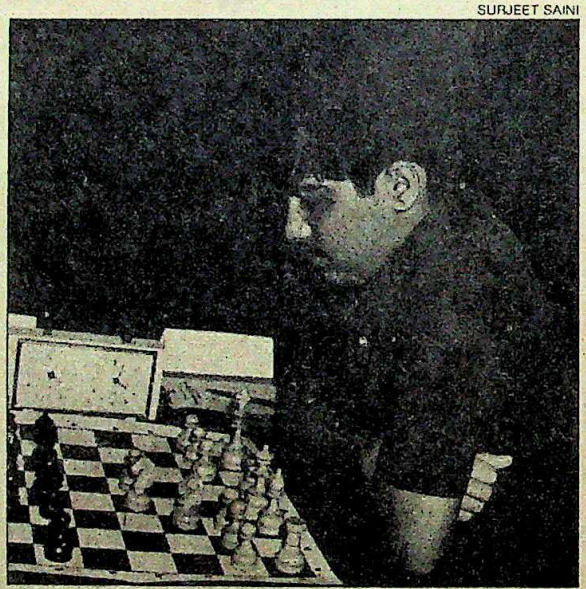
CHESS

Masterly Play

CHESS prodigies are a rarity in this country but of late the crop has been exceptionally good. First it was Dibyendu Barua and now it is Vishwanathan Anand. Barua, all of 19, shot to fame four years ago when he worsted Victor Korchnoi, and Anand became at 16, the youngest ever national champion. Going by their performance in the third Bhilwara International Grandmasters Chess Tournament, held in New Delhi last fortnight, the future of Indian chess seems exceptionally bright, major handicaps notwithstanding.

PRASHANT PANJIYAR

SURJEET SAINI



Barua (top) and Anand: race for the Grandmaster norm

Neither, of course, won the tourney; with Soviet Grandmaster Vladimir Tukmakov, member of the gold-medal winning USSR team to the 1984 Chess Olympiad in the fray, there was never any doubt about the winner. But Barua finished second and had he got half a point more, he would have become the first Indian to get the Holy Grail of all chess players—the Grandmaster (GM) norm. And Anand confirmed that he was the new Indian sensation when he worsted Tukmakov. He finished a poor fifth but his brilliant, if mercurial, play left nobody in doubt that the race for the first Indian grandmaster will be between him and Barua.

Anand's win over the phlegmatic Tukmakov, who once finished half-a-point behind Anatoly Karpov at the 1973 Madrid tournament, was a fantastic performance by the little maestro who took less than half-an-hour for each of his moves. Showing superb control of his pawns, the schoolboy blocked Tukmakov's queenside pawns. Some flashy kingside play by Anand which threatened the Russian's king and a slight slip by Tukmakov enabled Anand to shut his bishop out of play. The finale saw Anand grab the vital queenside pawns and win. Acknowledged the grandmaster later: "He is young and impulsive, but is very good. He may well be the first Indian grandmaster."

Anand's problem was a bad start; he got only two points from the first six rounds. He lost a winning game against Grandmaster Sergei Makarychev—who is presently coaching Karpov—and frittered away his early advantage against Bulgarian Grandmaster Dimiter Donchev by playing too fast. In the process, Anand, already an international master, lost out in the race for the grandmaster norm which requires 8.5 points from 11 rounds.

His speed came in for some criticism. Said Tukmakov: "He is too quick. He must be patient and think out his moves more deeply." Anand shrugged off such criticism, saying: "That is the way I play." But it highlighted the Indian chess player's obvious weakness. Anand, by his own admission, has "no regular coaching". "I practice for one hour every day with books," he says. Adds Barua: "I get no help. Worse still, there is no good player one can play against on a regular basis."

The appeal underlying that statement was graphically evident in Barua's struggle for second place—bitterly contested by Makarychev and Semen Palatnik. Ultimately, Barua moved decisively into the second slot with a resounding win over Palatnik but nemesis in the form of Anand cost him the Grandmaster norm. In a fast-paced ninth-round game spread over 42 moves, Anand rocked Barua with a series of shrewd positional moves and a killing of rooks and queens forcing a draw.

Barring Barua and Anand, none of the other Indian International Masters—Pravin Thipsay, R. Ravi Shekhar and D.V. Prasad—were ever in the race for the GM norm. Evidently, the lack of well-equipped chess clubs is a serious handicap. The few that exist offer limited facilities. The Botwinnik Chess Academy in New Delhi which hosted the tournament, and the Alekhine Club in Calcutta are the only active ones. In the circumstances, the triumphs of Indian chess players have been largely due to personal effort.

The tournament emphasised another factor which has acquired frightening dimensions—the psychological pressures which can make or break a player. Good chess players require a high degree of intellectual development and extraordinarily strong nerves. Lanka Ravi, who stood first in the International Rating Tournament at Mount Abu last year, attributed his poor showing largely to nervousness. A.B Meteei, who represented India at the Asian Chess Championships in Dubai recently, finished at the bottom.

Barua wants Indian players to be sent to Europe where a large number of tournaments are held. "The current practice of despatching players to the USSR for three weeks of intensive practice is not good enough," he says. While that is a matter for the Indian Chess Federation to decide, Anand and Barua have set their sights firmly on the World Junior Chess Championships in Norway this August, to be followed by the Lloyds Bank Invitation Chess Championship in London in their quest for the Holy Grail.

—SURYA GANGADHARAN

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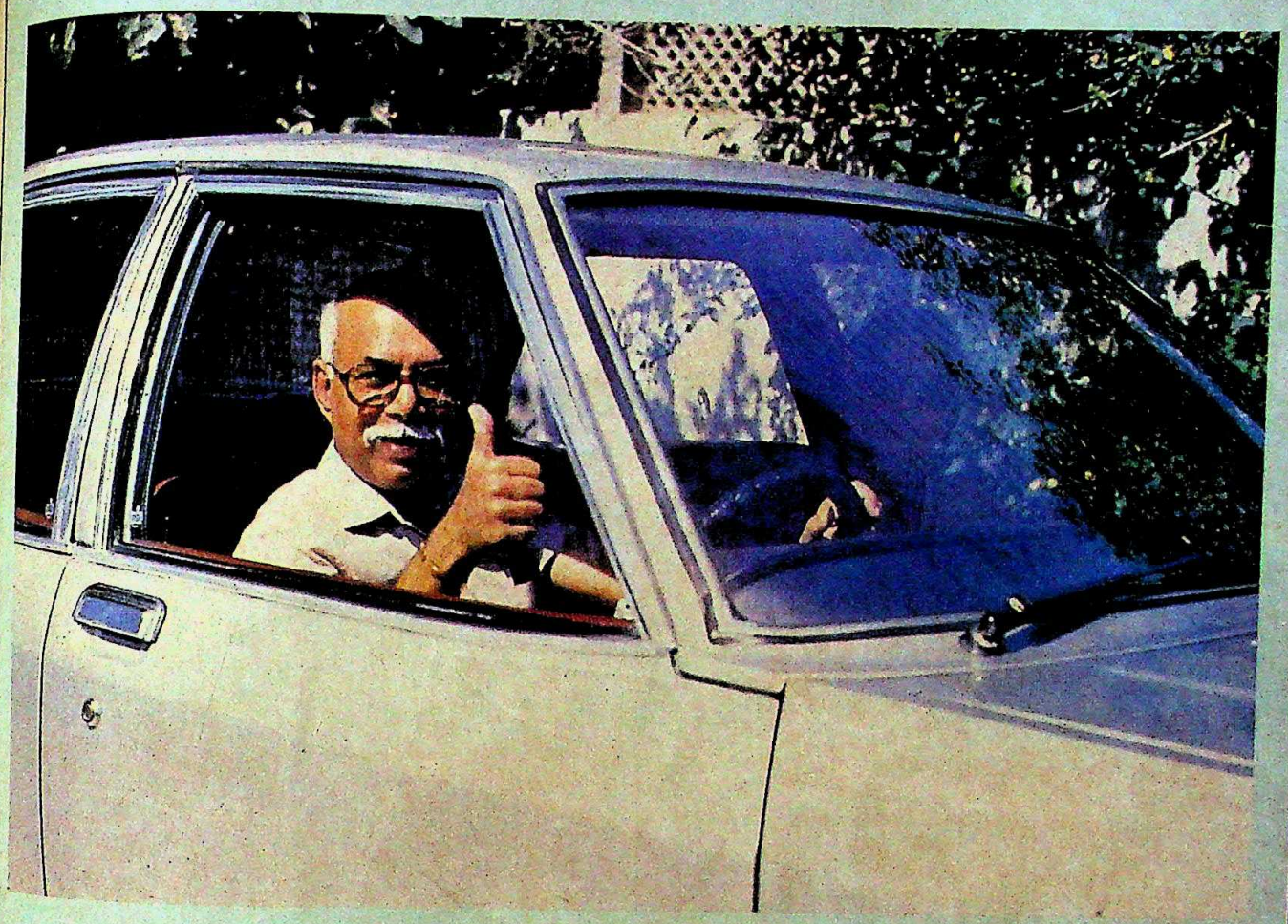

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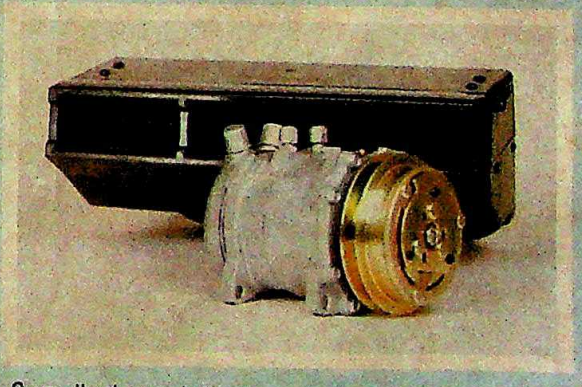

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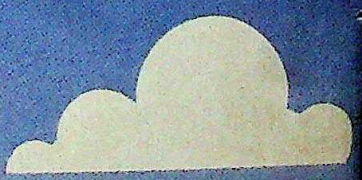

THAT'S WHY BANGALORE IS THE FASTEST GROWING CITY IN INDIA

Graph indicates the Reach of THE DECCAN HERALD GROUP of publications in Karnataka in their respective categories. (Deccan Herald reaches 76.3% of all adults reachable through English dailies.) Source: NRS III

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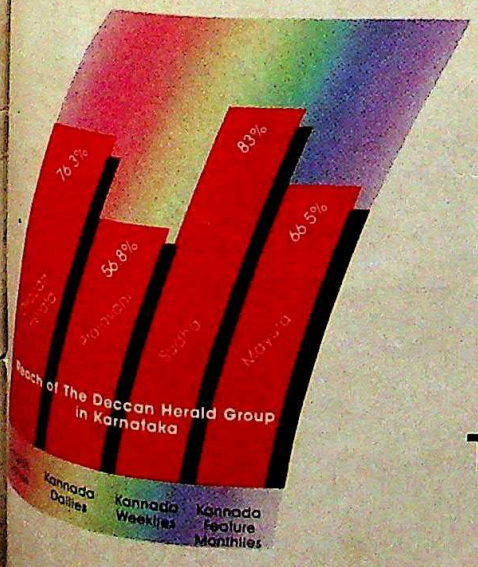

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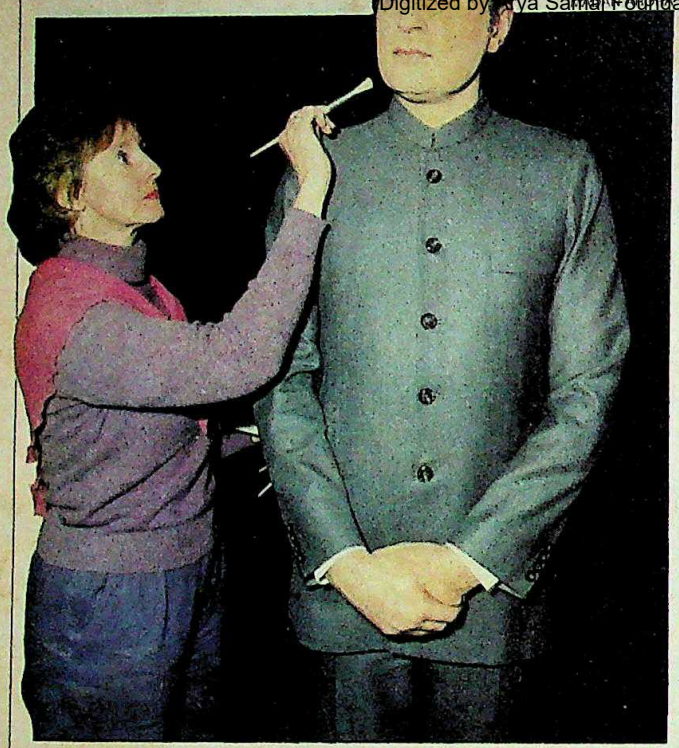


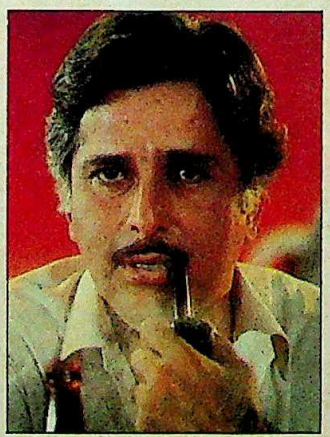
Rajiv at Tussaud's: waxing

◆ Prime Minister **Rajiv Gandhi** is a doll. Well, sort of. The life-sized wax figure, bearing a startling likeness to the prime minister, was unveiled at the famed Madame Tussaud's in London last fortnight, with a beaming High Commissioner P.C. Alexander accepting the compliments on the prime minister's behalf. Crafted by sculptor Judith Craig after a meticulous sitting at New Delhi last August and draped in a grey Nehru suit donated by Rajiv, the figure now stands in the gallery of greats rubbing shoulders with two other Gandhis—his mother and the Mahatma. As a museum official remarked: "It shows the impact he's made on the international scene." An impact that waxes, but doesn't wane. So far.

◆ With a pedigree like hers, **Anuradha Mafatlal**, 25, was destined to end up in garments, one way or the other. So when the pert and soft-spoken daughter of textile baron Rasesh Mafatlal put up some 400 designs on show in Bombay last month, it didn't take long for the city's socialites to cotton on, despite the price-tags ranging from Rs 300 to Rs 2,500. "I sold 98 per cent of my stocks in 10 days," gloated Anuradha, who has done a three-month course under the famous designer Benny Ong. She is now planning her own retail outlet in Bombay, which will sell her ready-to-wear gear under the snappy label of Anu M. Says the designer: "My designs are going to be practical. Otherwise, who'll buy them?"

Mafatlal: new designs

◆ He was never known for his acting ability. If anything, he was known for his crooked teeth, carefree gait and unruly mop of hair. But eventually the Kapoor genes come up trumps. Last fortnight, **Shashi Kapoor** walked away with the best actor's national award for his performance in *New Delhi Times*— the first major acting award the star has won in his protracted career. Not surprisingly, the actor himself was



Kapoor: belated award

the most taken aback. Said he: "It should have gone to Jennifer the year it went to Rekha."

◆ If it were left to him, **Zail Singh** would have preferred to treat it as just another day. But being a head of state—and on the 70th birthday—it is a bit difficult to avoid the bouquets that start streaming in from morning, as they did this year on May 5. The birthday callers just kept coming—from the prime minister to the vice-president to lesser-known well-wishers—until Rashtrapati

Zail on birthday: rosy

Bhavan began to resemble a flower show. "It's nice to be 70," said the President, even as he made light of all the pomp and circumstance.

SIGNPOST

◆ Thirty-three years ago, as he stood literally with the world at his feet, **Tenzing Norgay** bowed down to his God—characteristic of the simple sherpa who became, along with Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to conquer the world's highest peak. Last fortnight, when death came at the grand old age of 72, the man had become as much of a legend as the mountain he had conquered. Said his grieving friend Sir Edmund: "Tenzing had a great life. From simple beginnings, he achieved great things."

—Compiled by MOHAMMED ASLAM

Tenzing: great life

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OPINIONS TODAY

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The first of the Opinions Today polls begins next issue of INDIA TODAY. Look out for it. And make sure you speak out. Such chances don't come too often.

INDIA TODAY

The pulse of change.

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INDIA TODAY
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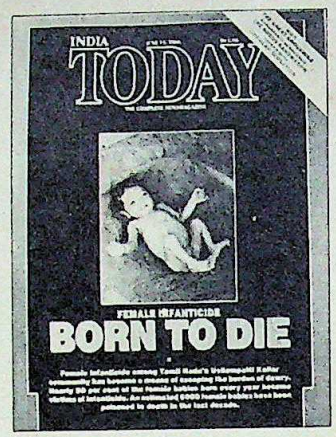

SHOCKING CUSTOMS

I was shocked to read the horror-story of mothers killing their own female infants. ("Born To Die", June 15). The innocent baby on the cover still haunts me. Any person with some sense of humanity would feel highly distressed at these inhuman acts. Let the conscience of society be awakened at all levels. Let there be a relentless crusade and a mass movement against this practice and its underlying cause—the dowry system, by the lawkeepers and social organisations.

Kottayam — V.K. SATHYAVAN NAIR

■ The alarming story of female infanticide reported from Usilampatti in Tamil Nadu, speaks volumes of the Government's failure to touch on real issues. The Government tries to perpetuate ignorance so that it can thrive on it. Dowry, which is the sole cause of this great evil, can be rooted out through well-planned economic measures aimed at the poorest of the poor. The alarming gap between the rich and the poor, and the educated and illiterate should be brought down to make evils like this disappear.

Madras — S. RETNASWAMY

■ We have been aware of incidents of female infanticide in some parts of the country through the media. The stark facts that look us in the face make us lose hope of evolving a modern Indian society in the near future and the 21st century seems too far away.

Unless the curse of dowry is fought on a war-footing and with as much zeal and attention as the family planning drive and unless the social workers try earnestly to motivate women to develop some human dignity, Indian society will continue to wallow in this chauvinistic muck. The real culprit is the dowry problem.

Guwahati — RANJITA BISWAS

CULTURE SHOCK

While we in India have a great and ancient culture to live up to, many aspects of this have to be lived down. Your June 15 issue was a veritable jeremiad of Indian culture. Female infanticide ("Born To Die"), religious persecution ("Migrants Of Fear"), communalism ("The Barabanki Bomb"), child marriage ("Wedding Of The Dolls") and bonded labour ("Inhuman Bondage") are all a regrettable part of our much-vaunted culture. These and other problems have to be tackled at the grass-roots levels. Literacy alone is not enough. A humanistic, rational outlook has to be instilled into our masses along with a national spirit. Only mass-oriented, public awareness programmes can eradicate our myriad social problems.

Bangalore — VINOD KUMAR B.

CHRONIC PROBLEM

Your photo feature on child marriage ("Wedding Of The Dolls", June 15) is a timely eye-opener. You deserve praise for your expose on child marriage. You have tried hard to bring the malaise into focus, but whether it will cut any ice or not remains to be seen. It is regrettable to note that in some cases the parents who are behind these marriages are educated, yet seem to be astonishingly oblivious of their future. Stricter measures are urgently required to solve this chronic problem.

Bangalore — JAYAPRAKASH

■ It is not true that child marriages do not come to the knowledge of the outside world. The problem really is that the people who are aware of this evil do not want to get involved in legal proceedings. I have come across politicians who were a party to such marriages. The village youth should also be forthcoming and force their elders not to indulge in such activities. If such illegal activities are going on, they should be reported to the police.

Faridabad — RAJIV GUGNANI

ODD TAX

I sincerely hope that the Government reconsiders the rules pertaining to the recent introduction of Modvat, the modified value added tax ("Compounding Confusion", May 31). If the Government had envisaged the after-effects of the scheme, as well as the unnecessary increase in paperwork by this so-called simplification of the pricing process, it would not have made the procedure so

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complicated. I hope that the powers-that-be soon realise their mistake and simplify Modvat before it becomes "Odd-vat".

Madras — FRANKLIN STANLEY

DEPLORABLE TACTICS

Your article on the Janata Party ("Hard Times", May 31) confirms its bankruptcy and its tall claims of being an alternative to the Congress(I). The "election" of the reluctant Chandra Shekhar can at best be described as a farce; the heavens would not have fallen down if there were proper elections among the five contenders. The deplorable state of affairs in the party and its lack of principles are clear from its attitude of welcoming dissidents from the Congress (I). What an unscrupulous way of strengthening one's party!

Pune — D.B.N. MURTHY

SISTER WRITER

With reference to your article on Mountbatten, the movie ("Lament for Lord Louis", May 31), in the last paragraph, Ramesh Chandran mentions "Joan Collins epics like *The Stud* and *The Bitch*". To put the record straight, the writer in question is actually Jackie Collins. Joan Collins is her sister.

Jaipur — DIBEYENDU GANGULY

MASTER TROUBLE

Perhaps your writer did not know that Pravin Thipsay has got one Grandmaster Norm when you mentioned ("Masterly Play", May 31) that the race for the first Indian Grandmaster will be between Vishwanathan Anand and Dibyendu Barua. He thus obviously has a better chance of becoming the first Indian Grandmaster even though he seems to have fared badly in the recently-held Bhilwara Tournament.

Trivandrum — K.V.B. MENON

RARE OCCURRENCE

With reference to your editorial on the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl ("Comment", May 31), I would like to point out that a study for the Atomic Energy Commission conducted by Professor Norman Rossman summed up in its report that nuclear accidents have a much lower probability than man-made and natural risks; fires, aeroplane crashes, explosions, toxic chemical releases, dam failures, earthquakes, hurricanes and tornados are more likely to occur and can have consequences comparable to or greater than nuclear accidents.

Shimla — VIVEK MOHAN

■ You have rightly maintained, in your editorial, that "dangerous technologies are double-edged swords". But I disagree with your conclusion that one ought not turn aginst them simply because they are dangerous. In fact, one should be extra cautious in accepting technologies from developed countries; they could result in serious loss of life, and innocent lives at that. Man-made accidents like crashes and natural ones like flood affect only those who are directly involved. Nuclear dangers, like the accident which hit the chernobyl atomic plant in the USSR, affect vast areas nowhere near the source of the disaster.

One wonders if, perhaps, having a country with a good old agricultural base is all that bad after all. Such an economy may not be all that modern or technologically advanced, but it probably has the best chance of survival.

New Delhi — V. SAGAR

UP IN ARMS

In your little vignette on the award presented to Madhu Kishwar ("Eye-catchers", May 15) of Manushi, you have observed that she is "no bra-burning feminist". How many bra-burning feminists are there anyway? It is unfortunate that a magazine of your standing is giving further currency, not to mention publicity, to this empty, meaningless term that originated years ago in the US, when a few sensation-seeking women decided to resort to a cheap gimmick to get some media attention.

Hyderabad — M. RAMDAS

SHORT-SHRIFT

I agree with his senior officers, that my brother, Dharam Singh Rawat ("Unusual Crusade", Statenotes, May 15) is a crank. Otherwise, why should he be peeping into creaky cupboards cluttered with the skeletons of bungling bureaucracy? Again, why should he raise the dust of doubtful decisions and corrupt practices in his directorate when these have been safely and very conveniently swept under the carpet? In the era of 'Mr. Clean', small fries like Dharam Singh should not dream of cleaning the Augean stables. Logically, only big, influential and ambitious people can achieve big things.

Bangalore — A.S.RAWAT

TUITION TROUBLE

I read with great interest your observations on the educational system ("Learning Reform", May 15). I agree with your examination of the ills plagung the educational system. That some teachers of Andhra University were caught red-handed while coaching classes at home stinks. But the evil of private tuition is widely prevalent in all states. What seems to be required is a change of heart—on the part of both students and teachers. This is only possible by introducing spiritual training in schools and colleges. Teachers should undergo a refresher course so that they can inspire their students to pursue Truth, Beauty and Goodness.

Ahmedabad — K.S. VISWANATHAN

UNSUNG LIGHT

In your article on the Progressive Writers Association ("Bleak House", May 15) you have omitted to mention at all one of the most important members of the group—Professor Ahmed Ali, who works in Karachi. Ali's novel *Twilight in Delhi* is one of the best novels written by an Indian writer in English and it would have been very pleasant if the rancour of nationalism and ideology had permitted acknowledgement of this great writer's achievements, not only in this work but also in his superb short stories. A collection of these has recently been republished, and they are of a quality that indicates why his work has received so much praise and critical acclaim in the English-speaking world.

New York — A.T. EMBREE

LANDMARK STORY

As a former Harvey Award judge for medical journalism and as a concerned clinician, I hope you will permit me to say that your article on the problem of Alcoholism ("A Growing Malaise", April 30,) is a landmark contribution to literature. INDIA TODAY needs to be congratulated for its bold confrontation of a growing and increasingly serious social problem. Your article has done much to peel away the naive myths and misconceived notions surrounding alcohol; you have presented the stark realities of this disorder with clinical candour. Unfortunately, the absence of durable cures compounds the tragedy; in most unbiased studies, five-year cure rates for alcohol addiction are less than 10 per cent. Even some cancers have better therapeutic outcomes.

Minnesota, USA — IQBAL KRISHAN

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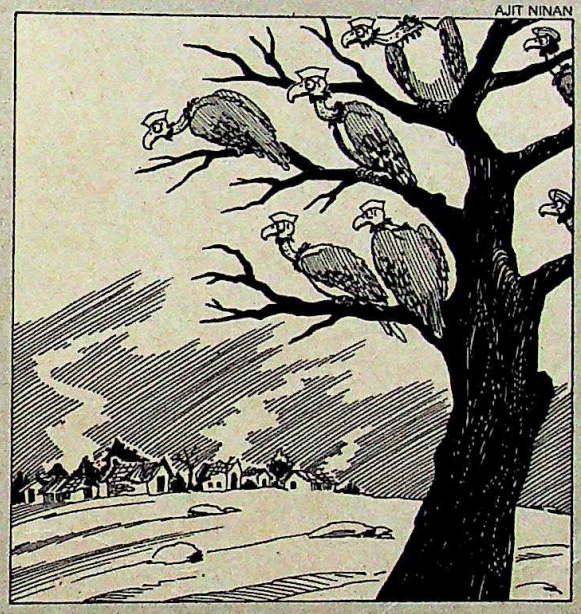
These Damn Politicians

THAT exasperated phrase can be heard with increasing frequency across the country as short-sighted politicians with an eye on what they think is the main chance, swoop, like vultures who have spotted carrion, on to every trouble-spot in the country. A language problem near Karnataka's border with Maharashtra is used to provoke a violent agitation that leads to riots, killings, the destruction of civic property and the threat by one senior politician of creating a Punjab-like situation. Another language dispute in north Bengal leads to a call for statehood, and once again politicians fan the flames. More dead bodies. A third language problem in Goa, concerning Konkani, leads to police firing.


AJIT NINAN

A sensitive issue concerning a community's personal law is used by ambitious politicians to fan communal passions. In Punjab, some of the districts on or near the border with Pakistan reach an unprecedented state of lawlessness, so that ordinary citizens have to flee for their lives. But there are politicians ready to pander to the extremists. And in Haryana, a Devi Lal tries to raise the state's political temperature to match that in Punjab, even as a Bhajan Lal refuses to accept geographical realities and insists on getting nothing other than Fazilka and Abohar in return for Chandigarh going to Punjab, until he is asked to resign.

People may get the Government they deserve, but India deserves a better breed of politicians than it has got. Punjab, once the country's most prosperous state, is now a troubled land. The state's politicians must ask themselves what they have achieved for Punjab through five years of morchas, sustained agitation, and the assiduous nurturing of a sense of grievance. Instead of solutions being found, intractable problems have been created of a kind and degree that did not exist before. What have the politicians achieved, apart from replacing *lassi* with blood, and bringing extremists and terrorists into the mainstream of national life? Would the Punjab problem have got out of hand if politicians had behaved more responsibly?

There is a lesson in the fate of Punjab for politicians everywhere who seek to exploit dormant grievances, to play on divisive emotions and to heighten tensions. Do the leaders of the Nepali agitation genuinely believe that they can achieve a separate Gorkha homeland, or that they can spur development by frightening away tourists? Can inter-state border questions be solved by cutting off water supply to Belgaum? Can the body politic remain healthy when it has pointed at its vitals the *kirpan, kukri, trishul* and the scimitar?

The perception all too often seems to be that seizing on communal issues and on regional and linguistic aspirations is a sure fire method of garnering votes. But this is quite simply untrue. The people have repeatedly said through one election after another that they are not interested in being divided and ruled. They said so in Punjab, where they voted for peace, rejected calls to boycott the polls and endorsed only those who stood for a settlement of the outstanding issues along agreed lines. They have said so in Karnataka, where a misguided film actor who sought to build a political base by using the issue of the Kannada language has been consigned to the political periphery. And repeatedly, those who stood for a Hindu vote, or a Muslim vote, have met with little success compared to those who sought a national consensus. Yet the message seems to have been lost on purblind politicians, one of whom urged last fortnight that Maharashtra should retaliate against Karnataka by banning Udipi restaurants!

The politicians who stand tall today are the ones who have tried to solve problems rather than create them. Both Ramakrishna Hegde and S.B. Chavan have emerged with greater credit from Belgaum than Sharad Pawar and S.M. Joshi, who should ponder over their fate in being bracketed with the likes of Chhagan Bhujbal of the Shiv Sena. Does a Prakash Singh Badal or an Amarinder Singh believe that the country looks to him with hope? And what good did Bhajan Lal do for the country or for Haryana by creating a situation last January in which the first step could not be taken towards implementing the Punjab accord?

The task of nation-building is far from complete in India. There are differences and tensions of various sorts, and divisions along caste, community and language lines. But no nation can be built if its politicians emphasise its diversity rather than its unity. To the extent that regionalism is now an accepted part of the political landscape, the "national" parties have failed to voice the aspirations of people in these states. There is in this a lesson for the more responsible politicians, to be more responsive to genuine aspirations and problems.

But that said, the fact remains that today's flash-points are more the product of politicians' unprincipled search for political opportunity in trouble-spots. Inevitably, agitational methods are used in preference to more constitutional forms of making a point. So hundreds have died as Indian has fought Indian over the years. But it is never the politicians who are killed. The cannon fodder in their campaigns is ordinary people who, inflamed by their leaders' rhetoric, step right into the firing line and pay for their folly with their lives. The politicians might mouth their sympathies, but in reality it is their objective which has been served. Vultures do need the dead, but the country can do without them.

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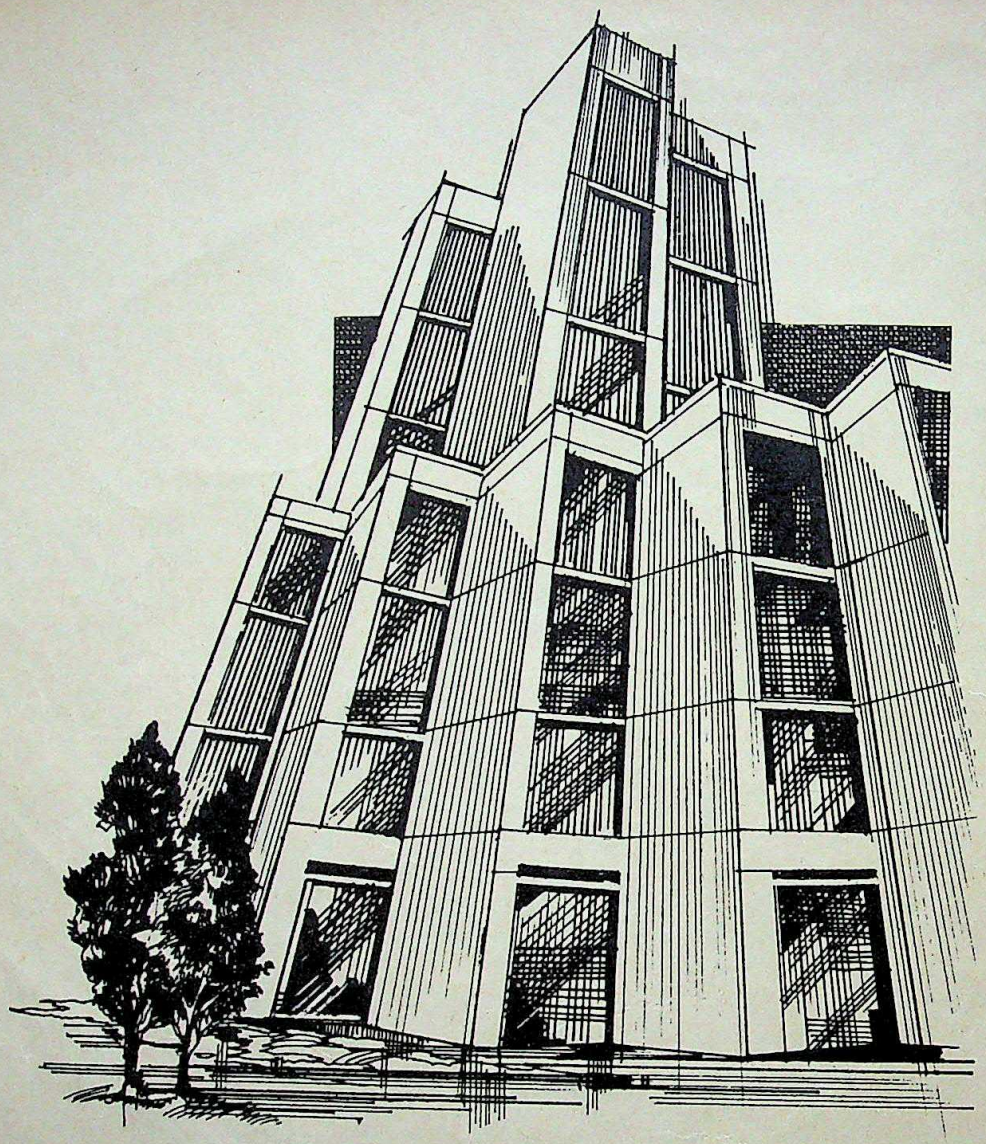

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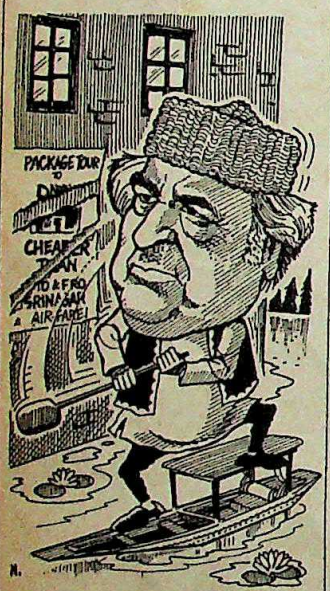
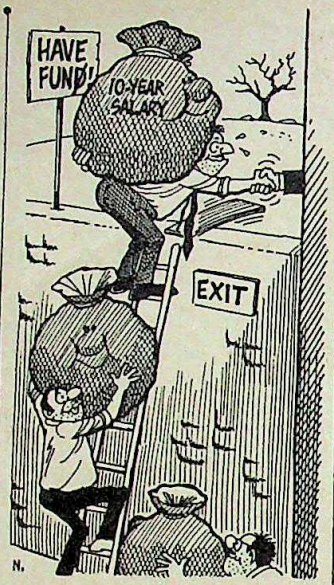
Tourist Stop

● Mufti Mohammed Syed may have moved to the Central Cabinet in New Delhi as minister of tourism, but his heart is still very much in the vales of Srinagar, as one leading private hotel chain recently discovered to its discomfiture. The chain had been bringing out a series of advertisements to lure tourists to its five-star hotel in a popular destination during the off-season. The advertisements offered prospective clients a discount package tour and other accompanying inducements.



But what caught the eagle eye of the tourism minister was the catchline, which stated that the entire package would cost "less than the air fare to Srinagar and back".

His chauvinistic instincts aroused, the minister ordered his officials to get the offending advertisements stopped post-haste as, in his view, it would affect tourism to Kashmir. A senior mandarin in the ministry promptly called up the hotel management and demanded that the advertising campaign be withdrawn. Knowing the kind of pitfalls involved if the "request" were turned down, the hotel chain meekly complied. Who says the Centre is ignoring the states?



Paying Proposal

● Time-servers and disillusioned bureaucrats in the Indian administrative and Central services will receive some welcome relief from the Pay Commission which is expected to issue its recommendations shortly. In a move aimed at encouraging jaded officials to quit the service as well as establishing incentive-oriented career ladders within the services, the Pay Commission is expected to make a unique proposal: Officers will be allowed to take "early retirement" after 15 years of service. But that is not all. They will be able to depart with a hefty golden handshake taking with them—as an advance—10 years of salary.

"This will be a positive step," said one senior official close to the commission. "It will make room for new blood while at the same time encourage those who are leaving to invest in savings bonds or start entrepreneurial schemes on their own."

Last Resort

● Charges of favouritism, bias and corruption abound when it comes to film censorship: why was such and such film given an 'A' certificate and a more torrid product permitted universal viewing, or a third film slashed heavily? But when it comes to Amitabh Bachchan, the ball game is in a different league altogether.

The film star-turned-MP has often bulldozed his way through the establishment to get his films cleared. But criticism for this has not prevented Bachchan from surpassing Bachchan for his latest film, *Aakhree Raasta*. Human Resources Development Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao was asked to try and get the film a 'U' certificate. And there were more requests. For one thing, he wanted one of the censors

certifying the film to be from Kerala, known for its liberal views on what is acceptable by way of steaminess. For another, he wanted some specific sequences to be spared the censor's scissors.

Ad Campaign

● With recurrent shenanigans in Doordarshan hogging all the headlines the other significant changes in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, meant to polish up the fast fading image of the Government, have gone more or less unnoticed. But these have caused a veritable scramble in the cut-throat world of advertising agencies that suddenly find the prospect of lucrative pickings provided they get the nod from the mandarins in Shastri Bhawan.

After a detailed study of the functioning of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry and particularly of the wings supposed to be looking after the Government's image, the Centre has decided on drastic changes. While the old Song and Drama Division is being merged with the Department of Field Publicity, the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), which has customarily handled government advertising, is being dismantled altogether. The reason: an internal study has found it inefficient, unproductive and inadequate to the needs the Government has from such an organisation.

Instead, the Government has now decided to go the Congress(I) way of using private, professional advertisement agencies to handle the massive government ad budget. This has obviously led to the mad scramble and, if insiders are to be believed, the high-pressure lobbying officials are finding it difficult to draw a short-list of agencies among which the accounts are to be divided. The ad-world is abuzz with the rumours that the first short-list contains as many as 42 agencies which only promises a bitterly-contested battle.

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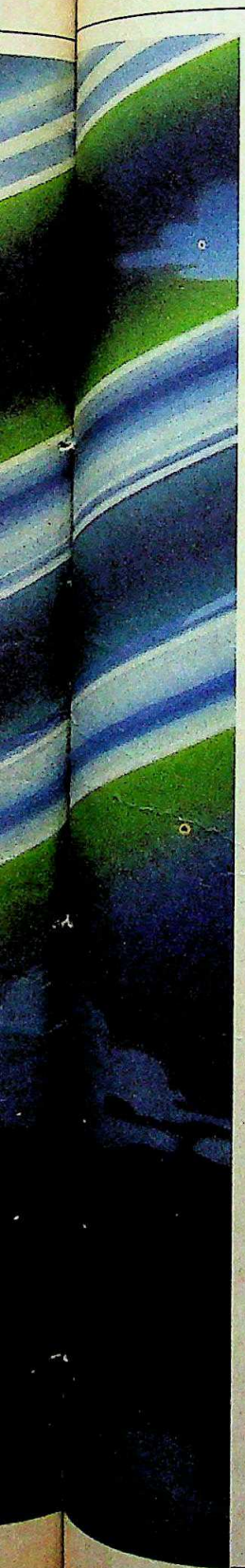

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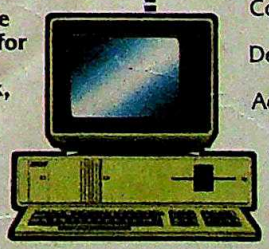

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● *I have resigned to strengthen the Congress party. I am grateful to the prime minister and to Indira Gandhi. I put myself at the disposal of the prime minister to use my services in any way he deems fit.*

■ BHAJAN LAL, Haryana chief minister, after his resignation

● *Punjab is getting Chandigarh. Haryana has got Bansi Lal. One puppet has gone and another has taken its place.*

■ DEVI LAL, Lok Dal leader, after Bansi Lal's appointment as chief minister

● *It (his letter to Rajiv Gandhi) is a piece of literature. I am very grateful to the press for publishing it.*

■ KAMLAPATI TRIPATHI, Congress(I) working president in the *Sunday Observer*

● *He (Rajiv) told me there was great pressure on him to drop me. When I asked him where the pressures were coming from he said that pro-American lobbies are at it.*

■ BALIRAM BHAGAT, former foreign minister in *Current*

● *It has been reported that either American or Russian pressure was behind my ouster. Nothing can be farther from the truth. It is sheer blasphemy to assume that the Prime Minister of India will ever act under pressure of any country, howsoever powerful.*

■ BALIRAM BHAGAT in a press statement

● *All that I can say is that our party has no Vajpayee men and no Advani men. All are* BJP *men.*

■ L.K. ADVANI, BJP president in *Sunday*

● *What is the political base of Rajiv Gandhi? He inherited an electoral constituency nursed by his dead brother. Arun Nehru inherited the Rai Bareli constituency just by the grace of his family title. Gandhi got Fotedar elected to the Rajya Sabha.... Should the charge that I am 'baseless' be hurled against me?*

■ PRANAB MUKHERJEE in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *If anyone has a base it is there only so long as he is connected with the Congress party. The moment he is out of the Congress that base seems to evaporate.*

■ ARJUN SINGH, Congress(I) vice-president in *Blitz*

● *The Mahajan Commission has gone into the gamut of the (Belgaum) problem and has submitted its report to the Government. How can we reopen the issue now? There has to be some sanctity to the institutions we set up.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI to newsmen in Delhi

● *When I voted for Jayewardene in 1977, there were only 20 or 30 militants. Now there are thousands. This Government is the recruiting agent for the militants.*

■ A Tamil lawyer in Sri Lanka quoted in *Time* magazine

● *When you are the captain, you have to take the good with the bad. My shoulders are broad and my chin is strong. Nobody can question my will to win—for India or myself.*

■ KAPIL DEV in his autobiography, *By God's Decree*

● *Avoid promiscuity. Add that extra ingredient of philosophy to your life.*

■ H.V. HANDE, Tamil Nadu health minister, on AIDS precautions in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *The other day I was at dinner at a friend's house and* Buniyad *was on. All sorts of emotional things were happening to me on the screen and these people were saying 'pass the chapattis.' I got so upset.... I've been offered very good serials but have turned them down only because of this.*

■ ANITA KANWAR, *Buniyad* actress in *Sunday Observer*

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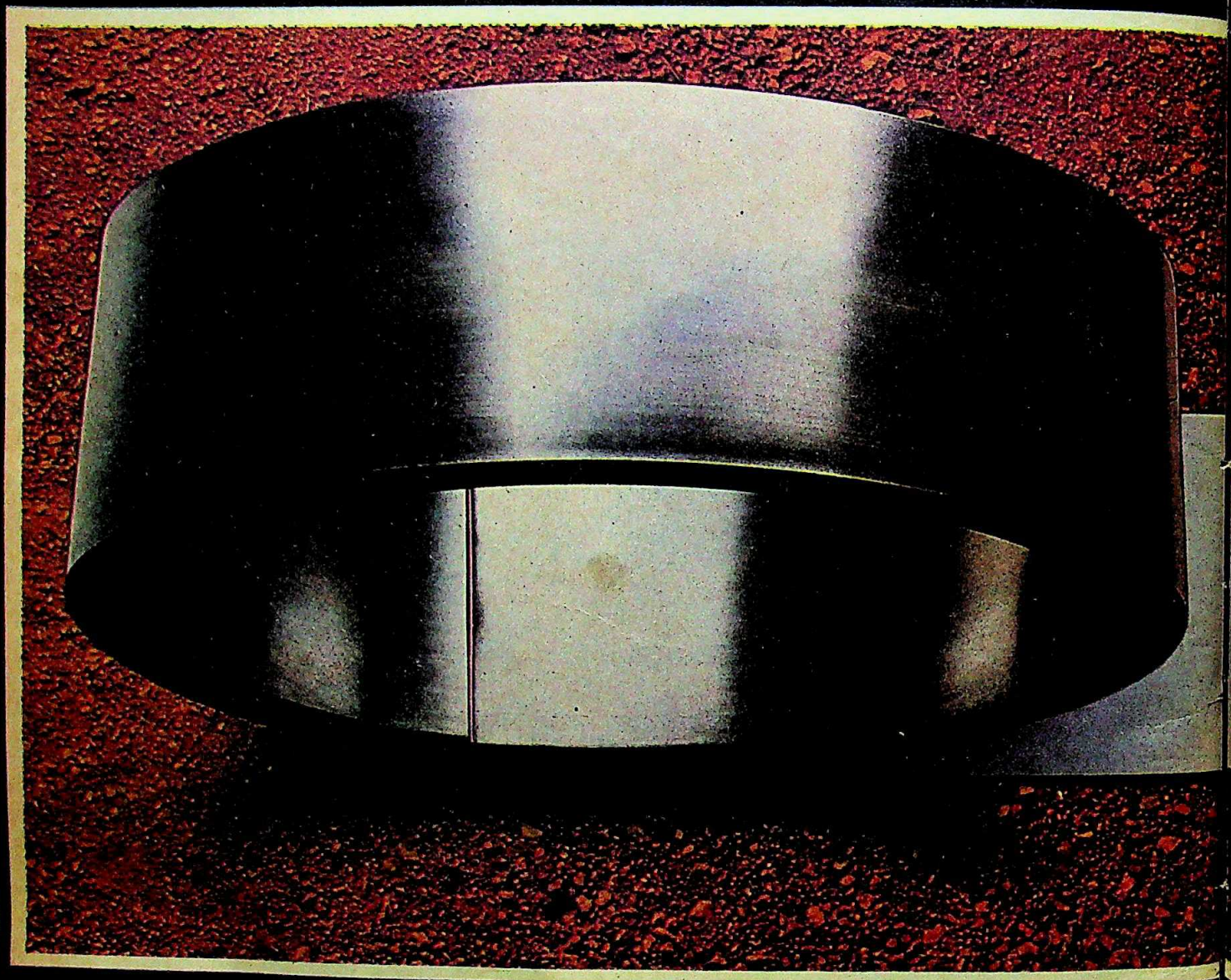

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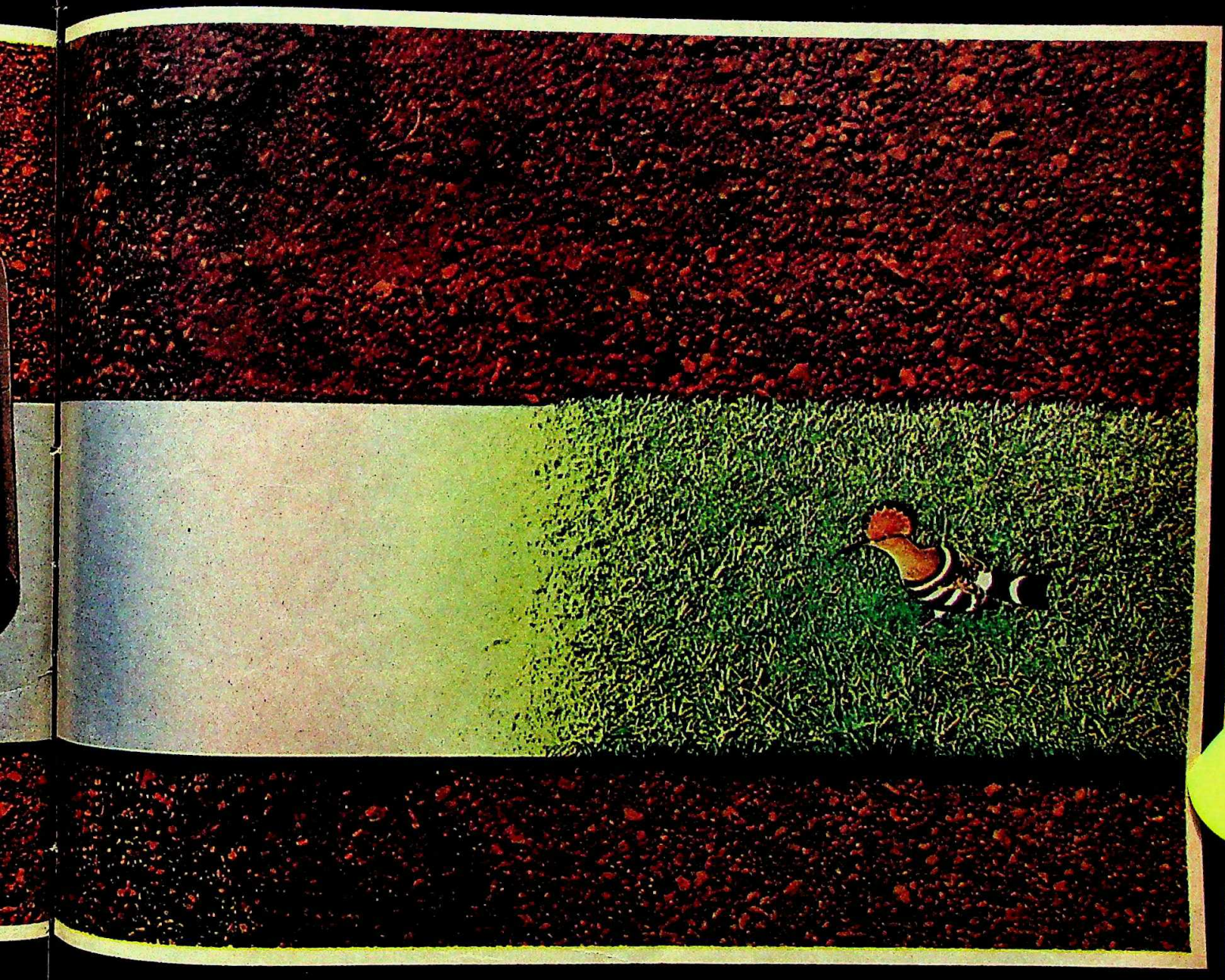

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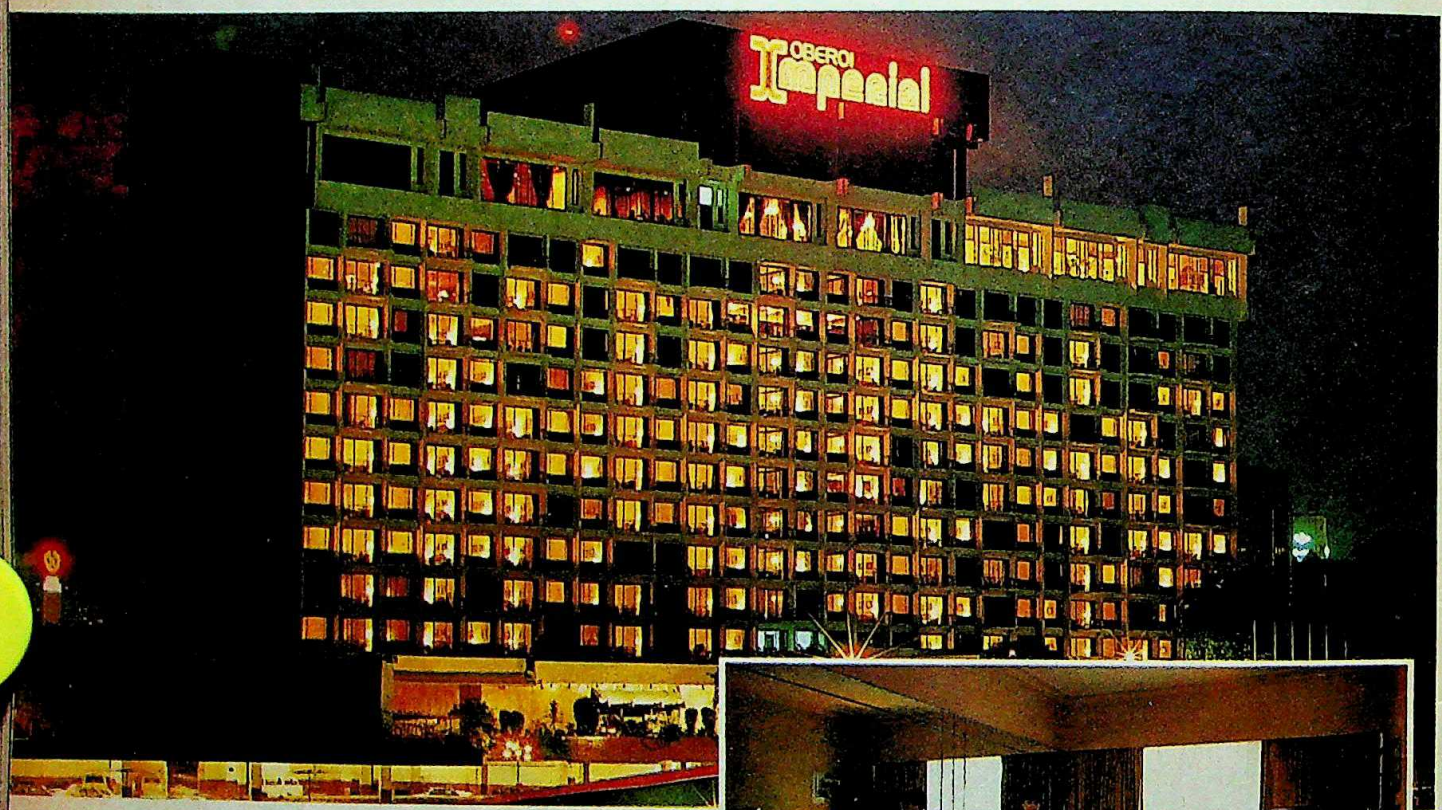

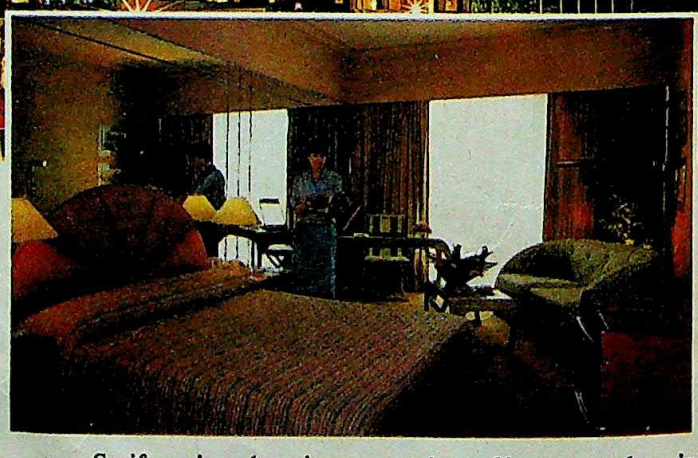

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AD 08

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LATE PROMOTION

■ What does it take to get a promotion in a government department? In some cases bribery does the trick, in others, clout counts. But the National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI) in New Delhi seems to have set new and bizarre standards. Take the tragic tale of R.R. Patro, one of the institute's research scientists who, frustrated by lengthy delays in his promotion and the withdrawal of an incentive granted to him by the institute, suffered severe depression last May which eventually led to his committing suicide. Patro left behind a note in which he said he was driven to taking his own life because of "official harassment and long delay in getting my due promotion".

The sad story did not end there. Exactly a fortnight after his widely-reported suicide, the powers-that-be in the NDRI decided to grant Patro his long-overdue promotion—posthumously. Patro's wife received a letter from the institute addressed to her dead husband in which the institute was pleased to grant him a promotion to a higher salary scale. The tragic irony lay more in the footnote to the letter which read: "In case of any difficulty, it would be our pleasure to render necessary assistance."

MOONLIGHT SONATA

■ When times are hard, a little moonlighting on the side can hardly be considered objectionable. But the Rehman family of Hyderabad seem to have taken it to absurd—though mutually beneficial—extremes. Rehman is an officer in the state Government's Industries Department. And his good wife just happens to be chairperson of the Standing Committee of the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad city. And how the twain combined is currently the subject of a heated controversy. Rehman, officially meant to be relaxing on his annual leave, was unofficially moonlighting as secretary to his own wife in her official capacity.

But there was more to his extra-curricular activities than usual husbandly solicitude. In his double role, he was busy drafting letters pertaining to the awarding of lucrative contracts by the corporation for the purchase of steel for its construction projects. The rivals for the contracts were two public sector companies and his wife, as chairperson, had a major say in the decision, helped by her secretary no doubt. Marital harmony does have beneficial side-effects.

RICH PICKINGS

■ Once a thief, always a thief, or so the old saying goes. The Mawana police in Meerut district would beg to concur, specially after their recent experience. Baffled by a series of successes chalked up by a local pickpocket, the Mawana police rounded up all the known light-fingered gentry in the area. But the pickpocketing wave continued unabated. This went on for some months while the red-faced policemen continued their futile efforts to apprehend the elusive culprit under pressure from an irate—and poorer—public.

Finally, the big break came. A local citizen, Rakesh Kumar, was caught literally red-handed last fortnight while in the process of dipping his fingers into the pocket of an unsuspecting victim. Hauled off to jail, he pleaded that he was a poor amateur and his desperation for money had led him to take desperate measures. But the truth proved otherwise. Delving into his own pockets, the police discovered to their amazement that Kumar was in possession of two passbooks for different banks and the joint account showed that he had a working capital of over Rs 10 lakh, making him one of the richest individuals in the district. Who says crime doesn't pay?

MEDICAL BUNGLE

■ Mix-ups in the medical wards of government hospitals are legion, with regular reports of doctors operating on the wrong limb or carelessly leaving behind their instruments in unsuspecting stomachs. But one of the doctors in the Thanjavur Government Hospital must surely find pride of place in the medical equivalent of the Book of Bungles. Due to perform a delicate operation on a young patient called Suresh, who had a urinary infection for which the doctor had recommended circumcision, the doctor unfortunately mistook a six-year-old boy called Ramesh whose only complaint was a boil on his foot, for the circumcision candidate. In what must rank as the cruellest cut of all, the boy with the boil woke up from anaesthesia to find that he was missing vital inches from an equally vital part of his anatomy. Now, poor Ramesh is out on a limb with the prospect of having to undergo another operation for the unattended boil. There is cold comfort for him in the fact that the bungling doctor has been suspended since this is hardly one operation scar he would like to show off.

—Compiled by DILIP BOBB

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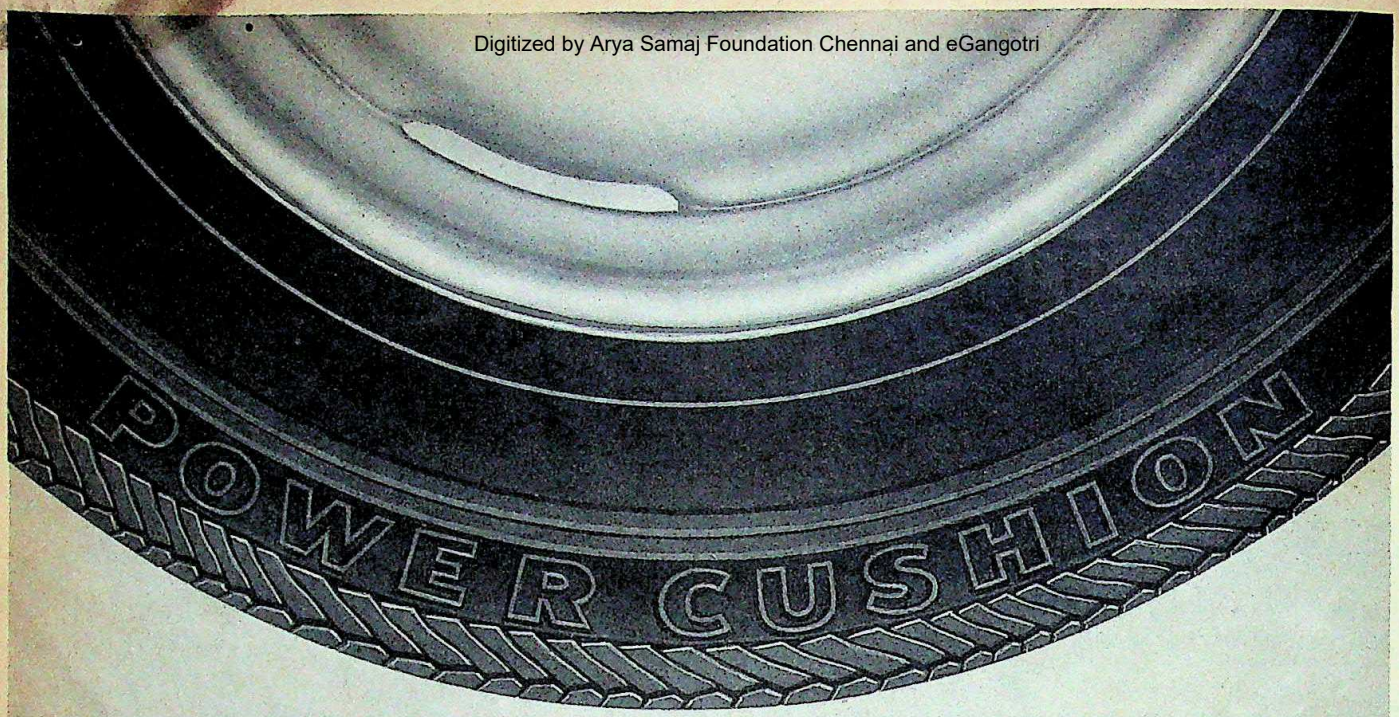

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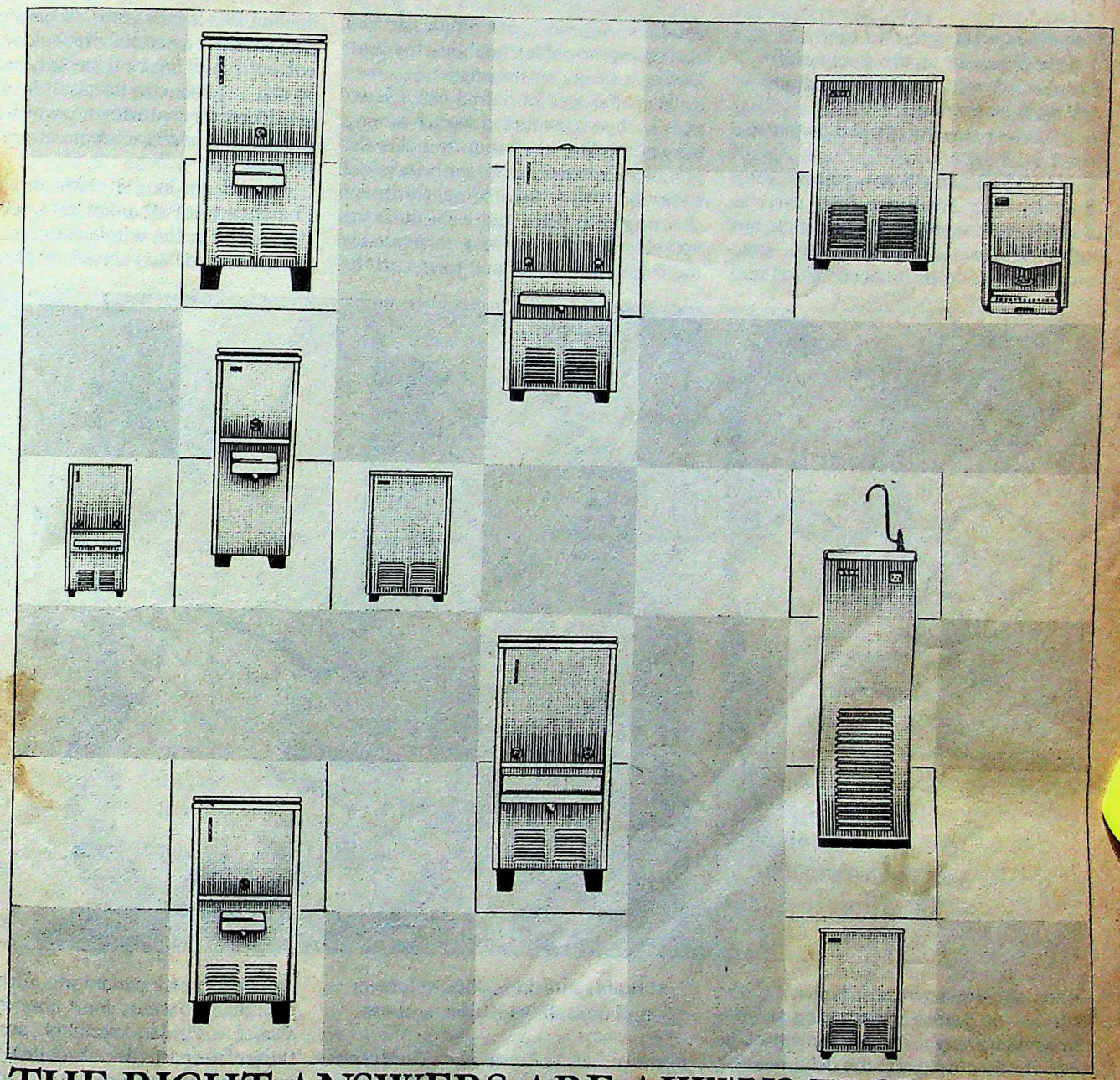

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PUNJAB

The Grip of Fear

Punjab has fallen to the evil eye
And the flames lap up this lovely garden
Please, someone fetch red chillies and a broom
And hit it on the head.

—Young Punjabi poet Surjit Patar

IN PUNJAB today, fear is all-pervading and people are losing faith even in divine intervention. The once rich, but tightly-knit social tapestry of the state now lies stained in innocent blood and riven by the terrorists' bullets. If the Hindus are scared and running away—from villages to the relative security of the cities and from cities to the neighbouring states—the right-thinking Sikh feels increasingly insecure, unable to raise his voice in protest even against the blatant desecration of his gurudwaras by those professing to be the guardians of his own faith. There was hardly a murmur of protest on June 5 as sword and club-wielding militants lynched Avtar Singh, a member of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) volunteer force, within half-an-hour of the meeting in the temple complex where dissident Akali leaders spewed extremist venom and Bimal Kaur Khalsa, the widow of Mrs Gandhi's assassin Beant Singh paraded her three-year-old son holding a toy-gun, his finger firmly on the trigger.

With the seed of hatred being sown with such single-minded resolve among the youth, the future hardly holds the promise of better times for the beleagured state where every dawn brings the threat of a new massacre, and each dusk the apprehension that one may not live to see the dawn. In villages and towns, in the districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Kapurthala and partly Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Faridkot, life is circumscribed by the sickening shadow of terror. "It seems as if someone has poisoned my Punjab," laments famous Amritsar playwright and actor Gursharan Singh. Adds a youngster in Batala with a laboured attempt at wry humour: "We have an undeclared Janata curfew every day."

Highways that once saw maddeningly fast traffic, bustling bazaars where liquor shops remained open till midnight defying government orders with typical Punjabi nonchalance, and the once-over-flowing bus-stands—are all empty, unpeopled. Only a handful of people venture out, either looking for their daily bread or to take a patient to hospital. In a state considered for centuries the sword-arm of India, it seems there are no courageous people left.

On a night-long 300-km drive from Chandigarh to Pathankot last week, once the busiest in the whole country, INDIA TODAY saw just four vehicles: one carrying a perilously sick patient and three full of policemen. Twenty-four hour roadside *dhabas*, a Punjab speciality, are now a thing of the past. "We absolutely wind up our business by nine p.m." says Ram Singh, a *dhaba* owner near Mukerian, wistfully remembering the long-lost "normal" times when business went on merrily into the early hours of the morning. Similarly, between Rajpura and Amritsar—another 300 km—and on the Ludhiana-Ferozpur national highway, it is largely Punjab police patrols or Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) pickets which greet the rare daring traveller.

In the crowded, old bazaars of Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana and elsewhere, shopkeepers draw their shutters much

Fear is all-pervading and even the right-thinking Sikh's voice is drowned in the crackle of gunshots.

Militants attacking SGPC volunteer; and (left) Bimal Khalsa and son

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before the normal closing time and flee to the relative security of their houses. "If I don't reach home by seven p.m., my wife and children go mad with fear," says Amrit Aggarwal of Katra Ahluwalia in Amritsar, struggling to keep a semblance of his textile business going at a time when many others have chosen to call it quits.

The police and security forces, who begin their intensive patrolling once dusk descends, also prefer to see people back home by then, leaving them with fewer targets to defend against the hidden, elusive terrorist monster. "Don't create problems for us. Go back to your rooms. We have enough problems as such," shouted men of a CRPF patrol, shoving and beating a bunch of rickshaw-pullers with rifle-butts in Ghantaghar Chowk, the eternal Ludhiana landmark. Their tension and anger showed in the abuse which laced their orders. Morale, obviously, is not at its best.

In the past, people used to prefer travelling by night in the summer; today, most buses reach their destinations by seven in the evening. In smaller towns buses are parked near the police stations to save them from militant pyromania. At the railway stations—particularly in Amritsar, Pathankot and Jalandhar—passengers arriving late in the evening are escorted home by police patrols, if they are lucky. Or they stay back at the platform to spend the night in collective safety. Railwaymen do the same. "Our employees who finish duty by midnight, just stay put in their work-places till the morning", says Pritam Singh, Amritsar's assistant station-master.

MOST trains have been withdrawn as a safety measure and the few that survive, including Shan-e-Punjab, once the pride of the Indian Railways' express fleet, crawl at 20 kilometres an hour. Against five trains from Amritsar to Pathankot in normal times, there is only one now, mostly carrying railway employees. On the main lines, where practically each train compartment has a posse of policemen, traffic has thinned by 30 per cent. The smaller lines barely see one-fifth the normal complement of passengers.

The mercury of life, business, social amity and communal peace, drops a few notches with the news of each killing, inflated and spiced generously with rumour. But there is a section of people, albeit miniscule, that must be laughing up its sleeve. The terrorists have now begun to see a hope of their diabolical designs coming to fruition, and their systematic campaign of murder to trigger an exchange of population as beginning to show results.

"We will first force Hindus out of the rural and semi-urban areas to major cities. In this, Sikhs will have to support us. And then we will encircle the cities. We know it is a prolonged war but we will surely win." This is how Didar Singh of the Khalistan Commando Force sums up the terrorist game-plan in identical letters sent to several prominent Hindus in the state. Adds Tarsem Singh Kohar, a well-known terrorist leader: "We want a separate constitution, a flag and a president."

Unfortunately, this madness is backed by method, ruthless, cold-blooded and utterly bereft of compassion. Locally important and well-known commission agents, teachers and doctors have been the main targets. "The extremists know what they are doing. They know that killing influential people will cause more scare and migration," says Amritsar police chief S.S. Virk. Already, as state police Director-General Julio Ribeiro concedes, some terrorist sanctuaries are beginning to take shape close to the India-Pakistan border. And as he says with a hint of helplessness: "It is disgusting to see teachers, commission agents, bus passengers and farmers getting killed like ducks."

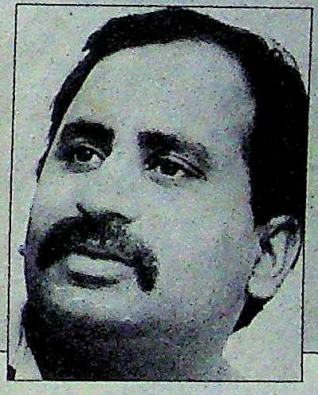
The few Sikhs who oppose the terror campaign are being systematically annihilated. The small minority of middleground leaders in the Damdami Taksal or the All-India Sikh Students Federation, such as Harinder Singh Kahlon, who oppose the cult of killing are getting isolated, their increasingly feeble voice drowned in the crashing din of gunshots. The law of the gun is all pervasive and seemingly unchallenged.

The same sense of panic that engulfs

"The extremists know what they are doing. They know that killing influential people will cause more scare and migration."
S.S. VIRK
Amritsar police chief

"I sometimes feel like jumping down the roof. If we publish we are damned by the terrorists and if we don't, our readers call us cowards."
VIJAY KUMAR CHOPRA
Jalandhar editor

"Seventy per cent of our business is gone. We dare not go to the villages."
NARESH SETHI
Amritsar carpet manufacturer



"You will see workers rampaging in the streets and hungry mouths laying hands on whatever is available."
AMRIK SINGH AMAN
Ludhiana industrialist

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the common man is palpable even in the heavily stockaded police stations. Most of the time these are locked from inside and policemen are extremely hesitant to open the doors. The terrorists have made a special target of the police. A Ludhiana Deputy Superintendent of Police, R.K. Bedi, who arrested known terrorist Gursewak Singh Babla lost his son at the hands of the terrorists. "The police is more demoralised than the people," laments Congress(I) state unit President Beant Singh.

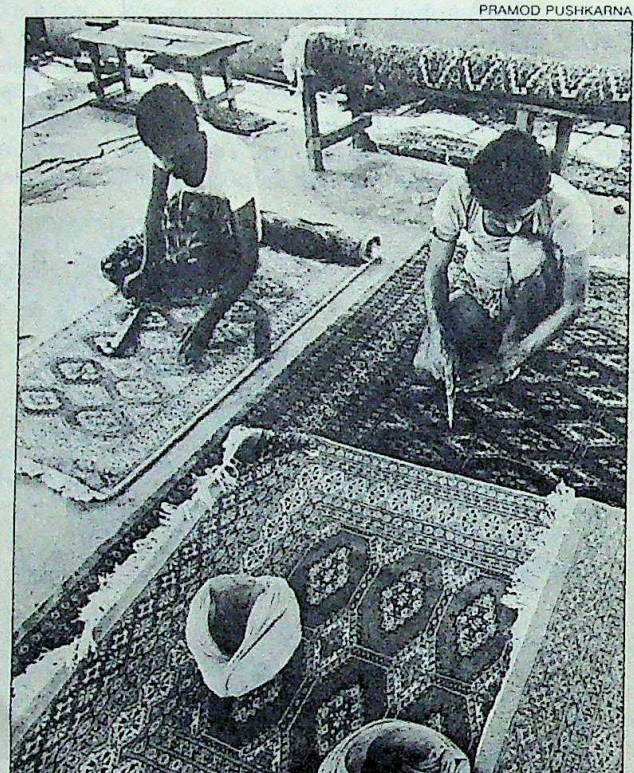
In the rural areas, the centre of systematic annihilation of Hindus and the Sikhs opposed to terrorism, fear has immobilised the bravest of people. In Chola Sahib in Amritsar district, when over two dozen terrorists struck last fortnight, killing four and injuring seven, no one gathered the wits or the courage to go and inform the police. At Warpal, barely 10 km from Amritsar, four terrorists nonchalantly entered the house of Sohan Lal, killed him and his daughter and instructed his dazed family to stay put if they wanted to remain alive. The village, incredibly enough, learnt of the killings a good four hours after they had been carried out.

In Fatehgarh Churian, a town of 20,000, when the terrorists struck and killed the courageous BJP leader Ram Lubhaya, they had the cheek to tell people not to move without their permission as it was a "liberated area of the Khalistan Commando Force". "We have no words. We can tell our tale only in tears," says Lubhaya's daughter. The scars of the Hindu-Sikh clash that took place after the killing are too deep to be forgotten. Hindus agree that most Sikhs shelter terrorists out of fear, but feel that some also do so out of sympathy. "Sikhs are helpless. We are scared. We are bound to die one by one," says Narinder Kundra, who recently resigned from the Congress (I).

Terrorists have already declared two sub-divisions, Tarn Taran in Amritsar district and Batala in Gurdaspur district, as their liberated areas. "The terrorists rule here while the police looks the other way. Nobody dares to oppose them and we are not in a position to defend ourselves," says Rajpal, a panchayat member of Fatehabad in Tarn Taran from where 30 Hindu families have already migrated. Adds Dr Beant Singh, a CPI member: "People have lost faith in the police and the rulers. Either we have to get organised and fight back or we are finished."

Scores of Hindus have fled from a large number of villages and from small towns like Patti, Khadoor Sahib, Goindwal, Chatiwind, Majitha, Jhabal, Chola Sahib and Tumbi (INDIA TODAY, June 15). Those who have stayed back are only biding their time. "I am here only to sell away my shop. The rest of my family is already in Haryana," says Ramesh Kumar, a small shopkeeper in Warpal. Although the police denies it vehemently, many people allege that the police tell them to go away till they can control terrorism.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



More than half the business houses are getting carpets woven in Kashmir and in the few units that survive, their mainly Muslim workers have grown beards and wear turbans.

The extremists' penchant for pulling the trigger is matched only by their flair for letter-writing. The police receive about a score every day forwarded by scared citizens. V.K. Chopra, editor of the Jalandhar-based Hind Samachar group of newspapers gets at least three every day as his publications have championed the Hindu cause. Chopra functions from a heavily guarded office, approaches to which are out of bounds. He moves with an escort of half a dozen armed policemen, but is still mortally scared. "I sometimes feel like jumping down the roof. If we publish we are damned by the terrorists and if we don't, our readers call us cowards," says Chopra, whose father and brother were killed by terrorists.

BATALA, once the prosperous industrial hub of Gurdaspur, is now the nucleus from which the violent campaign radiates into the state. Half of the foundry units in the city are already closed, some 45 of them shifting to Samalkha near Panipat in Haryana in the last two months. As many as 750 business houses have surrendered their sales tax allotments. "Banks give no credit. All trade is in cash. We are here because we cannot face hunger," says Anil Sareen, a foundry owner. Adds a Sikh who prefers the discretion of anonymity: "We are threatened if we buy Hindu property. Terrorists tell us that all the property belongs to the Sikhs."

The industrial scene is just as dismal in Amritsar, Jalandhar or Ludhiana. There are 10,000 powerlooms scattered in Amritsar and the villages around, but business in the once-flourishing textile trade is down by 40 per cent. In worsted weaving, blankets, staple yarn and shawls, Amritsar is losing its prime position to Surat, Ahmedabad and Bombay. More than half the business houses are getting their carpets woven in Kashmir and in the units that survive, workers, mostly Muslim craftsmen from Uttar Pradesh, have grown beards and wear turbans. "Seventy per cent of our business is gone. We dare not go to the villages," says Naresh Seth of Moghul Carpets with a Rs one-crore plus annual turnover. The two-shift factory routine is a thing of the past and Amritsar's volume of annual trade is down to a bare Rs 200 crore, one third of what it used to be in better times. Eco-

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nomically, Punjab is in the doldrums.

The flight of industry and capital has also begun from these cities. Blanket-makers are moving to Panipat. Some are going to Kashmir, Ahmedabad—even Bombay. Migrant workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are leaving. Banks are chary of giving advances and transport is hamstrung. If terrorism keeps its pace, the ranks of the unemployed will swell and add to the tension. "You will see workers rampaging in the streets and hungry mouths laying hands at whatever is available. The crime graph will shoot up," says industrialist Amrik Singh Aman, whose cycle parts unit has halved its production.

What is worse, the pattern of panic is conforming to terrorist designs. There is a rapidly widening cleavage between Hindus and Sikhs. In rural Punjab, Hindus get scared if a strange Sikh appears in the village and in the Hindu-dominated localities of Amritsar, Jalandhar and Ludhiana, Sikhs are moving out to safer, Sikh-populated areas. After each terrorist attack, Shiv Sena workers make Sikh homes and shops their target. Laments Gurdaspur Police Chief J.P. Birdi, an energetic officer who spends a physically exhausting 16 hours a day dashing about from village to village: "In Fatehgarh Churian innocent Sikhs became the target after terrorists killed the BJP leader. This aggravates the problem."

This is particularly tragic because in Punjab there is no dearth of families with both Hindus and Sikhs in their fold. "With each breath I only say *waheguru*," says an old Hindu woman of Fatehabad who has sought shelter in Amritsar. From this village a Chawla family has split, with two brothers staying back and two leaving for Karnal. "I have better relations with my Sikh partner than with my brothers," bemoans Premnath, a Sirhind industrialist who refuses to concede that they can ever be separated.

Sikhs are equally upset but feel helpless. "There was Bluestar, Woodrose, the November 1984 riots and now the terrorist killings. We Sikhs have lost so many lives. Still we have not killed a single Hindu in Punjab. The terrorists are not Sikhs. Let the Government catch them," says Gurdev Singh, a farmer from Jhabal village near Amritsar.

In this scenario, where police are helpless and political leaders rendered more or less irrelevant, looking into the future is a depressing pursuit. Most depressing of all, perhaps, for Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala fighting odds on all fronts—with rivals in the Akali Dal, with Haryana and the Centre vis-a-vis the accord and with terrorists. In sheer desperation, last fortnight he ordered a full-scale deployment of security forces. The worst-affected areas of Amritsar and Gurdaspur were handed over to the CRPF and the BSF, respectively. Under overall command of Ribeiro, inspectors-general of the two forces will be in charge of the two districts where 22 additional companies have taken the total strength of armed policemen to over 22,000. Terrorists have started shifting to Hoshiarpur, Sangrur, and Ludhiana, where the police think they can be met because they do not have so many hide-outs.

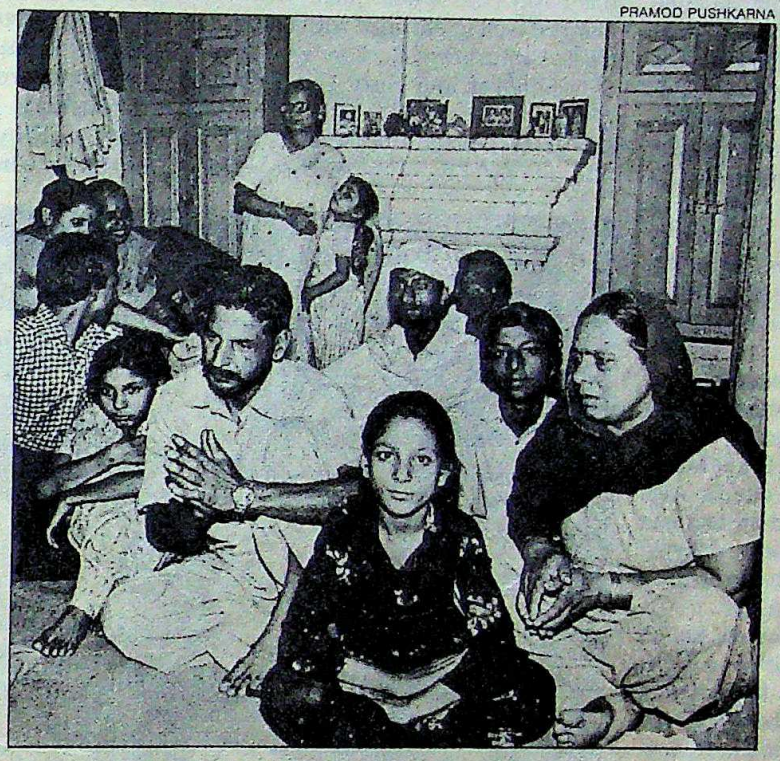
There is the promise of a new offensive at the political level as well. For the first time since the Akali Government took over, a minister, though a junior one, has picked up courage and toured the sensitive areas in Amritsar and Gurdaspur. Minister of State for Home Kanwaljit Singh initially had a tough time talking to Sikh peasants, particularly at Balpuria village in Batala sub-division where over 200 Sikhs urged him to tell the Akali leaders to stop quarreling and give political power to the youth. "We have to wean away the youth from this path. State terrorism or army deployment are no answer," Singh said later.

But that is precisely what is happening, as the tally of deaths crossed the 250 mark since Barnala took over. With more and more paramilitary forces being sucked in, it seemed the Government was being drawn inexorably towards the last choice in Punjab, calling in the army in at least the border districts. And when that happens, Punjab, within two bloody years, would return to the nightmare days of Operation Bluestar.

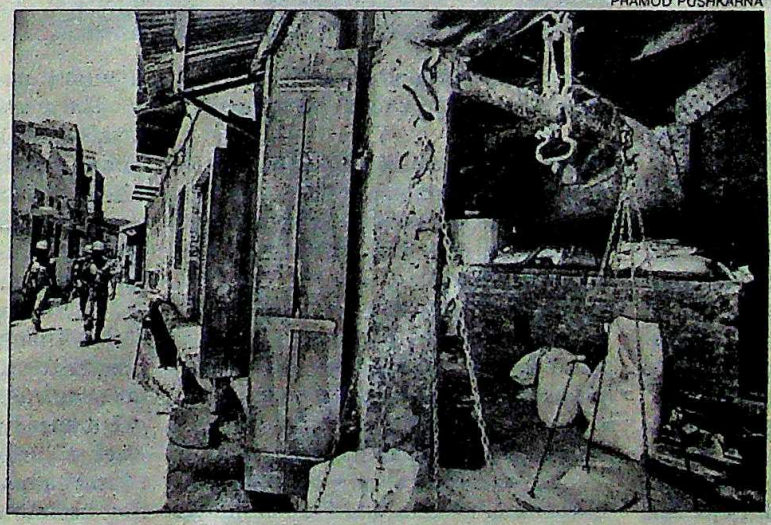
—GOBIND THUKRAL in Amritsar

Deserted streets in Fatehpur (bottom); and Hindu family in an Amritsar temple

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



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HARYANA

Bansi's Burden

FOR ALMOST seven years, he had clung on to the chief ministership of Haryana with a dubious mixture of political guile and blatant power-broking. In the market-place of politics, he is considered the consummate wheeler-dealer. But then, somewhat inevitably, the count-down for the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab also set the final seal on his survival in office. In a rather ignominous exit, he meekly handed in his 'resignation' last fortnight, and was replaced by Bansi Lal, Union transport minister and former chief minister of the state.

The timing made it abundantly obvious that it was intended to remove a major irritant in the implementation of the Punjab accord. At stake was Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's own credibility with the Punjab Government and the fact that the ruling party in Haryana was receiving a battering from the Opposition provided a convenient, additional incentive.

Bhajan Lal's exit followed Rajiv's growing conviction that with him in the driving seat, the Haryana Government would not only sabotage the accord but would be unable to handle the Opposition-sponsored anti-accord agitation. Exulted a dissident Haryana leader: "By forcing Bhajan Lal to quit, Rajivji has proved that he can be tough and decisive when the need arises and is capable of defeating politicians like Bhajan Lal at their own game."

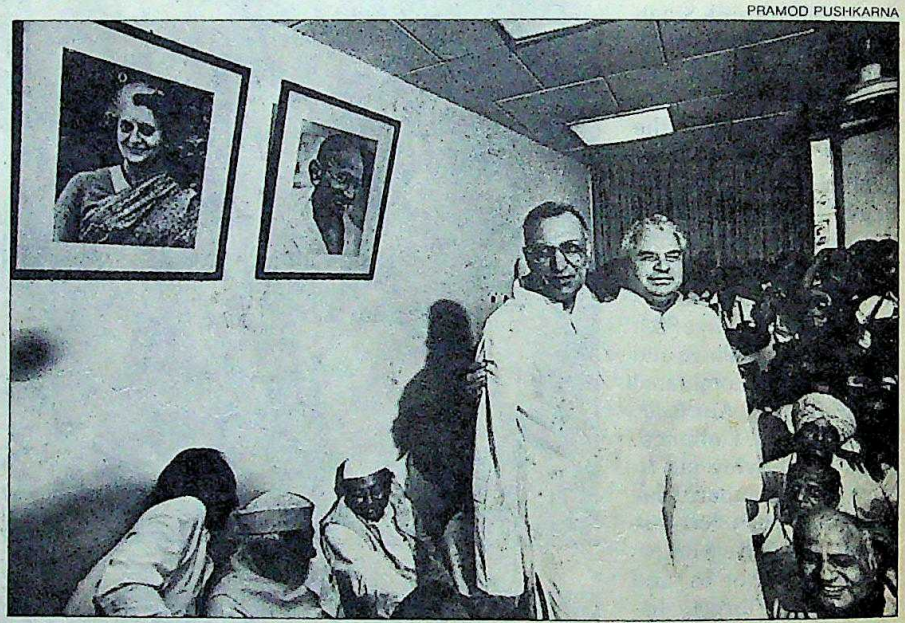
For once, Bhajan Lal was caught on the wrong foot. On the fateful day, he was scheduled to attend a meeting at the North Block office of Union Home Minister Buta Singh in New Delhi along with Punjab Chief Minister S.S. Barnala. However, before he could set off from Haryana Bhavan, he was summoned by Rajiv. Barely had he sat down when Rajiv dropped the bombshell. Charging that his actions were against the party's avowed stand on the Punjab accord, Rajiv said that he also had information that he was trying to build up his own image at the expense of the Centre. Rajiv's aggressive approach was enough for Bhajan Lal to realise that he had no choice but to abdicate. His resignation was handed over before he left the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

Though it did come as a surprise to everybody, including Central Cabinet ministers (even Buta Singh, who was handling the Punjab accord, was kept in the dark), the whole affair had been planned well in advance with only a few trusted ministers like Foreign Minister Shiv Shanker and party Vice-President Arjun Singh privy to the plan. The decision to sack Bhajan Lal was taken soon after the meeting of the Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet, held on May 31 at the prime minister's residence to consider the report of the Venkataramiah Commission (*see box*) looking into the territorial dispute.

During the meeting, it was revealed that the Haryana Government had filed an affidavit with the commission reiterating its claim to both Fazilka and Abohar. Haryana maintained that the commission had no jurisdiction to consider anything else, other than sorting out the question of Abohar and Fazilka. Justice Venkataramiah was in the process of giving the finishing touches to his final report expressing his inability to sort out the dispute, which would have resulted in a dangerous impasse, like in the case of the Mathew Commission report. The Haryana Government, and Bhajan Lal, had been specifically directed by the Centre not to insist on Abohar and Fazilka and were advised instead to file an alternative claim to the commission, so that it could provide a face-saving solution to the state. Bhajan Lal's defiance was thus an unexpected snag.

Initially, Bhajan Lal feigned innocence, but subsequently, in a letter to the home minister, he regretted his action and at the same time sought an extension of the commission's term, due to expire on May 31. Rajiv conceded the request for an extension, but at the same time set in motion the process for Bhajan's ouster. He asked Arjun Singh to summon all the Haryana Congress MLA's and MP's to Delhi on the day when Bhajan Lal was supposed to meet Buta Singh.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Bansi Lal (left) and Bhajan Lal after the election of the new chief minister

The meeting was ostensibly called to tackle the Opposition-sponsored agitation against the Chandigarh transfer and also to elicit the views of Congressmen on the territorial issues to be finalised by the commission. It was also a convenient coincidence that Haryana Governor S.M.H. Burney was also present in New Delhi. Though Arjun Singh maintained that there was no connection between the meeting and Bhajan's exit, the observers went ahead with the formality of asking each of the 58 MLA's present in Delhi to "elect" a new leader. Bhajan Lal, knowing his fate was sealed, was pressurised into proposing the name of Bansi Lal, his arch-rival in the state. Insisted Sitaram Kesari, one of the observers: "No one was imposed from above. It was Bansi Lal all the way. The party requires an experienced, loyal and tough chief minister".

Bansi Lal's induction in the state as chief minister paid immediate dividends.

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Soon after his swearing-in, he spoke with a conciliatory yet firm tone on the question of the transfer of Chandigarh in lieu of Abohar and Fazilka to Haryana. Retracting on the stand he had taken earlier, during his stint as chief minister between 1968 and 1975, Bansi Lal asserted, "Why should we talk about the past? Let us think of the future now. I will agree to forgo Abohar and Fazilka if it is in the national interest." Coming from the chief minister of a state which was proving a major hurdle in the implementation of the accord, it clearly meant that Bansi Lal was prepared to sacrifice his own political interests for the sake of the prime minister and the party.

BHAWAN SINGH

Devi Lal with anti-accord poster at Samiti meeting in Rohtak: major threat

BANSI LAL'S strategy will be to focus on the water problem, a key issue for the Jat-dominated rich peasantry in Haryana, for whom Chandigarh has no emotional attraction. Bansi Lal had earlier told the prime minister that the people of Haryana would welcome any solution which would give them more water and less territory in return for Abohar and Fazilka. His assessment seems to be pretty close to the truth. A majority of the people who were interviewed by INDIA TODAY last week in the state seemed to share this perception. According to Ram Sarup, an old farmer of Dasiya Village on the road from Rohtak to Gohana: "We have no love for Chandigarh. Just get us more water. And we don't care whether it comes from Punjab or Pakistan." Admitted a Lok Dal leader from Haryana: "If Bansi Lal can get more water from Punjab we will not be able to collect a few hundred for our agitation".

But Bansi Lal is not willing to sacrifice his all at the altar of the accord. While reluctantly accepting the offer of chief ministership, he made it clear that he would be firm when it came to protecting the interests of the state. In agreeing to the transfer of Chandigarh without Abohar and Fazilka, he reiterated that he would run his government from Chandigarh for at least five years till the Central Government constructed a new capital for the state on par with Le Corbusier's creation. He also extracted a promise from the Centre that the construction of the Sutlej-Yamuna-Link Canal will be done by a Central agency and the Eradi Commission adjudicating the water dispute would be prodded into giving its report at the earliest. Said Bansi Lal, "I will do all that a chief minister is expected to do."

And that, apart from the tricky accord-related issues, is no mean task. He now also has to try and salvage the damage done to the party and its image by his predecessor. Under Bhajan Lal, loyalty to the party and the leader could no longer be taken for granted. Over 25 of the 62 Congress MLA's had won the state elections on opposition tickets and Bhajan Lal was able to lure them over in his inimitable horse-trading style and set yet another record in converting a minority party into a majority in the span of 48 hours.

Bansi Lal lacks this ability, and he has to carry the MLA's with him till at least the next assembly elections due in May 1987. Since Bhajan Lal has bowed out of office leaving behind the impression that he was hounded out by the Centre for espousing the cause of Haryana, Bansi Lal has to walk a wafer-thin tightrope in convincing his colleagues that he will not abandon the state's interests either, however selectively, in order to neutralise the threat Bhajan Lal could pose to the party. During the last three years, Bhajan Lal has been able to build up an image of a saviour of the Hindus and had also succeeded in keeping the Sikh extremists on a tight leash as far as Haryana was concerned.

Bansi Lal thus faces a related dilemma. He cannot adopt the hawkish postures of Bhajan Lal, but at the same time he cannot afford to create the impression of being a puppet of the Centre which would also mean committing political hara-kiri.

It was precisely because of this that he has put before the commission Haryana's case for the transfer of at least 483 villages from Punjab. The state Government also made it clear that it would like the transfer of Chandigarh to be linked with the handing over of the administrative control of Hindi-speaking areas to Haryana. And when the commission submitted its report, it was Haryana which gained, since the commission's recommendations mean that it loses nothing to Punjab. Nothing could have been so advantageous for the Government, and Bansi Lal, faced with a major agitation threat from all the opposition parties.

Bansi Lal's immediate problem is to counter the agitation, launched by the Lok Sangharsha Samiti led by former chief minister Devi Lal, who has given a call for a Haryana bandh on June 21 when Chandigarh is to be handed over to Punjab. Says Devi Lal: "Haryana's interest cannot be protected by those who survive on the base of the support of their leaders in Delhi. One puppet has been replaced by another." Added Dr Mangal Sein, leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party: "The question is not who rules the state but who ensures the safety of minorities in Punjab and puts down terrorism with a heavy hand. We will not tolerate any attempt to surrender the rights of our people."

During the last few months, opposition leaders have been touring the state extensively to mobilise the people, particularly the Jat community, into opposing the Punjab accord. A few MLA's have even resigned on this question. Now, with Bansi Lal in command, the agitation is sure to acquire a more ruthless edge since it is a test of strength for both the Jat giants, Devi Lal and Bansi Lal, who have old scores to settle. Bansi Lal has not forgotten the humiliation he suffered at the hands of Devi Lal's govermnent in 1977. In what was purely a politically vengeful action,

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the Haryana police arrested Bansi Lal on flimsy charges and brought him to the courts handcuffed. Earlier, Bansi Lal during his stay as chief minister had Devi Lal arrested and paraded in handcuffs. Bansi Lal, however, acts unruffled: "I have handled many such agitations in the past and will tackle this threat also. Wait and see. We will fight the battle both administratively and politically."

But it is destined to be a bloody battle. Not only does he have to assert himself politically with the unpredictable Bhajan Lal waiting in the wings to pull the rug if he stumbles, Bansi Lal will also have to neutralise the Jat-dominated opposition. Since he himself has a a sizeable Jat following, a chunk of the community is likely to desert Devi Lal leading to a period of political turmoil.

Bansi Lal's major problem, however, is to revive the totally demoralised Congress Party and build up a trusted team of his own. During the last three years, Bhajan Lal's only priority was to keep his government afloat at any cost, leading to a parallel neglect of the state's development. Both power and industrial production have suffered a sharp setback and industrial indiscipline in the state has been hitting new highs.

To reverse this trend Bansi Lal has already drawn up an action plan which he means to implement during his first 100 days in office. The plan, for which funds have been made available, aims at faster development of irrigation and power facilities in the state and a stringent check on wasteful expenditure. But the implementation of the plan requires the support of a committed bureaucracy. Bansi Lal's advantage is that he has already earned a reputation for his administrative skills. He ordered a major reshuffle of key departments like finance, power and revenue within a week of his taking charge and has brought in trusted civil servants who have earlier worked under him.

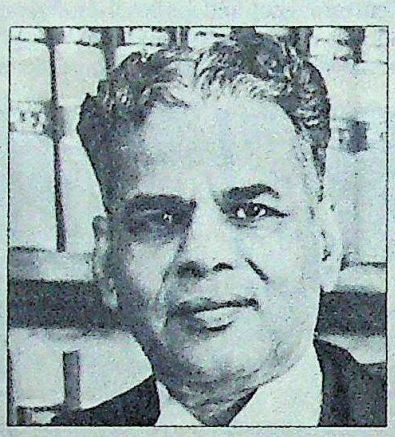
He has also drawn up an extensive touring schedule in the villages to counter the Opposition agitation. During the next few weeks he plans to cover all the major towns and important villages and woo the Jats back into the Congress fold by laying out his objectives and priorities. If Bansi Lal does succeed in neutralising the agitation, reviving the state's industrial health, and keeping the party together—a tall order—Rajiv's gamble of changing the leadership just 11 months before the state elections are due, could pay rich dividends.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

VENKATARAMIAH AWARD

No Solution

THE Justice E.S. Venkataramiah Commission's award on Hindi-speaking areas to be given to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh going to Punjab has once again proved that judges do not sort out territorial issues. In the process, the Union Government has realised that ex-



Venkataramiah: justice delayed

change of territories is a political issue which can only be sorted out at the political level.

Though Justice E.S. Venkataramiah quantified that Punjab should transfer 70,000 acres to Haryana, he left his main job—to identify Hindi-speaking areas for transfer to Haryana—untouched. "It may not be too late for the Centre and the governments of Punjab and Haryana to settle this issue amicably by identifying the villages to be given without insisting upon proof regarding the question whether they are Hindi-speaking or Punjabi-speaking," the judge observed.

Immediate reactions to Justice Venkataramiah's award were predictable. While the Punjab Congress (I) welcomed it, the Akali Dal, both the ruling Barnala faction and the rebels, were greatly upset. Reflecting the general mood, Education Minister Basant Singh Khalsa said: "The Rajiv-Longowal accord is dead. Venkataramiah has even surpassed Mathew." And while the opposition parties in Haryana roundly denounced the award, the ruling Congress(I) accepted it.

Barnala avoided any direct criticism but the Punjab Cabinet expressed "its deep sense of anguish to find that the commission has made recommendations unwarranted by its terms of reference as also by the letter and spirit of the accord." It "urged the Centre to review the report and strike down the portions transgressing and violating the terms of reference".

The award, Akali Dal leaders felt, shows that the Congress(I) Government is now giving primacy to its political compulsions in Haryana. Said Punjab Finance Minister Balwant Singh: "The purpose of the accord was to solve the Punjab problem. But this award solves the Congress(I)'s problems in Haryana." Added the Revenue Minister Major Singh Uboke: "The report is shocking and shows the Centre's insincerity."

Haryana, on the other hand, was happy with the package of awards given by the commission: that the Centre should bear the cost of land, its development and construction of government buildings for the capital of Haryana. A cabinet meeting presided over by Bansi Lal accepted the award, forsaking the state's earlier claim to Fazilka and Abohar "in the national interest".

Committed to transferring Chandigarh to Punjab by June 21, the Centre stepped up its efforts to hammer out a political solution. At a night-long meeting with Barnala, Balwant Singh and Governor S.S. Ray, Arjun Singh offered due compensation to Punjab and urged that the award be accepted. But the Akali leaders were unconvinced. While Arjun Singh returned to Delhi, Dr Attar Singh, a teacher at the Punjab University, was asked to convince the Akalis that the Centre is sincere.

Late last week, however, it seemed the efforts at a compromise could bear fruit. Barnala, who had offered 45,000 acres in 31 villages to Haryana, indicated that a solution to the problem of the remaining 25,000 acres could be worked out. And suddenly it seemed that the clouds that had gathered over the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, and, consequently, over the Rajiv-Longowal accord, might dissipate in a new spirit of give and take.

—GOBIND THUKRAL

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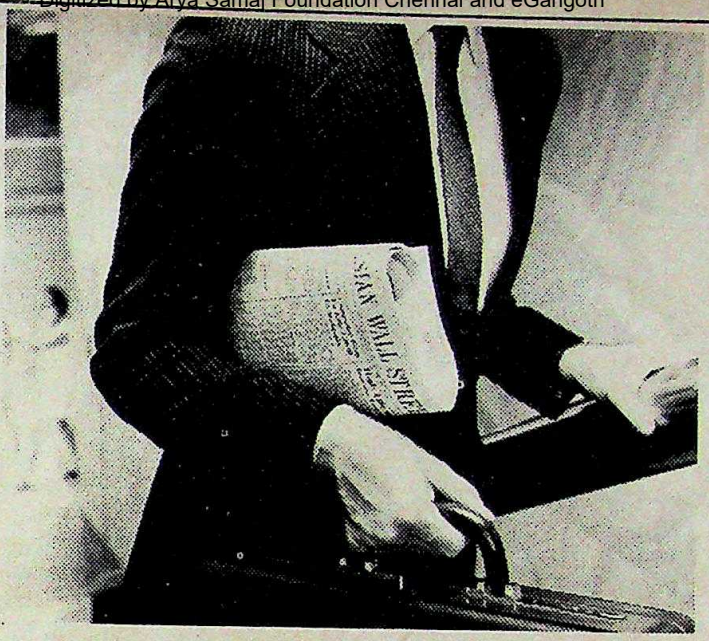

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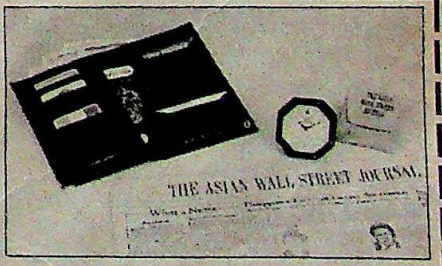

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MUKESH PARPIANI/The Daily

BELGAUM

The Elusive Solution

BELGAUM seems a far cry from Punjab. Yet it was here that the Punjab formula of granting territory on the principle of language affinity fired the embers of a dying aspiration, and stoked a week-long agitation that pitted political friends against each other, deeply embarrassed the Janata Party Government in Karnataka and left in its wake seven people dead and the people of a water-starved city wondering whether the day of reckoning had come. For 30 years the desire of the Marathi-speaking people of Belgaum to merge their territory with Maharashtra has periodically hit this northern Karnataka district with gale-like force. Last fortnight's was the strongest ever.

The spark this time was a decision by the Ramakrishna Hegde-led Janata Party Government making the teaching of Kannada compulsory even in areas around Belgaum that are predominantly Marathi-speaking. The decision gave a fresh lease of life to the Samyukta Maharashtra Seema Samiti (SMSS), formed by the state opposition, which took the lead in the agitation demanding that the Karnataka Government take back its decision. Thus, the president of the Samiti, the veteran Janata Party leader S.M. Joshi, poured venom on Hegde and even the Congress(S) leader Sharad Pawar, a personal friend of Hegde, was belligerence personified. Across the border, the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti, which has a single-point demand of Belgaum's merger with Maharashtra as its political charter, joined hands with the SMSS.

The irony was complete when the Congress(I) Chief Minister of Maharashtra, S.B. Chavan, took the role of the peacemaker on the insistence of SMSS leaders. Chavan had a hour-long closed-door meeting with Hegde in Bangalore. Later, joined by ministers and officials, the Karnataka Government made the same point to Chavan that Hegde had made in two unanswered letters to Pawar: that there was no compulsion to learn Kannada in the first two standards. Complained Hegde: "If the agitation leaders had come to me, I would have convinced them that there is no compulsion." The two governments decided to set up a joint committee of officials which will tour the border areas once in six months and suggest measures to solve the problems.

Less than a month earlier, at a massive public rally in Kolhapur, the SMSS decided to revive the agitation for merger by sending batches of satyagrahis across the border. The Karnataka Government responded by prohibiting all public demonstrations in the area. But Pawar managed to elude the Karnataka police to storm the barricades at Rani Channamma Chowk along with a batch of over 100 satyagrahis from Maharashtra on June 1. Pawar's arrest and the rumour that he had been jailed sparked off a frenzy of violence which led to police firing on a riotous mob outside Hindalga jail in which three people were shot dead.

Pawar in Belgaum: stoking fires

The same night the 20-km pipeline to Belgaum from Rakaskop Dam, the only source of water supply to the city, was damaged at several places by axe-wielding mobs from predominantly Marathi-speaking villages. Water supply to the city dried up, and a desperate administration hastily cleaned the city's 8,000 disused wells and began supplying water to the citizens by private tankers.

An even more alarming situation developed the next evening when a 1,000-strong crowd set out to damage the Rakaskop Dam and raise its sluice gates. "That would have been a disaster," said a visibly harried B. A. Coutinho, deputy commissioner of Belgaum, "and we got the local Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) legislator, B.I. Patil, to rush there to control the villagers." Near-disaster struck three days later when the Miraj-Vasco Express was derailed.

The same day the arrival of former Bombay mayor Chhagan Bhujbal, disguised as a Muslim businessman complete with a beard, in Belgaum sparked off a major riot, with running battles between the police and Shiv Sainiks and the stoning of several Kannadiga establishments. The mob even caught hold of a head constable of the Karnataka Special Reserve Force, Bhaskaran Nair, doused him with petrol, and set him alight. Nair was rescued by other policemen and survived with a badly burnt back.

The next day it was the turn of the Karnataka police to go berserk at Belgundi village, halfway on the road to Rakaskop Dam. After a police party broke into some shops and houses along the road, it was encircled by a 2,000- strong crowd, whereupon it opened fire on the mob, killing three villagers.

The analogy with Punjab is frequently drawn in Belgaum today, though the scale of violence bears no comparison. The analogy comes more out of the hope engendered by the Punjab accord that the Union Government would consider similar criteria—the village as the unit, and linguistic majority and geographical contiguity as deciding factors—to settle the long-standing border dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka. The violent nature of the present agitation, however, was deliberate. "Some of us feel that violence is the only way of highlighting an issue we have been fighting for the last 30 years," said an MES activist. "You have to clamp the nose for the mouth to open."

The MES was encouraged, ironically, by a reported assurance by Prime Minister

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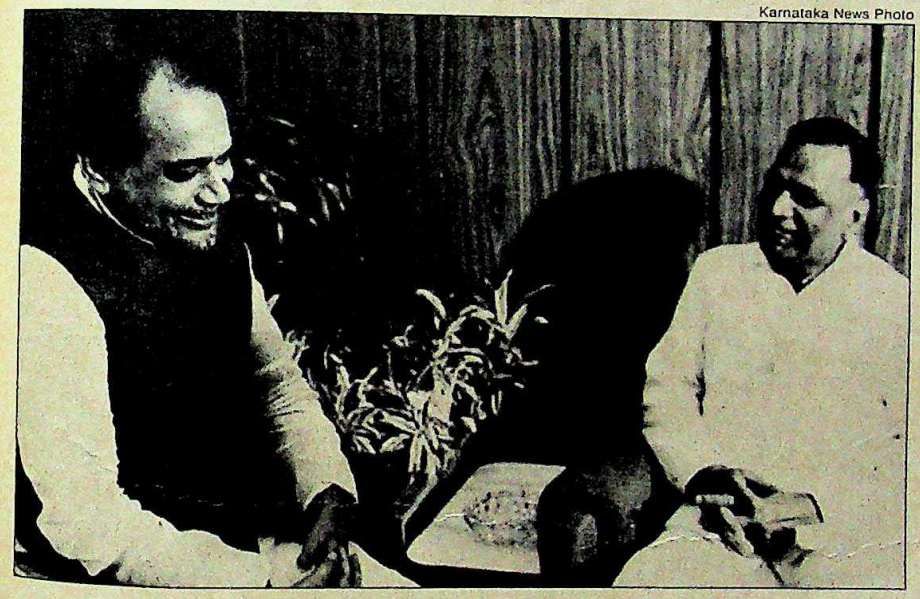
NAMAS BHOJANI

Karnataka News Photo



Derailed train (above); and Hegde and Chavan: fighting for peace

Rajiv Gandhi that the Belgaum border dispute would be resolved once the Punjab problem had been settled. There are conflicting claims about when and where Gandhi gave the assurance. Apparently it was as much of a off-the cuff statement as the recent one in support of the Mahajan Commission recommendations which caused a furore in Maharashtra.

A further fillip was given to the cause of the Marathi-speaking people in Belgaum by the open rivalry between two MES factions led by former MLA B.B. Sayanak and the present MLA, R.S. Mane. Charges were traded about abandoning the merger issue, and last year the two factions made an unseemly dash to Bombay to stage demonstrations in support of the cause. Delegations also went to New Delhi to stage dharnas before Parliament and MES representatives attended an all-party meeting in Bombay last February to chalk out the movement's strategy.

But dithering by Maharashtra's political leaders to launch a full-scale agitation brought forth the threat from an MES leader from Khanapur, Y.V. Chavan, to immolate himself at Shivaji Park in Bombay on May 1, the anniversary of the state's formation. "It was a serious thing. I could anticipate what would happen from Bombay to Kolhapur if he did that," said Pawar explaining why he took the lead.

It was then that an all-party conference chaired by Janata Party stalwart Joshi at Kolhapur on May 5 announced the satyagraha plan. Interestingly, the satyagraha was not in support of the merger demand but against the introduction of Kannada as a compulsory second language in Karnataka schools. As far as the border issue was concerned, the Union Government was given the ultimatum of resolving the problem by November 1. "The Kolhapur resolution was a compromise pushed through by Hegde's friends in Maharashtra to give the Karnataka chief minister some room for manoeuvre even as the responsibility for settling the border dispute was passed on to the Centre," said a Janata Party leader.

The Janata Party's leadership of the border agitation against the party's own government in Karnataka left leaders like Madhu Dandavate and Mrinal Gore unhappy and brought strictures from party President Chandra Shekhar. But the venerable, 82-year-old Joshi, who is formally not a member of the party but a special invitee to its executive committee, remained defiant: "This is a tricky problem, but the Marathi-speaking people have been neglected by us for long. If we don't do something they will go to parties which do not follow peaceful methods."

Yet, a visitor to Belgaum, even while the satyagraha agitation was on, could only be struck by the remarkable intermingling of the linguistic communities in the life of the city, 42 and 40 per cent of whose citizens speak Marathi and Kannada, respectively. Both groups, besides sharing a common culture and religion, are inextricably linked by generations of inter-marriages and economic ties. Said Vijay Patil, a Kannadiga tax practitioner whose wife speaks Marathi: "You will hardly find a family in Belgaum which does not have a link across the language divide. Why, even some MES leaders are married to Kannadigas!"

Hegde's Government, local journalists point out, cannot concede more than it already has—suspending the teaching of Kannada in schools located in the area given to Maharashtra by the Mahajan Commission—without facing a strong backlash from Kannada zealots in Belgaum and other parts of the state. Senior minister S.R. Bommai made the Government's stand clear when he said: "The Mahajan Commission has to be implemented in toto or the status quo maintained. There can be no other solution."

On the other side of the border, SMSS leaders were left with little choice at its meeting in Kolhapur on June 10 except to announce that the satyagraha programme will be extended. Both sides know, however, that the solution to the intractable border problem lies neither in Bangalore nor Bombay but in Delhi. Till the Centre moves decisively in the matter, Belgaum will continue to simmer, and erupt periodically.

—M. RAHMAN in Belgaum

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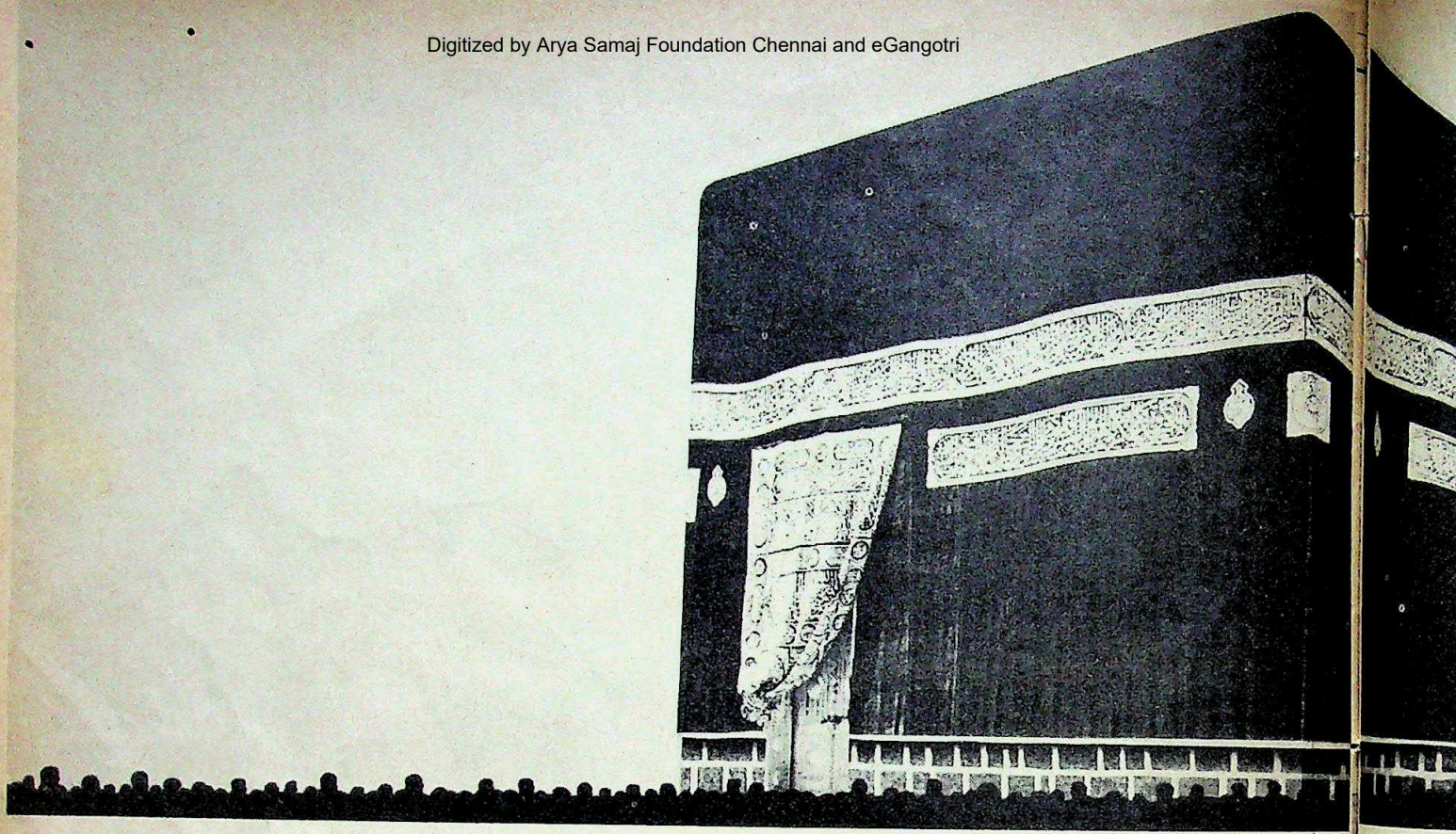

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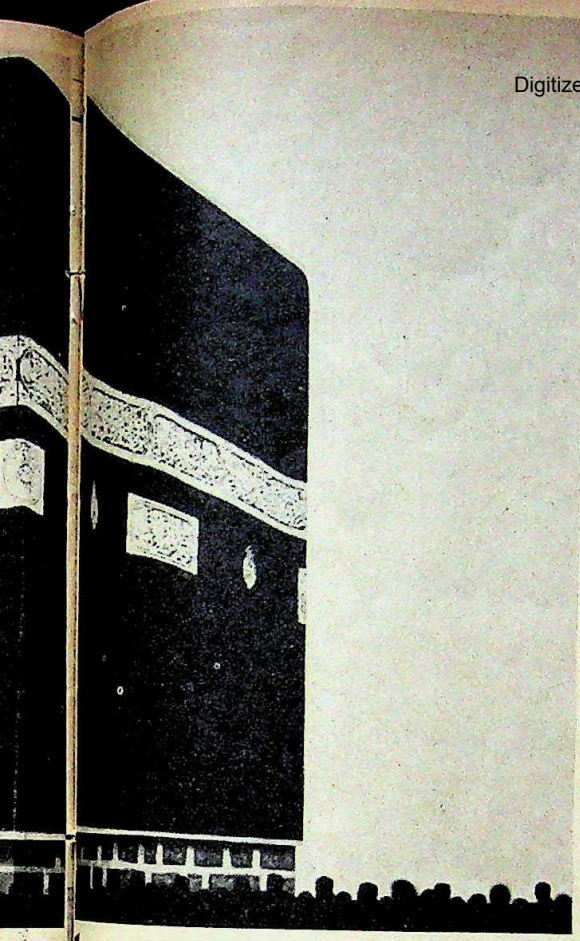

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ASSAM

The Perils of Power

THE ATMOSPHERE was electric in the top-floor room at the Stadium Guest House in Guwahati where the ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) party was meeting for a crucial session. Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, 32, was under attack from his own partymen and he was furious that a vast majority of his party's MLA's were accusing him of dictatorial functioning.

Worse, some senior colleagues were threatening to resign. Leading them was Home Minister Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, 29, Mahanta's alter ego at the head of the Assam movement for six years. Phukan was upset with Mahanta's action of depriving him of the political, general administration and anti-corruption departments in the recent cabinet reshuffle. He felt this was part of a "campaign" to clip his wings.

Goateed Brindaban Goswami, the astute and soft-spoken education minister and the strategist who masterminded the agitation, was also offering to resign to devote all his to the party. To the flurry of resignation offers, Mahanta added his own, offering to quit if his partymen continued to accuse him of being power-hungry and dictatorial.

There were other angry voices. Bharat Narah, 26, the forest minister who has been under attack from his supporters ever since he married a Muslim girl and then also committed the "misdemeanour" of inviting former chief minister Hiteswar Saikia for his wedding, was by far the most vocal. "What crime have I committed that people should want my job?" he asked bitterly. "I invited Saikia because he was elected to the Assembly in the same December 16 election which brought us all to power."

The concerted attack on Mahanta had a significant consequence: Mahanta's authority has been curtailed. The AGP has now decided to set up a four-member political affairs committee which will take all the major political and administrative decisions in future. Hitherto, Mahanta was exercising this privilege.

So strong was the infighting that the party forgot one of the most important items on the agenda: the action to be taken against two legislators and an MP facing serious charges of misdemeanour. The MP, Gakul Saikia, was asked to explain charges of drunken misbehaviour at the Assam House in New Delhi and the circuit house at Dibrugarh. Legislator Bhaben Barua was asked to explain his presence in Darranga Mela, a village on the Assam-Bhutan border inhabited almost exclusively by prostitutes—he claims he had gone there to buy an Apso pup. The other MLA, Rabin Saikia, was accused of bullying police officers.

Matters came to a head last fortnight with the sudden expansion of the state Cabinet, increased now to a strength of 32, only a little smaller than Hiteswar Saikia's widely-hated council of 38 ministers. "This is the negation of all the norms we stood for," complained one legislator loudly. Other partymen accused Mahanta of patronising elements belonging to the Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal and its student wing, the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chhatra Parishad, and the Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad.

These groups, whose ideology borders on secession, had contributed little more than embarrassment and violence to the Assam movement. Five of the new ministers belong to these groups, much to the discomfiture of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). Feeling left out and ignored, the AASU staged an angry rally at Guwahati the following morning against rising prices, its first act of defiance against the Government it had midwifed in December.

Even in that symbolic act of defiance, the AASU underlined the kind of prob-

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lems facing the AGP Government. Irked by the fact that Guwahati Deputy Commissioner C.K. Das refused to come outside his office to receive their memorandum, the AASU delegation, flaunting the authority of "our own government" abused him, called him a *dalal* (agent) of the Marwaris and threatened to teach him a lesson. Das immediately handed over charge to his deputy and sought leave, the first IAS officer of Assamese lineage to clash with the new Government.

Outside the IAS cadre, however, more have fallen victim to the AGP Government's quixotic style of functioning. Retired Colonel Uma Sarma was once a conscience-keeper of the agitation. After the AGP came to power, he was reinstated as chairman of the Assam State Electricity Board. He is now back in retirement after he made the mistake of promoting a Bengali officer to the rank of chief engineer while there was an Assamese claimant to the same job. When he was pulled up by the Government, he quit.

The dissension and dissatisfaction, mismanagement and confusion, are all off-shoots of the same phenomenon: the AGP boys' failure to cope with the acquisition of power. Their most significant failure, so far, lies in the inability to work out a working equation with the demoralised bureaucracy they inherited. During President's rule and then under Hiteswar Saikia, the bureaucracy had been used to crush the movement. This is something the AGP leaders cannot forget. Their handling of officialdom reflects this bitterness.

In the six months that the AGP Government has been in power they have had two chief secretaries and three director-generals of police (DGP's), while deputy commissioners and police chiefs have been shuffled many times over. But nothing signifies the confusion better than the manner in which the Government humiliated the second Director-General of Police T.A. Subrahmaniam, an officer with 15 years of experience in India and abroad with the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).

Officers were transferred, even suspended, despite his opposition and, on occasions, even without his knowledge. Mahanta and Phukan sent him contrary instructions on a matter as small as the posting of a deputy superintendent of police to Nowgong, Mahanta's home district. Mahanta's men wanted a raid organised on the house of a Marwari businessman, who is said to have lent his Maruti car to Bhrigu Phukan for a trip to Upper Assam. Kumud Narayan Sharma, said to be the guru of Mahanta, wanted a raid on the houses of three key agitation supporters who had been troubling him. Finally, Subrahmaniam decided to go on long leave, protesting against the reduction of "the DGP into a mere post office".

But Phukan defends his handling of the DGP, arguing that he had no choice but to get rid of an officer "who had no dignity of uniform, who did not know how to talk to ministers and who stood smoking a pipe while welcoming Zail Singh at the airport". Subrahmaniam denies the charges but refuses to say anything apart from a cryptic: "I am a faithful Hindu wife. I will not complain against my husband."

THE problem with the AGP ministers," said a senior officer, "is that they are trying run an open government in the 'Yes Minister' fashion but they also want revenge for what was done to them by the administration during the agitation. This makes for a self-destructive mix." This results in a situation where major government decisions are taken in consultation with only a few, trusted bureaucrats. Some of the orders recently issued by the AGP Government, considered to be major steps in fulfilling the promises made to the ethnic Assamese, reflect this state of affairs most tellingly.

By a *diktat* last fortnight, the Government declared that in future permanent residency certificates, needed for securing government jobs in the state, will be given to only those who have lived in the state for 20 years or more and have property. Legal experts feel that the circular will never stand the test of constitutionality.

Again, by a verbal order, the Government has placed a virtual ban on the registration of births, particularly in areas known to be dominated by immigrants. The idea is to prevent suspected foreigners from claiming citizenship for their children by dint of birth. But minority leaders have a point when they complain that they are being denied their "birth right". Arbitrary actions like these could lead to communal tension when the implementation of the sensitive parts of the accord begins.

But all this pales into insignificance before the great blunder the Government has made on the language issue, the perennial bug-bear of the polyglot state. Following close on the heels of a resolution passed by the Asom Sahitya Sabha in February, the Secondary Education Board of Assam decided to revive, out of the blue, its 1972 circular making Assamese a compulsory subject for students all over the state. This caused immediate

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consternation in the predominantly Bengali-speaking Cachar and Karimganj districts and also enraged a large section of the plains tribals, who have been demanding a separate state of Udayachal. The All Cachar Students Union (ACSU) has already launched an agitation and the All Tribal Students Union (ATSU) flexed its muscles at a convention specially called for this purpose.

The import of the circular in Cachar, where they used to study Bengali, Hindi and English, is that they will now have to study Assamese instead of Hindi. Similarly, in tribal areas, where they used to study Bodo as the mother tongue, Assamese will replace Hindi. "We have no objection to Assamese. But why are we being deprived of our right to study the national language?" asks ACSU President Pradip Kumar Datta Ray. "The circular has exposed the AGP's true pretensions. They want tribal lands but not tribal people, their languages or their heritage," alleges tribal student leader Ranauj Pegu.

Senior AGP leaders, including Brindaban Goswami, now admit that the circular was untimely. But they point out that it was issued by the Education Board which is a statutory body. They confess, however, that it has put them in a bind. If they do not go back on the circular there will be no stopping the separatist movements. History shows that Assam has split twice—in the separation of Meghalaya and Mizoram—because of the Assamese intellectuals' anxiety to thrust his language on the tribals.

On the other hand, if they get the circular withdrawn, the Assamese language lobby, led by the Sahitya Sabha will go for their jugular. Party spokesmen say they are trying to deal with the situation politically. Goswami is discussing with the tribal and Cachar students a new formula under which four languages will be taught in schools in two phases.

But in Assam the greatest danger today, much more serious than the dissensions and administrative follies of the AGP, is the threat of the accord going sour in the fashion of Punjab. Last fortnight Mahanta visited Delhi and angrily remonstrated before the prime minister and Union home minister seeking more active participation from the

Photographs by SHEKHAR GUPTA

Anti-Assamese slogans in Cachar

"We have no objection to Assamese. But why are we being deprived of our right to study the national language?"

PRADEEP KUMAR DATTA RAY
president ACSU

Centre in the implementation of the accord. But he later confided to close advisors that all he got were platitudes.

The AGP Government has been having problems with all the major clauses of the accord. The key clause, involving the detection of foreigners, cannot be put into effect because the Centre has not yet carried out the promised amendment to the Immigrants Determination by Tribunals Act of 1983 as this will provide further ammunition to the vocal Muslim communalist lobby. Similarly, work on the promised border fence has been suspended because the Government is disinclined to create tension on the border when it has its hands are already full with Punjab, Haryana, Belgaum, Gorkhaland et al. "Not only are they not building the fence they have even issued a circular asking us, the Assam Government, to stop survey for a road along the border," complains Phukan.

This has put Mahanta and his government on the defensive with the AASU leadership threatening to resume the agitation from August 15, the first anniversary of the signing of the accord. "We are extremely disappointed with the way things have gone," says AASU President Kartick Hazarika, adding: "Most Central Government undertakings such as Oil India, Post and Telegraphs, Indian Oil, have not even reinstated Assamese employees victimised during the agitation."

He also accuses the state Government of going slow on the withdrawal of cases against the agitation participants. "They have withdrawn 21,000 of the 30-odd thousand cases leaving out what they call as heinous crimes. This is ridiculous because the word heinous has such a broad definition," he complains. On this the AASU has already thrown a challenge to the Government by acting on its own. An example, last month, was the manhandling of Dr P. Bharali, the chief projects manager of Oil India Limited at Guwahati for his company's insistence on not treating six suspended executives as agitation victims.

The AASU's growing impatience can only spell danger for the AGP Government. "In case the drift continues we could end up in a Barnala-like situation with the new AASU leadership going its own way, against the Government," admits a senior party functionary. The AGP leaders are conscious of this and yet helpless. "People voted for us to implement this accord. If we fail they will never forgive us," admits Phukan.

But the immediate challenge is—how to cope with power. Brindaban Goswami defines it euphemistically, saying that the "party is too new to evolve a political philosophy, a style of functioning". But it does not have too long to do so because, with each passing week, with each misplaced circular or irrational transfer of an officer, the AGP will make it harder for itself to implement something as tricky as the accord that brought it into power in the first place.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Guwahati

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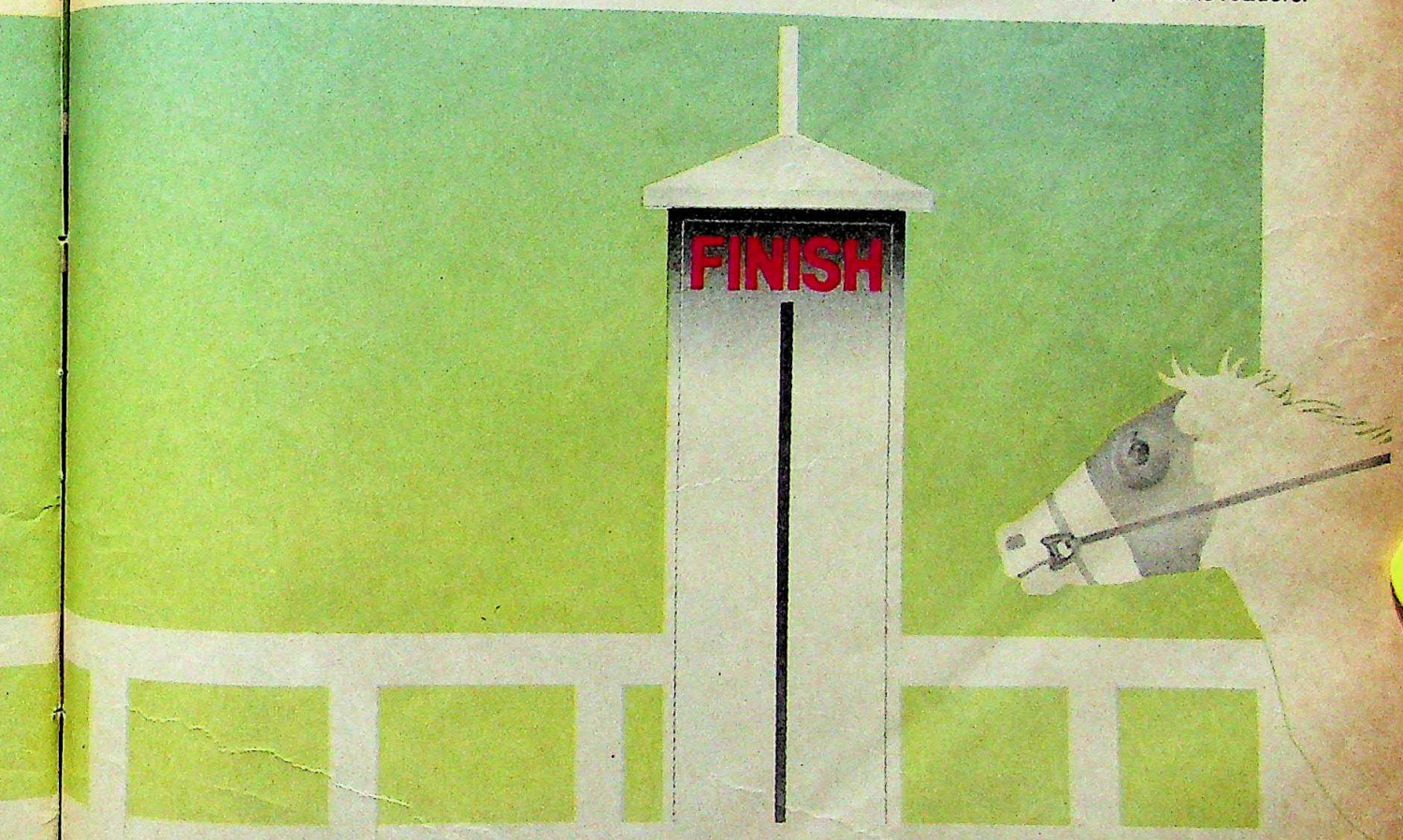

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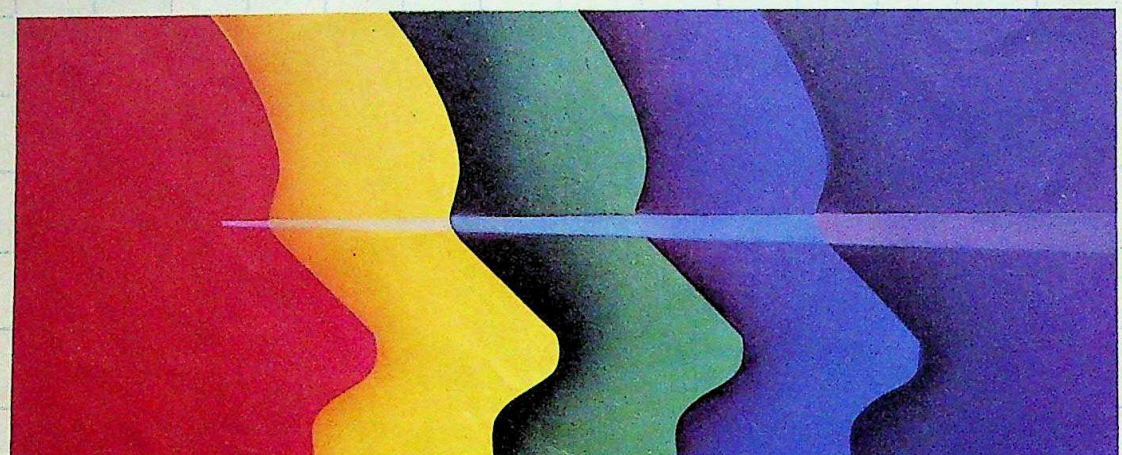

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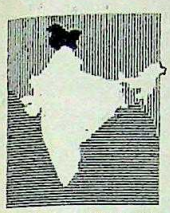
JAMMU & KASHMIR

Dual Strategy



WHEN he took over the reins of administration of Jammu and Kashmir last March, it was widely predicted that the volatile border state would turn out to be his Waterloo. But Governor Jagmohan has proved the Cassandras wrong.

During his brief period in office, he has managed to remove over 100 corrupt and inefficient officials, streamlined the recruitment system, amended various laws for punishing anti-social elements, established a monitoring system for implementing decisions and has made the administration more accessible to the ordinary people.

Jagmohan's acceptability in the politically hostile valley and the Jammu region is the outcome of the vigorous implementation of his 13-point 'Action Plan', which he drew within two weeks of his taking over. In his order of priority, Jagmohan decided that what was most urgently needed was a cleanliness drive to attract the maximum number of tourists to the state and thus revive the all-but-moribund tourist industry. To begin with, he ordered the cleaning up of the filthy Dal Lake and gave the municipal authorities a time-bound programme to finish the job.

He next set up a special task force for supervising the improvement of slum areas and roads in the valley and removed encroachments from public lands. He then personally supervised the progress of delayed construction works.

But Jagmohan's action plan, at another level, was also a subtle and effective way of neutralising the traditional hostility in the state towards the "*markazi sarkar* (Central Government)". He embarked on a strategy of approaching the locals directly with a view to solving their problems on the spot. He has launched a weekly janata darbar to which over 600 people come every week with their grievances. Says Jagmohan: "Kashmiris are very innocent and sentimental people. In the absence of any development, most of them suffer from economic problems and no one has bothered to listen to and design policies for them. Once they are convinced that the Government is meant for their benefit, they can no longer be misguided by anti-social elements."

Jagmohan, by inducting people from outside the state in key posts like chief secretary and the director-general of police, has attempted to introduce a bureaucracy that is neutral, a rare enough occurrence in Kashmir. Moreover, he has been able to promulgate over half-a-dozen ordinances amending various laws, including the draconian Public Safety Act brought into the statute books by the Sheikh Abdullah government. The amended Act is essentially aimed against the large number of 'anti-national' elements who have sought refuge in the state and provides for lodging detenus in jails outside the state. He has also set up recruitment boards for making governmental and public sector appointments to reverse the traditional trend of political patronage and influence-peddling which ignored merit.

The Dal Lake clean-up in progress; and (inset) Jagmohan: governor's gains

In a parallel move to minimise the scope of politically-motivated manipulations, the governor has appointed tribunals to decide on quasi-judicial matters related to land problems and revenue disputes. Earlier, these powers rested with ministers and as a result, over Rs 50 crore of taxes remained unrecovered. Jagmohan has also decided to withdraw the powers for the grant of liquor and other commercial licences from the political authority and give them to the tribunals.

Predictably enough, all this has created considerable resentment amongst the politicians whose powers he is trying to erode. Even the National Conference (Farooq) which had welcomed the imposition of governor's rule, has now started criticising Jagmohan's actions. They have accused him of diluting Article 370 of the Constitution, which gives special status to the state. The object is obviously to pressurise the Centre into calling for fresh elections in the state. Farooq made it clear that he would oppose the extension of governor's rule beyond the stipulated six-month period during his recent meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. He maintained that he would be powerless to contain the hawks in his party if fresh elections were not ordered in the state after September. The state Congress (I) on the other hand, while opposed to the idea of fresh elections, is pressing for an extention of governor's rule by at least a year or, failing which, installation of a government with the help of fence-sitters in the state's market-like political arena. Both Rajiv Gandhi and his Tourism Minister Mufti Mohammed Syed have already ruled out the possibility of early elections, but a section of the Congress (I) is toying with the idea of persuading Farooq to accept the chief ministership with their support. But that eventuality can only take place after the high command is convinced that governor's rule has not helped the Congress (I) in improving its base in the valley. But if the success of Jagmohan's calculated administrative and political strategy is any indication, the prime minister might be in a position to risk a poll earlier than anybody imagines.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Srinagar

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ARUN NEHRU

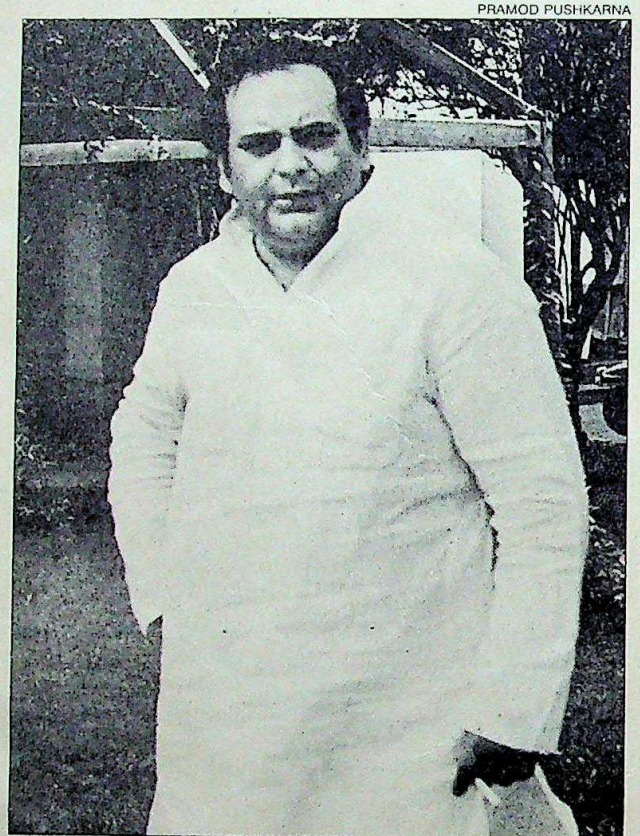
Political Palpitations

AS DOCTORS hovered anxiously around the corpulent patient in a Srinagar hospital, it seemed as if what they were really monitoring was the heightened political pulse in the Government and the Congress(I). In a sense, they were. The patient happened to be Arun Nehru, Union minister of state for internal security and believed to be the person with the most clout after the prime minister. And his medical diagnosis was linked inextricably to the political well-being of any number of politicians all over the country. Ever since Nehru suffered a heart attack in the early hours of May 31, the state of his health has become the country's most closely guarded secret.

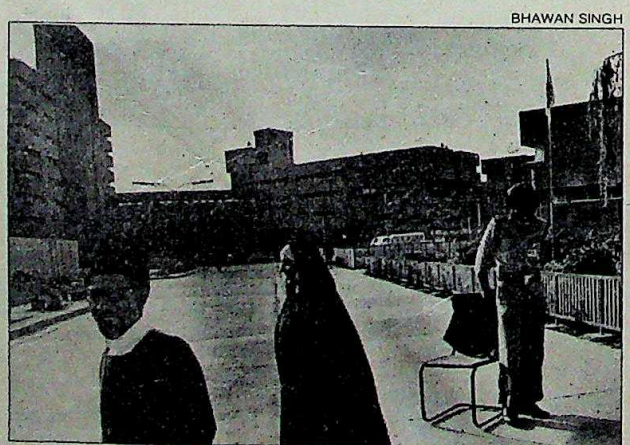
If any further proof of Nehru's importance in the current scheme of things was required it was provided by Doordarshan which televised a daily, and increasingly optimistic, medical report on Nehru for the first few days after the heart attack. But the grapevine throbbed with gossip and speculation about the extent of the damage caused to his heart and its implications for the nation. Srinagar's Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), where Nehru was recuperating, became the new Mecca for ruling party dignitaries, while back in Delhi, his political adversaries were busy floating rumours that he would need an artery bypass to continue in politics.

But at the institute, where a six-member medical team was assigned solely to Nehru, the signals by last week were that he was well on the way to a full recovery. In fact, it was more the drama and secrecy surrounding his sudden heart attack which fuelled speculation that he was seriously stricken to the point of being ruled out of active political life for some years. From the time he was rushed to the hospital by Jammu and Kashmir Governor Jagmohan at 6 a.m., the steady stream of visitors who descended on the hospital were kept at arms length. Commandos covered all strategic points of entry and metal detectors and physical frisking was carried out on all visitors to the first floor where his Intensive Care Unit (ICU) was situated. Even Central ministers like P. Chidambaram were only allowed to see Subhadra, his wife. Said a senior doctor: "The idea was to snap all contacts with the world so that Nehru was left to himself and his family members."

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



BHAWAN SINGH



Nehru (top); and the Sher-e-Kashmir hospital: temporary vacuum

The medical drama started at three in the morning when Nehru, who was staying with his family at a state government tourist resort in picturesque Dacchi Gaon, felt a severe chest pain and started shivering. Earlier, after dinner with his family and some friends, he had complained of strain but that was attributed to his hectic schedule during the day which had included a meeting in Governor Jagmohan's office and a visit to the local Congress(I) office. But on his return to the guesthouse he had seemed cheerful. Said one of the security guards posted at Dacchi Gaon: "Nehruji was in a really good mood throughout his stay at this place. He was enjoying his food and would go out for long walks with his daughter. He never gave us any impression that he had any physical problems."

But when he first arrived at the hospital in an ambulance from Dacchi Gaon, 16 km away, doctors say he had to be immediately admitted to the ICU. Jagmohan, who was the first to know about Nehru's illness, had contacted cardiologists and other specialists in the city and rushed them to the institute while he himself drove to Dacchi Gaon to accompany Nehru to the hospital. Since it was originally believed that Nehru had suffered a massive heart attack, he was immediately put on sedatives. Meanwhile, the prime minister, who is also Nehru's cousin, directed his aides to rush specialists and the necessary medicines to Srinagar. Dr S.P. Manchanda, a prominent Bombay neuro-surgeon, was the first to be contacted by the Prime Minister's Office and asked to rush to Srinagar immediately. Special arrangements were made to send Professor Khalilullah, a cardiologist at New Delhi's G.B. Pant Hospital, along with another cardiologist, Group Captain S.P. Verma. The three specialists closely examined their VIP patient over the next three days but as Dr Nagpal, SKIMS director, says: "We were able to minimise the damage because everything was available in time. We have with us a very cooperative patient

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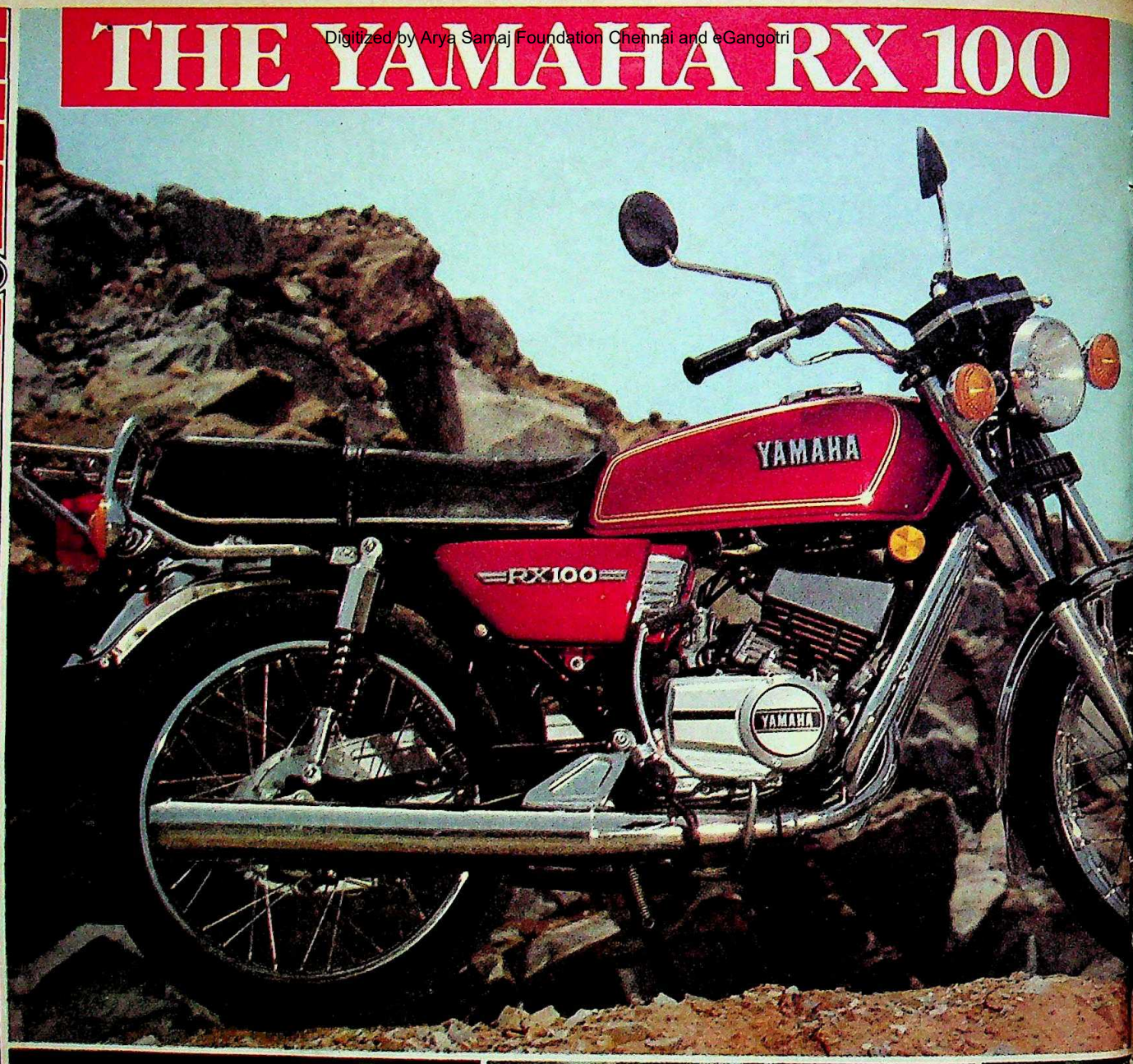

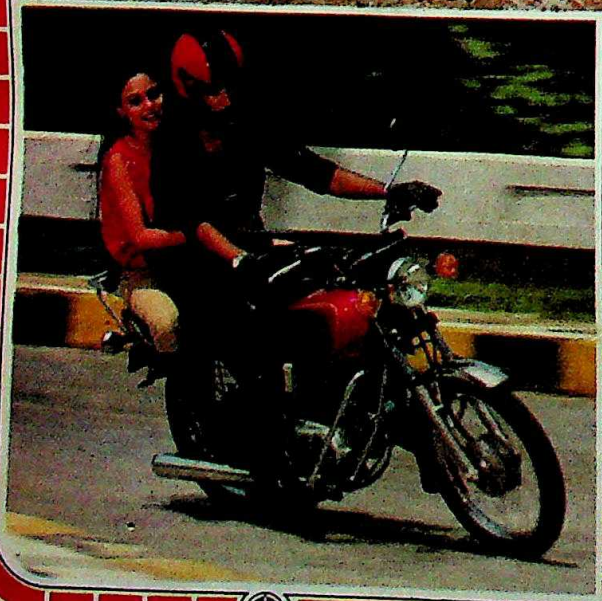

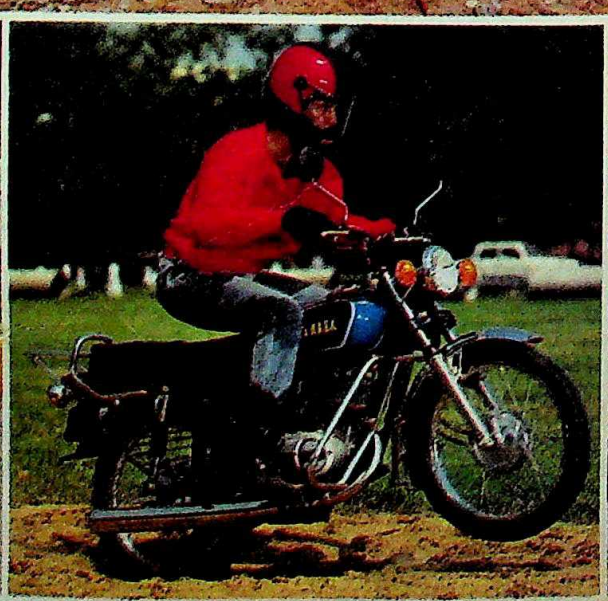

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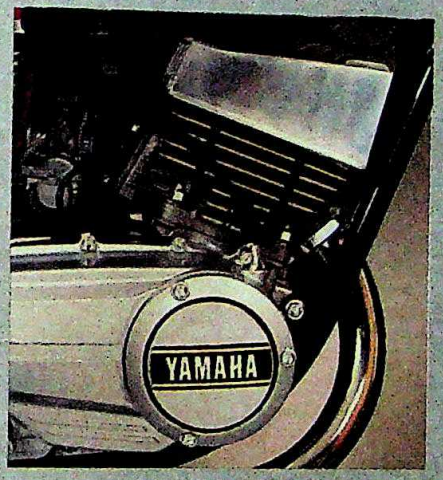

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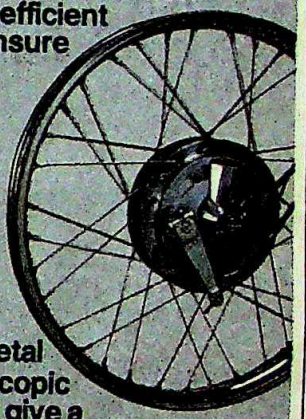

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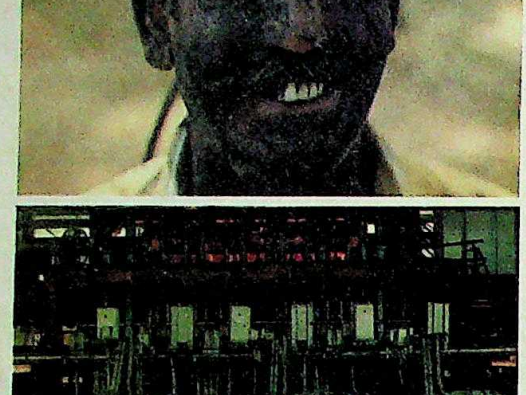

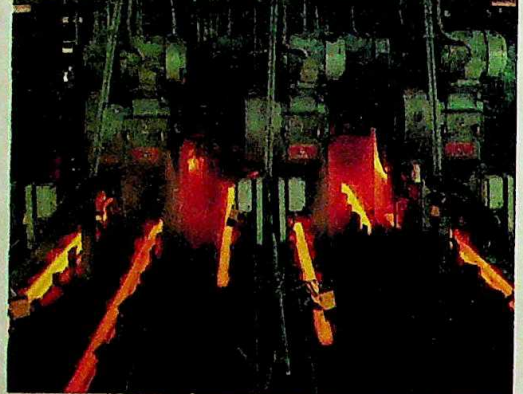

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and we expect him to take up his normal duties within the next few weeks."

However, other hospital sources maintain that Nehru has been advised complete rest in Srinagar for two weeks and even then, he will be confined to bed for another six weeks. Doctors say that it will be at least two months before he will be permitted to handle light work. But that is more a concession to his political importance than a question of health. Admitted one doctor: "If he were an ordinary person we would have allowed him to resume his activities within six weeks. But we cannnot take that risk in his case becuse of the nature of his job which involves a lot of mental stresses and strains. He can't be as active as he was before for some time yet."

Sources say that Nehru was extremely prone to heart problems because of his obesity. Nehru, 42, carries a weight of 91 kg on his 5 feet 11 inches frame and had been advised by his doctor to reduce his weight to at least 80 kg. During the last 15 months he had succeeded in shedding over 20 kg through yoga, playing cricket and controlling his diet. But despite this, his cholesterol and triglyceride level was higher than normal. The high cholesterol level led to deposits of fat in the coronary arteries which possibly led to a thickening of the blood vessels and finally blocking of the blood supply to the heart.

Doctors say the problem was aggravated by the acute tension Nehru has been under during the last few months due to the Punjab crisis. Home Ministry sources say that he was awake till the early hours of the morning for two days in succession at the height of the Punjab crisis and was also attending at least half a dozen meetings a day apart from the long Parliament session. It was during one of his routine medical checkups that he was advised to rest and he chose Kashmir.

But doctors, while refusing to divulge the extent of damage caused to his heart tissues, express optimism about his future health. They maintain that the arteries supplying blood to the heart are in perfect condition and claim that they have been able to revive the blood tissues which were damaged temporarily. According to them, the special Muga test—which screened his heart—confirmed that Nehru's heart muscles have suffered no permanent damage. But the fact that he will be on the sidelines for at least another two months leaves a major political vacuum which could not have come at a worse time for the increasingly beleagured government his cousin heads.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Srinagar

INDIRA GANDHI CANAL

Dark Lining

THE JINX over the 28-year-old Indira Gandhi Canal Project was once again in evidence last fortnight when 45 engineers working on the still incomplete project were suspended on corruption charges. The suspensions came after an investigation confirmed that the canal lining was substandard for over 20 km along the main canal, which will be 445 km long when ready. The scandal is now certain to not only delay the completion of the main canal—at least a year beyond the original date of end-1986—but also raise its cost. The remedy being considered—a low density polythene film with a cement, mortar and brick-tile cover to reinforce the lining—will cost about Rs 5.5 crore, around the same as the original lining.

The corruption issue was first raised in the Assembly two years ago by BJP leader Bhairon Singh Shekhawat after he spotted tell-tale evidence in a brief report on the canal. The report pointed out that at a point where the main canal is 12 metres broad at the base and about 5.5 metres high and 36 metres wide at the top, the bed lining essential to cut water losses was totally inadequate.

Shekhawat's allegations compelled the authorities to appoint a three-man inquiry committee headed by the project's chief technical examiner. The inquiry—though obstructed by officials who refused to empty the canal for investigations—not only upheld the allegations but added some of its own; namely:

- the lining had already broken in most places, though the water flow was low;
- poor quality tiles were used in spite of an order against taking the consignment;
- there was much less cement in the plaster than recommended;
- clay was never bought even though its transportation costs were charged;
- sand packing on the sides was billed but not carried out.

In spite of the report, no action was taken until March this year when Kamla Beniwal, the Indira Gandhi Canal minister, announced that the engineers responsible would be suspended. There was a further two-month delay before the suspensions were actually ordered. Typically, however, while junior officials have been punished—those suspended include five executive engineers, 13 assistant engineers, 27 junior engineers—no action has been taken against an additional chief engineer and three superintendent engineers, even though the inquiry committee blamed them equally for the fiasco.

The suspended engineers later got together to submit a memorandum to Chief Minister Harideo Joshi. They charged the committee with partisanship and sloppy investigation. Demanding their reinstatement, they charged the authorities with shielding senior officials. They also accused the state Government of setting an impossible time schedule so that water could be released by the prime minister at the Charanwala Headworks on October 2, 1983.

Site near Bikrampur: slow progress

The engineers have also made a sensational allegation—that over another stretch of 60 km of the main canal, the lining is as defective. They want to know why the engineers for this section have been let off. More skeletons may well come tumbling out in the coming months.

Shekhawat is now campaigning to bring them to justice along with S. Kashyap, the then chairman of the Canal Board. Noted Shekhawat ruefully: "There is more corruption in the construction of this project than any other in the state. Well over a third of all money put in it is siphoned off. The engineers' lobby exercises so much money power that the state Government does not have the courage to take action against senior people." Given Shekhawat's dogged delving into the issue and the latest revelations, the prestigious project is obviously destined to remain a major source of controversy till well after its long-awaited completion.

—SREEKANT KHANDEKAR

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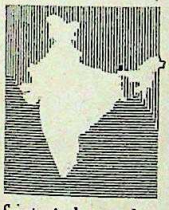
Pro-Bhandari rally: muscle-flexing

SIKKIM

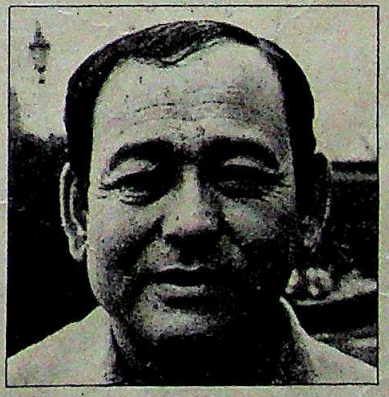
Show of Strength



WITH Nar Bahadur Bhandari at the helm, Sikkim has the uncanny habit of springing into the headlines when least expected. It happened yet again last fortnight when the 47-year-old chief minister of the tiny Himalayan state threw the gauntlet at the Centre giving a one-year ultimatum to accept his three "basic" demands: inclusion of Nepali language in the eighth schedule of the Constitution, grant of citizenship to an unspecified number of stateless Nepali settlers in the state and, trickiest of all, reservation of seats in the legislative Assembly for the Nepali community, which forms 75 per cent of the state's population of 3.2 lakh. Thundered Bhandari at his party's annual convention: "If these demands are not conceded within a year, I will show Delhi who Bhandari is. I will face the first bullet, go under the first tank. The Government of India can pump into my body all the bullets manufactured in all its ordnance factories."

For the Centre the tenor of his speech was perplexing as Bhandari has been having a virtual honeymoon with the Congress(I) high command. In December, he had driven at the head of a 100-strong car-cade into Assam to campaign for the party he had humbled so completely in the 1984 assembly election. The only MP from Sikkim, his wife Dil Kumari, conveniently absented herself from voting on the Muslim women's bill. Yet, he chose confrontation.

The maverick, however, has his reasons. He has been courting the Congress(I) in the hope that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) cases against him will be withdrawn. But the Congress(I) demand for the merger of his party in return and the developments over the past couple of months put him firmly on the path of aggression.



"The Centre should keep out of it, we will pull him down on our own. Bhandari is scared."

MADAN CHHETRI
vice president (PCCI)

It began with a flurry of stinkers from Union Minister of State for Internal Security Arun Nehru, complaining about his inaction against secessionist elements and the sale of smuggled goods in Gangtok from a shop owned by one of his cabinet colleagues. Then, he was accused of patronising captain Yongda, a former officer in the late Chogyal's palace guard who allegedly had contacts with the Pakistani and Chinese intelligence agents who had launched the Naya Sikkim Party seeking demerger of the state from India. Bhandari made amends by arresting Yongda and his key supporters under the National Security Act just as pressure mounted.

Besides these, the Centre and the governor are also peeved at some of his administrative actions. These include:

► An unprecedented order divesting Chief Secretary K.M.L. Chhabra, a former Union Home Ministry joint secretary, of his usual role as the clerk of the Cabinet. Sikkim now has the unique distinction of having a chief secretary who cannot attend cabinet meetings.

► A notification doing away with the stipulation that the Government should consult the state Public Service Commission (PSC) while making selections to government posts. The PSC has consulted Attorney-General of India K. Parasaran, who has stated in writing that the constitutionality of the notification can be easily challenged by any "public spirited citizen". The commission, which came into being five years ago, has not selected a single candidate for any government post.

Bhandari, however, does not say anything directly on the chief secretary except that, "Arun Nehru offered me a new chief secretary but Jagmohan took him away to Kashmir", but officials close to him unhesitatingly say that Chhabra was victimised because of his "proximity to the Centre". And he dismisses the charge on the Public Service Commission, saying, "I have been asking Delhi for a chief secretary, for directors of education and health. I have been asking the Centre to give me outsiders for all senior posts. No one gives me these officers. On the other hand, they are all so worried about the posts of peons and clerks. Mind you, I am not going to give these away to the outsiders. I have to keep in mind the interest of the *bhumiputras* (sons of the soil)."

The Centre's pressure on Bhandari

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was accompanied with a concerted attempt to rejuvenate the state Congress (I) unit: the PCC(I), lying in a state of disuse since the last elections, was hurriedly organised and former Indian Police Service officer Madan Chhetri was named the state unit's vice-president. Says Chhetri, a fellow Nepali who is being billed as the Congress(I)'s counter to Bhandari: "The Centre should keep out of it, we will pull him down on our own. Bhandari is scared."

But deep down, Chhetri and other Congressmen realise that with the kind of mandate Bhandari enjoys there is precious little they can do to topple him. Given Bhandari's unchallenged abilities as a political manipulator, the Congress(I)'s only hope of returning to Sikkim is by bringing home another prodigal—even if the price for that is consignment of three CBI cases to the archives in Delhi's Lok Nayak Bhawan.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Gangtok

NAR BAHADUR BHANDARI

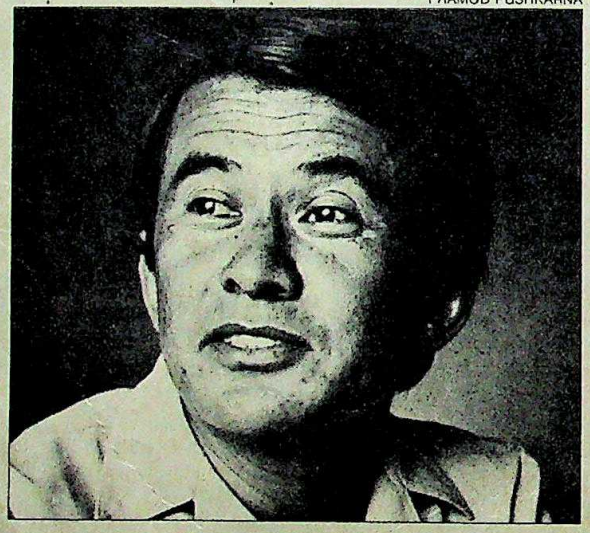
"We don't want a Khalistan"

Nar Bahadur Bhandari, the maverick chief minister of the Himalayan state of Sikkim, is a nonconformist in more ways than one. Sartorially he is often nattier than any other chief minister in the country, with his favourite three-piece suits and ties. He blusters where other politicians would prefer to keep mum and is disdainfully indiscreet in the way he runs down his opponents.

A former schoolteacher, he enjoys the strongest backing any chief minister has in the country—30 legislators in a house of 32. Bhandari is conscious of this as well of having annihilated the Congress(I), his former party which had sacked him on charges of corruption and sedition.

Yet, with a CBI investigation pending against him, Bhandari had refrained from openly attacking the Centre but suddenly turned confrontationist last month. He spoke to Principal Correspondent SHEKHAR GUPTA in Gangtok last fortnight. Excerpts:

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Q. *What explains your sudden ultimatum to the Centre to concede your demands within one year?*

A. There is nothing sudden about this. These three demands—constitutional status for the Nepali language, regularisation of stateless persons in Sikkim and reservation for the Nepali community in the state Assembly—were the demands on which I came into power. Now people want results. Frustration is mounting. Delhi does not realise that, unlike Assam and Meghalaya, Sikkim became a part of India only about 10 years ago. Now do you want us to take a 100 years to become Indians? We are not seeking to break away from India. We are not asking for Khalistan. The problem is that I am a Nepali and being from the Nepali community is a curse now.

Q. *While the language and citizenship demands are still easier to understand, what justification do you have in seeking seat reservations for the Nepalis who constitute 75 per cent of Sikkim's population?*

A. The problem is that Sikkim is today such a good, peaceful state. We did not have even a single murder in 1985. Our high court has just seven cases pending. This, while so much *golmal* (commotion) is happening all over the country. So obviously, people like to come and settle down here. In 1973, the population of Gangtok was 12,000. Today it is 53,000. As a result, in the last election the Gangtok seat went to an outsider. The Sikkimese have thus already lost their capital. In the next election they will lose at least four more seats. Seat reservation thus is a genuine requirement for a state which has no more than 3 lakh original inhabitants. My fear is that an Assam-like situation should not develop in the state of Sikkim.

Q. *You recently said that if your three demands were conceded, you will become the best Congressman in Sikkim. What did you mean ?*

A. You must understand the politics of Sikkim. Parties do not count here, persons do. The same people who are with me today were earlier the Sikkim Congress. In fact, I had taken my party like a cake on a platter and presented it to the Congress(I). But, unfortunately, those people in Delhi do not even know how to eat cake properly. My point is straightforward. What does a small state like Sikkim, with just one MP, matter to the Congress(I) at the national level also when that lone MP (his wife) also supports them? They should just leave us alone here and I will be their best friend.

Q. *But what went wrong when you were a Congress(I) chief minister?*

A. The guiding principle of politics in India is: if a man seems to be getting a mass following, cut his roots. That is what was done to me. (Homi) Taleyarkhan, the then governor, planned the whole operation and pulled me down. But a week before she died, Mrs Gandhi had admitted to me her party's folly.

Q. *Are you worried about the CBI inquiry into the corruption cases against you?*

A. Five hundred CBI people came to Gangtok and dug up all official records. They went to each newly-constructed house in Darjeeling and asked people if it was Bhandari's. They have found nothing. I won't say it on record, but in case the Centre decides to proceed with the cases I will also give a fitting reply. Remember, the sanction to prosecute me was given by Gurung's two-man cabinet meeting in Taleyarkhan's residence. I can withdraw it the day I feel like.

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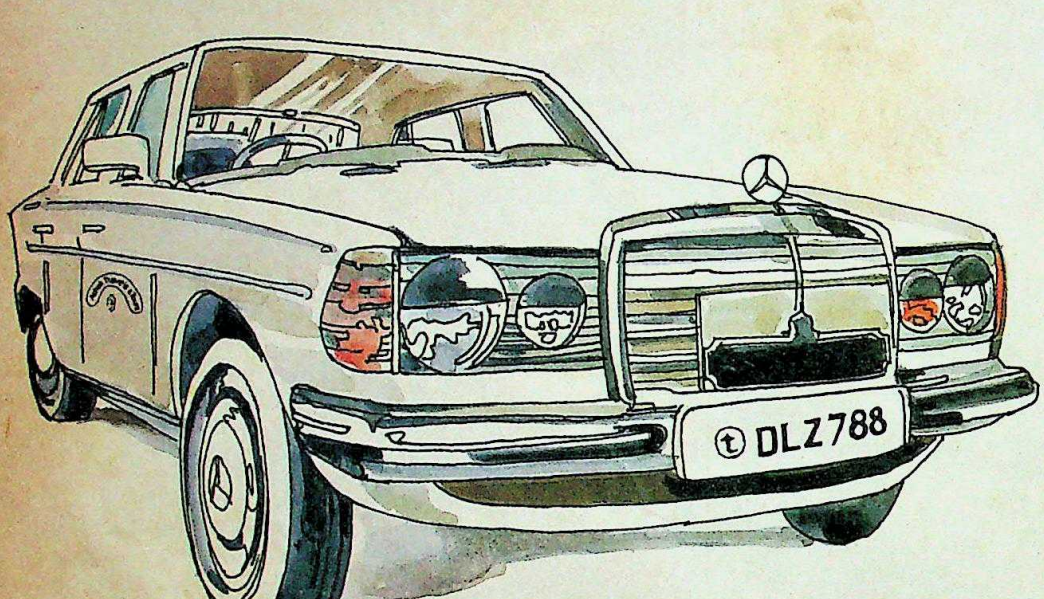

But we would rat
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India Tourism Development Corporation

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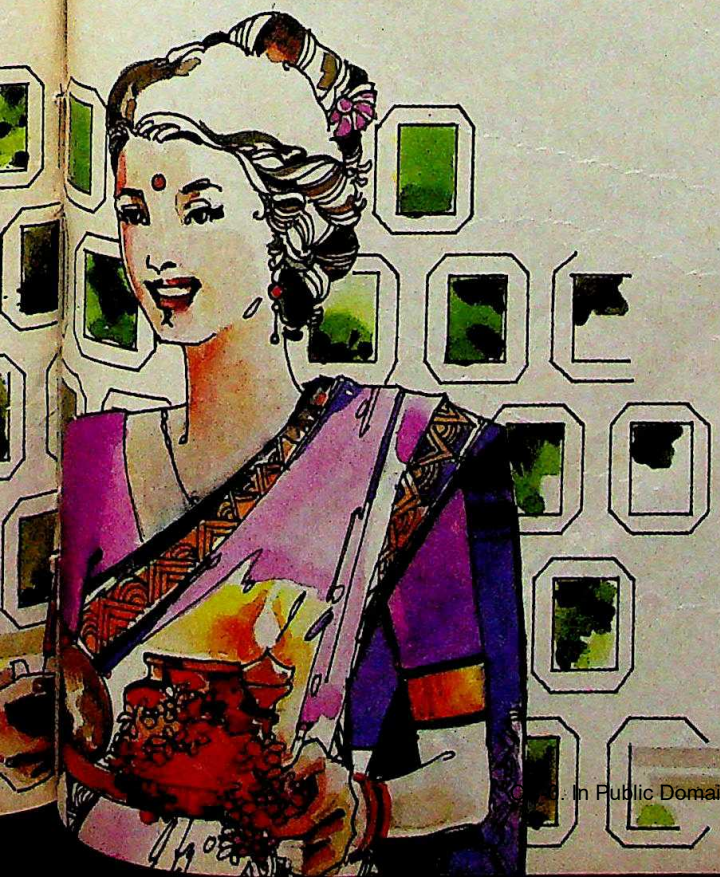

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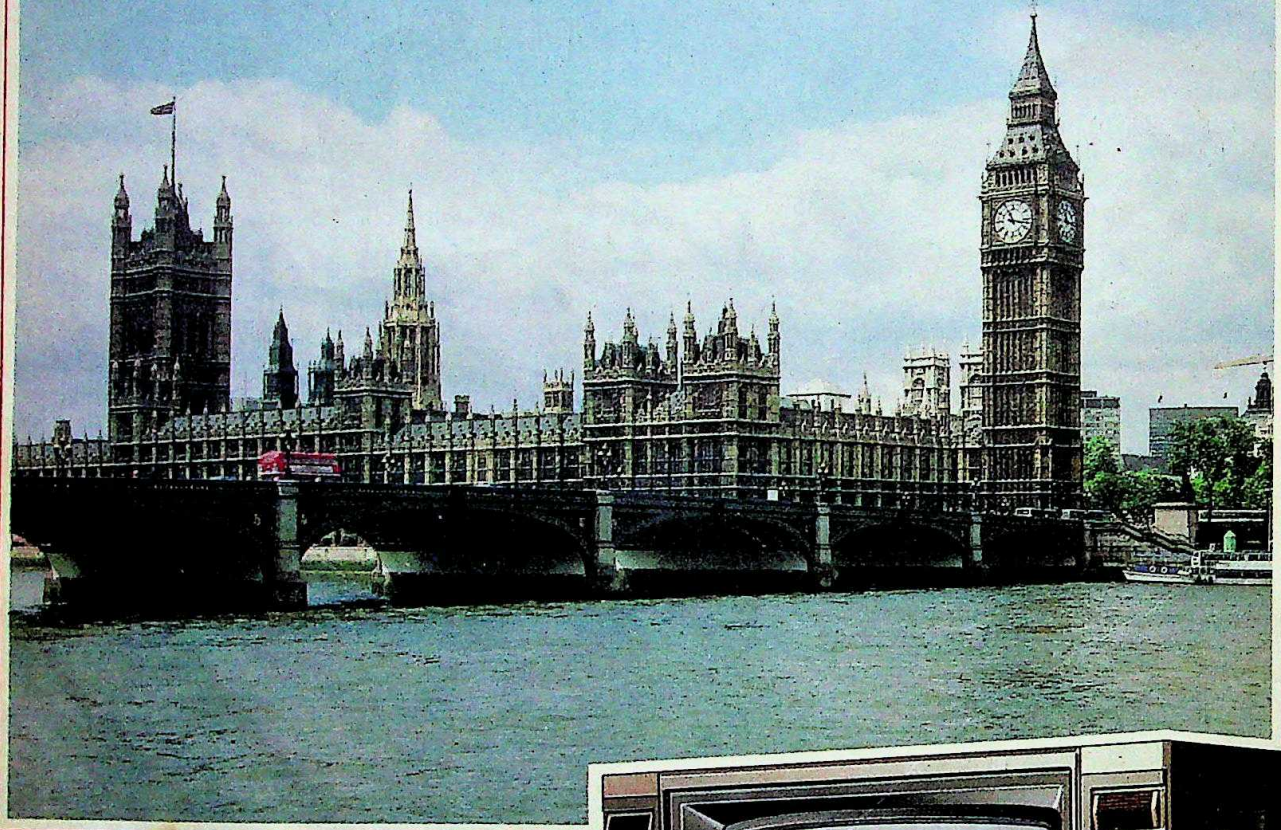

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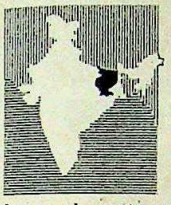
BIHAR

'Mafia' War



SEVEN years ago, the mafia labour leaders of Dhanbad had come together to dislodge Karpoori Thakur as the chief minister because he had dared to challenge their "authority". The same mafia gangs have again closed ranks against Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, a trade union veteran of 45 years' standing in the area. The significant difference is that the mafia leaders are working in unison with Jagannath Mishra. "Our aim is not only to remove Dubey from the chief ministership but also to destroy his trade union base in the coalfields," boasted a Mishra confidant.

Last fortnight, Dubey brought the matter to the party high command's notice when he carried a report on Mishra's efforts to break his hold over the Rashtriya Colliery Mazdoor Sangh (RCMS) as the latest tactic in Mishra's six-month-old effort to dislodge him. Said Dubey: "Some politicians and exploiters known as mafia leaders have ganged up to destabilise my government as I have launched a crackdown against them." Dubey's complaint, and Mishra's statement challenging Dubey to prove his majority in the legislature party, prompted party General Secretary in charge of Bihar T. Anjiah, to send a letter warning Mishra of disciplinary action.

However, Mishra continued to assert that Dubey was trying to cover up the failures of his government by labelling the Dhanbad labour leaders as a "mafia" gang. Said Mishra belligerently: "Dubey has lost the sanction of the people and the working class. He has just become an ornamental head of the state and a liability for the party and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi."

The Dubey-Mishra battle for Dhanbad came to the boil when both of them turned up in Dhanbad to address separate rallies of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), to which the RCMS is affiliated. While Dubey, a past president of the INTUC, attended the official function, Mishra addressed a parallel meeting which was organised by Congress(I) MLA S.P. Roy.

Since strongman and District Board Chairman Satyadeo Singh and other labour 'leaders' had lent their support to Roy's meeting, Mishra's meeting drew a larger crowd. Spurred on by the large turn-out, Roy and his men stormed into the union headquarters, ransacked the office and removed Dubey's nameplates. Further damage was pre-empted by the police, who arrested them.

Not to be daunted, Roy called a special delegates' session where he 'disbanded' the RCMS, 'removed' Dubey from its presidentship and got Shankar Dayal Singh, MP and brother of Satyadeo Singh, 'elected' as president and himself as general secretary. "It was good drama but I am least bothered," remarked Dubey later. "Roy has no locus standi to call such a meeting. More than 75 per cent of the delegates were outsiders. Moreover, S.D. Singh's election as president was illegal as he is not even a member of the RCMS."

Dubey's supporters say the dramatis personae in the story have come together only because they have their own grouses against Dubey. Roy is now opposing him, says INTUC leader Balram Rai, because he expected to become a minister and Dubey had not obliged. S.D. Singh fell in with Roy's plan because Dubey had denied the Assembly ticket from Singh's constituency to his brother. The Rajput mafia leaders have never been kindly disposed towards the Brahmin Dubey but their opposition to him concretised during the last state elections. Dubey was then the state party chief and was instrumental in denying them Congress(I) tickets. After he became chief minister, Dubey added insult to injury by launching an offensive calculated to break their stranglehold over government contracts. Noted Dubey: "My crackdown led to their unity and they ganged up against me."

But Dubey committed one unpardonable error: he did not carry his fight with the mafia to the finish. Not only does the mafia continue to thrive, it pressurised Dubey to revive the auction system for liquor shops and to sack excise minister Indernath Bhagat after Bhagat opposed the step and ordered raids on some shops. With the people's support only lukewarm, the coming together of all his opponents has shaken the chief minister.

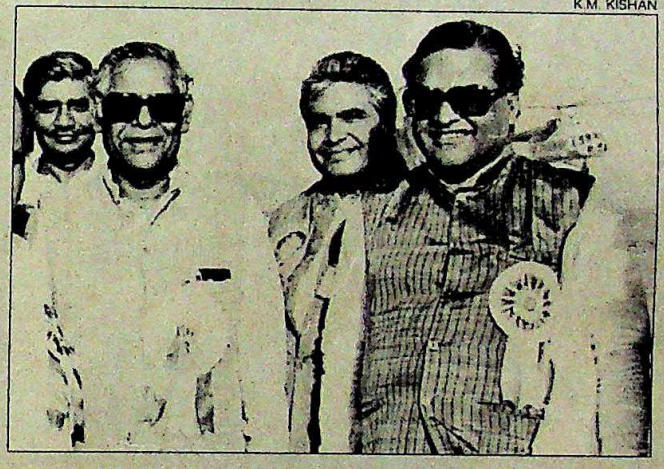
The heightening of tension in the coalfields has also begun to take a physical toll. Jagdish Narain Pandey, a trade union leader close to Dubey, was brutally murdered by some unknown persons last month. Though it was overtly unconnected with the Dubey-Mishra war, the people of Dhanbad regard it as a sign of things to come.

—FARZAND AHMED

"Some politicians known as mafia leaders have ganged up to destabilise my government as I have launched a crackdown against them."

BINDESHWARI DUBEY
chief minister

K.M. KISHAN



"Dubey has lost the sanction of the people and the working class. He has become a liability for the party and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi."

JAGANNATH MISHRA

Dubey (left) and Mishra in more congenial times

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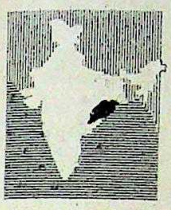

ALL ABUZZ with the sensational 'revelations' about Chief Minister Janaki Ballav Patnaik in last month's *Illustrated Weekly of India*, Orissa was like a theatre of the absurd last fortnight. Patnaik defied expectations by not going to the Press Council or the courts, but would not reveal his plans either. Asked Patnaik: "If a dog bites you, will you also bite the dog ?"

Even as pro-Patnaik journalists fired off a memo to the Press Council in Delhi to take up the case *suo moto*, a Rourkela lawyer and party supporter, Umakant Mishra, filed an obscenity case against the magazine in Rourkela. Janata Party worker Chittaranjan Mohanty added to the confusion by filing a case under the Orissa Press Act for scurrilous writing in Cuttack, demanding that the magazine's editor, Pritish Nandy, the article's writer and all others named be summoned and cross-examined. The cases will queer the pitch for Patnaik, who favours approaching the Press Council, since the council will not take up a case already in the courts.

Statements of support from his party, orchestrated by Patnaik, came in a torrent—88 party MLA's issued a statement condemning the write-up and the Youth Congress(I) and the party's women's cell called it a slur on Oriya girls and boys. But these were countered with demands for his resignation by dissidents within the Congress(I) and opposition leaders.

Patnaik and his supporters maintained that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was supportive and sympathetic and had asked the chief minister to take legal opinion before deciding on the future course of action. But dissident leaders quoted party General Secretary in charge of Orissa, T. Anjiah, as having told Patnaik that it would be irrelevant if all the 115 party MLA's backed him, since the issue was one of morality. Later, Anjiah said in Bhubaneswar that it was for the party high command to take a decision on Patnaik.

Even the dramatis personae in the *Weekly* story behaved in a puzzling manner. The youth who the *Weekly* claimed had been molested by Patnaik in his office was identified as Vishwanath Sethi of Balipatna village in Puri district

Eastern Press Agency

Dissident leaders say that the high command has given Patnaik a chance to prove his innocence or be damned.

Eastern Press Agency

Sethi admitted to having spoken to the *Weekly's* reporter on tape and of having gone to the chief minister for help but claimed he did not know what he had said about Patnaik's behaviour.

(the *Weekly* had given a *nom de plume*, Raju Jena). Contacted by INDIA TODAY, Sethi, a plain looking youth of 20, said he had been taken to Patnaik by Braj Kishore Barik, who was once close to Patnaik but was now in the Janata Party, when he needed some monetary help. Patnaik had heard him and given him money on more than one occasion.

Sethi, who runs a small *kirana* shop, admitted to having spoken to the magazine's reporter on tape when Barik had come a month ago with the reporter and the personal assistant of opposition leader Biju Patnaik. He says he first refused to speak but then agreed after Barik assured him that Biju *babu* would get him a job if he cooperated. "I then told them about my visit to the chief minister's house but I don't know what all has been published," said Sethi. When informed of what the magazine had quoted him as saying, he said that he did not remember what he had told them and added: "I will not speak anything against the chief minister who helped me and showed me sympathy."

Suktani Hota, an attractive widow of 32 from Jharsuguda in western Orissa, touted as a Patnaik paramour, complicated matters by issuing a statement saying she was being unnecessarily dragged into the controversy and denying that she had written to Sonia Gandhi complaining against Patnaik.

Most people still do not know what had been written since the local papers, normally quick to seize on anything anti-Patnaik, refrained from translating the *Weekly's* write-up. But the odd journalist who stepped out of line was soon pulled up. When *Pragativadi* Managing Editor Rabi Das commented that Patnaik must clear himself of the charges as his silence might be taken as confirmation, Patnaik ordered that Das must vacate his government house since editors were not entitled to official houses.

Official pressure held up the *Weekly's* circulation in the state (approximately 2,500) initially but then additional copies were rushed and eventually the magazine sold over 10,000 copies. It was retailed in the black, often loaned out on an hourly basis and some enterprising people made a fast buck by photostating the article and selling that for Rs 5. But since the magazine only sells in the urban areas, its impact was limited. However, Janata Party MP Sarat Deb, who had toured some rural areas, maintained that people were shocked even though they did not know the details.

But Patnaik's family was angry. Said

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Soumya Ranjan Patnaik, the chief minister's son-in-law and editor of Oriya daily *Sambad*: "I think this is part of an organised campaign by The Times of India group to malign and weaken Rajiv Gandhi, since Orissa is the only bastion of the Congress(I) in the east."

There was no clear answer to the basic question: had Patnaik misused his office for sexual favours ? Janata Party leader Damodar Rout, in a letter to the governor reproduced by the magazine, had alleged that Patnaik had converted the Chief Minister's Relief Fund into a "personal charity fund for purchasing pleasure" by sanctioning funds for "picnics and sightseeing by college students." But doubt emerged about whether Rout's letter had been sent to Raj Bhavan before or after the magazine's publication.

Reacting to the criminal case, the *Weekly's* editor, Pritish Nandy, said he would be more than willing to "take on Mr Patnaik". But Patnaik's men claimed that their leader was just waiting for the storm to blow over, as others have in the six years he has been in power. Now that Anjiah has clarified that the high command has no objection to Patnaik taking the issue to court, the chief minister cannot buck the decision much longer.

—FARZAND AHMED in Bhubaneswar

UTTAR PRADESH

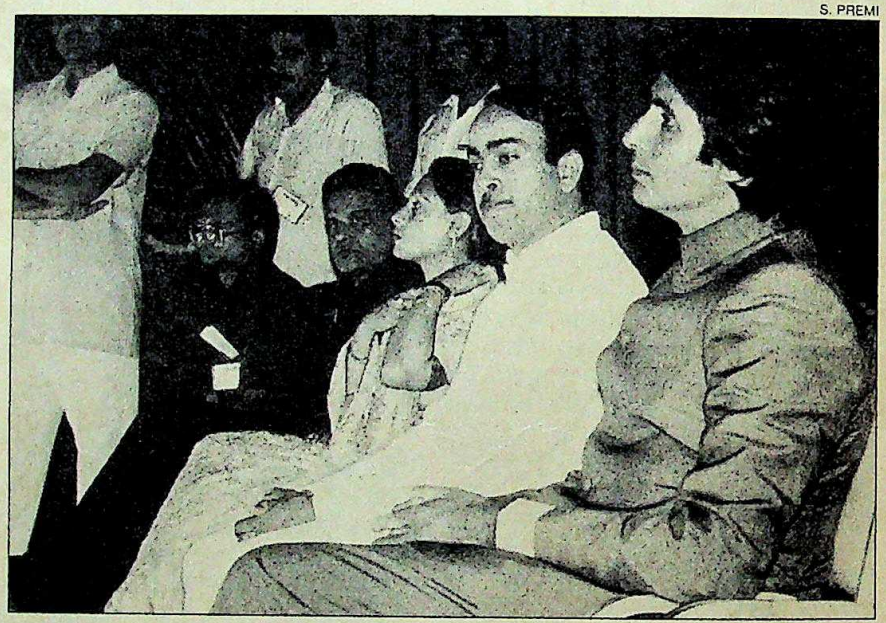
Side Show

BACCHANALIA is generally translated as riotous revelry; which was a fitting enough description of Amitabh Bachchan's rather farcical visit to Lucknow last fortnight for the premiere of his latest film, *Aakhree Raasta*. The only problem was that the riotous revelry was all on the part of the state Government and certainly not on the part of the sparse audience which showed up.

In fact, the real cinematic-type antics were more in evidence behind the scenes than on it. Already tarnished by accusations of nepotism in the manner in which the state Government bent over backwards to accommodate the film star-turned-MP, the show turned out to be a melodramatic farce. The state administration set what must rank as their fastest-ever timing in responding to a personally-signed letter from Bachchan on May 27 requesting permission for the charity show, its exemption from entertainment tax and security arrangements. All three were granted within a day. Said Transport Minister Sanjay Singh, the man behind the official miracle: "Amitabh Bachchan is doing the charity show for a good cause."

Singh personally telephoned the director-general of police and other top officials with the request for security. No less than five battalions of the Provincial Armed Constabulary and an equal number of policemen—twice the capacity of the 1,000-seat Novelty cinema, the venue of the premiere—were requisitioned by the organisers.

S. PREMI



Bachchan, Sanjay Singh and Jaya at the premiere: official stunts

Further accommodation was in evidence when the office-bearers of the Amitabh Bachchan Fans' Association were lodged in the state guest-house, as was Bachchan's Personal Assistant K. Srinivasan, who arrived in Lucknow on June 1 and was personally received by Sanjay Singh. A dozen government vehicles were left at their disposal. Sputtered Singh: "They are government taxis and anybody can book them."

But it soon became obvious that the response from the public hardly matched the moment. The organisers, realising that the collections would barely cross the Rs 50,000 mark, decided to bringout a souvenir. And presto! Official letters from the chief minister's Secretary S. Krishna, were immediately dispatched to all heads of public corporations asking them to release full-page black-and-white advertisements of Rs 5,000 or Rs 10,000 for the brochure.

The souvenir never appeared and neither, for that matter, did the fans. Despite a blitzkrieg publicity campaign, public response was lukewarm. Obviously, the city was not prepared to shell out the Rs 500, Rs 300 or Rs 100 required for the premiere.

Ultimately, the association had to resort to filling the half-empty hall with ministers, officials, chairmen of public corporations and members of the press, who were issued passes. Said association Chairman Ravi Bhushan Wadhawan: "We collected Rs 8.50 lakh on the premiere of *Mard* in Allahabad and we were expecting Rs 10 lakh from Lucknow. We are disappointed."

The start of the premiere developed into a mini-riot as the non-paying audience tried to gatecrash. The police retaliated and in the ensuing melee, a number of shops and vehicles were damaged and about 90 people injured. Amitabh hurriedly ended his speech and when an aide whispered something into his ear, announced a grant of Rs 15,000 for the Lucknow University Library by Nirmaan, his Allahabad-based charity organisation. Later, a further Rs 11,000 was announced by the producer of *Aakhree Raasta*, Raj Chopra.

Barely a month ago, on his last visit to the state capital, Bachchan had obtained a special grant of Rs 1.30 crore from Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh for his constituency of Allahabad. Now, here he was, in the flesh, doling out largesse to Lucknow. Except this time, there were not many people present to appreciate the honour.

—S. PREMI

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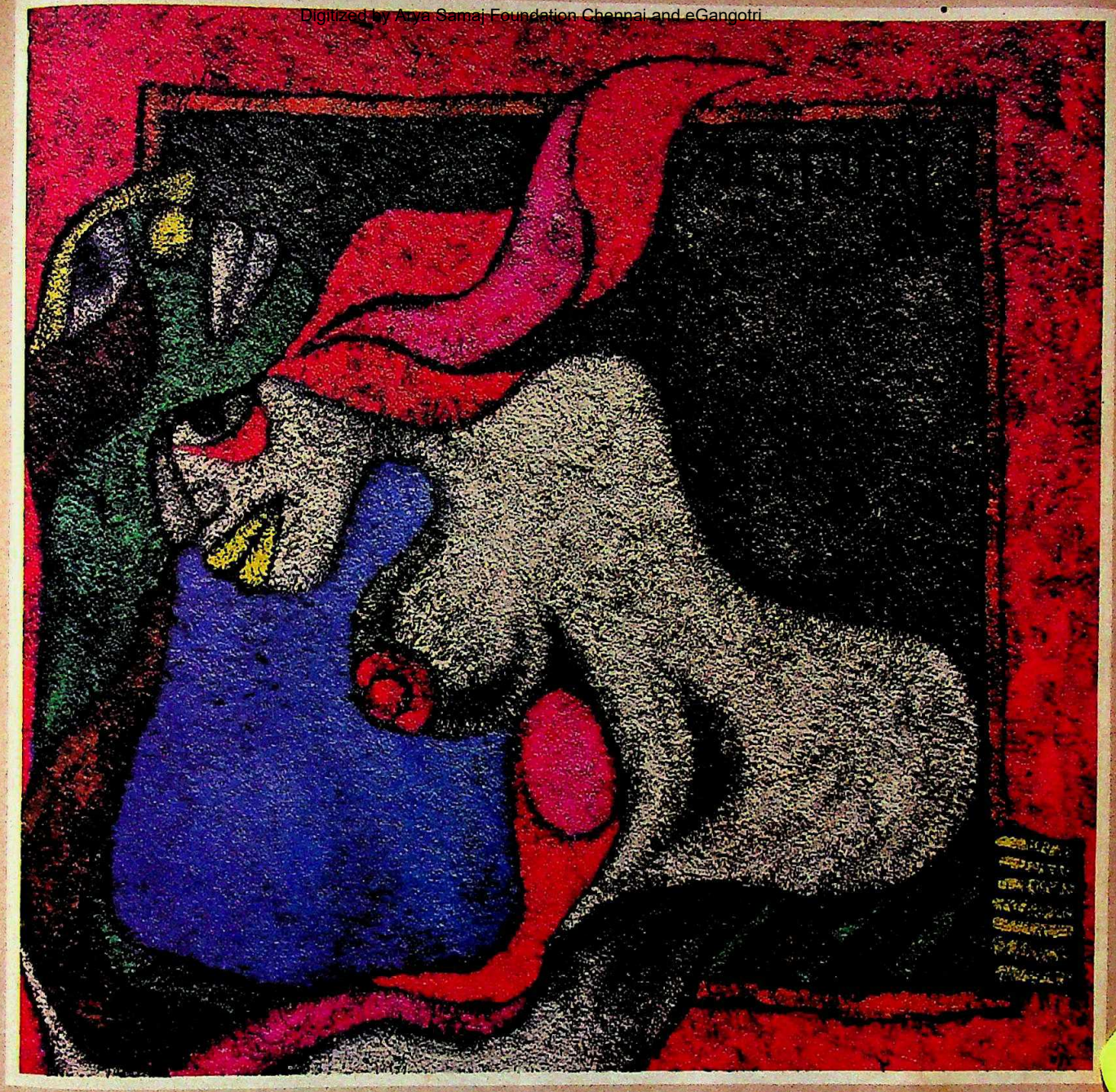

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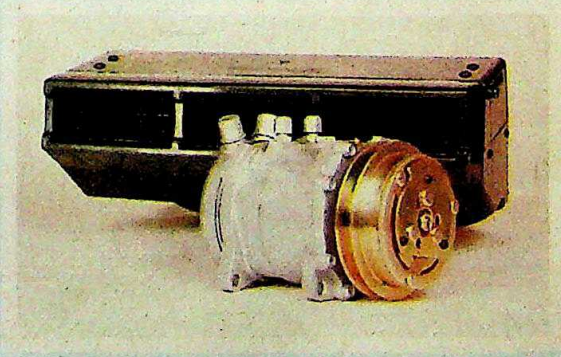

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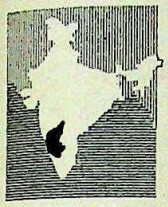
KARNATAKA

Bangarappa's Blunder



FOR THE Congress(I) the jinx continues in Karnataka. In the three-and-a-half years that Ramakrishna Hegde has been in power, the Congress(I) has had an embarrassingly high turnover of state party chiefs and leaders of the legislature party. The latest to go was S. Bangarappa, who quit last fortnight as the leader of the legislature party after a week of eventful drama. Though he gave no reason for his sudden decision, the provocation unquestionably was a high court judgement which severely castigated him for purchasing some land that should have gone to the Government.

With the leadership issue wide open yet again—earlier Veerappa Moily had quit—the familiar fissures in the party took no time to emerge. Hours after Bangarappa's announcement, a dozen MLA's of the Vokkaliga caste shot off a telegram to party president Rajiv Gandhi asking him to continue with Bangarappa as the leader. They were prompted not by any great affection for Bangarappa. They merely wanted to pre-empt the chances of the other groups in the party, belonging to former chief minister R. Gundu Rao or former state party chief K.H. Ranganath, or even the possibility that a lone crusader former minister B. Basavalingappa or former speaker K.S. Nagarathnama could surprise them all. And Moily rushed to Delhi to lobby for himself, even though he still faces a judicial inquiry on the tapes episode. The high command accepted Bangarappa's decision till his appeal to a division bench of the high court was disposed off.

The case against Bangarappa relates to a petition filed in 1981 by four Harijans from his native Sorab taluk in Shimoga district. The petitioners alleged that about 42-acres of land owned by one Bindu Madhavachar and M. Raghavendrachar had been under tenancy to the family of Mugur Parsappa. But the land tribunal at Sorab had rejected the claims of Parsappa's sons and awarded the land to the landlords.

Bangarappa came into the picture when he bought a portion of this land from a tribunal member, alongwith two of his nephews. This action drew strictures from Justice P.P.Bopanna, who remarked: "There could be no doubt that the proceedings before the tribunal are shrouded by gravely suspicious circumstances and disturbing features." He referred the matter back to the land tribunal for fresh disposal of the claims.

BHAWAN SINGH

Bangarappa claimed the land had never been under tenancy but in another deal took ownership of 13 acres.

The case decisively established that:

► Madhavachar had named Parsappa as the tenant in an application filed in 1966 to take possession of half his land (under laws then in force, landlords could claim half their land under tenancy).

► Parsappa's sons, Lalappa and Basappa, claimed ownership of the land saying they inherited the tenancy from their father.

► The tribunal rejected Basappa's claim in February 1979 (when Bangarappa was a minister in the Urs government) saying he had given up his claim. But it recorded no statement from him.

► It also rejected Lalappa's claim in two separate orders in February 1979 and December 1980 on the same grounds. But his statements, supposedly to the effect that he had never cultivated the land, were recorded only by the tribunal members, not the chairman.

► In May 1979, K. Veerappa, a member of the tribunal, himself bought some 10 acres of the disputed land and sold it to Bangarappa in February 1980 for Rs 7,000. Later Bangarappa's nephews bought the rest.

Predictably, Bangarappa denied that there was anything illegal about the deal and claimed that the land had never been under tenancy. But he stood exposed when the court came across another deal dating back to 1976 when he was a member of a tribunal and signed an order conferring ownership of some 13 acres on himself! Snapped a disbelieving Bopanna: "I have come across quite a number of atrocious orders by land tribunals but this takes the cake."

As if that was not enough for Bangarappa, Bopanna slapped on a contempt of court charge on him for having said—through his counsel—that the case should be heard by another judge. No reasons were cited.

Later he appealed to the division bench of the high court and obtained a stay order. But by then his partymen had already started sniping at him. Party MLC L.G. Havanur told Bangarappa in a letter released to the press: "You must quit because the party cannot sit in judgement over the high court verdict." An infuriated Bangarappa initially told partymen that he was ready to quit but the high command had told him it would take a final decision on the issue. Even when he did finally quit, it was not clear whether he had done so on the high command's instructions or on his own.

For the Janata Party, the bickering in the Congress(I) served to take the public attention away from its own wranglings. A minister was asked to quit and then reinstated but hardly anybody noticed: *l'affaire* Bangarappa continued to hog the headlights. To the delight of Hegde, the Congress(I)'s name in the state had again been rubbed in the mud.

—SRINIVASA PRASAD

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THE NEPALIS

Hounded at Home

FOR over a century now, the Nepalis have felt at home in India's north-east. But today, the 30-lakh Nepalis spread over the hill districts of West Bengal, Sikkim, Meghalaya and Assam suddenly find themselves branded as foreigners and encroachers and evicted. Alarmed by this development, the entire Nepali community is battling to acquire legitimacy and defend its rights in its adopted land.

The epicentre of this gathering storm is Darjeeling district where the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), primed by the eviction of 7,000 Nepali immigrants by Meghalaya in March, is waging a determined movement for a separate state called Gorkhaland (INDIA TODAY, May 16-31). And Nepalis all over the north-east are exhorting their leaders to come out in support of the Gorkhaland movement, while GNLF emissaries are fanning out all over the country preaching about the Centre's policy of "apartheid" towards the community.

There is a very real possibility that the movement could turn violent. Warns GNLF leader Subhash Ghising: "If justice is not given by the Central Government the political situation in Darjeeling will take a violent turn in the future." *(see box)* Adds R.P. Sharma, lawyer and convenor of the Joint Action Committee of Assamese Nepali Organisations (JACANO): "There are 18 lakh Nepalis in Assam and many of them are now saying that we should begin to arm ourselves."

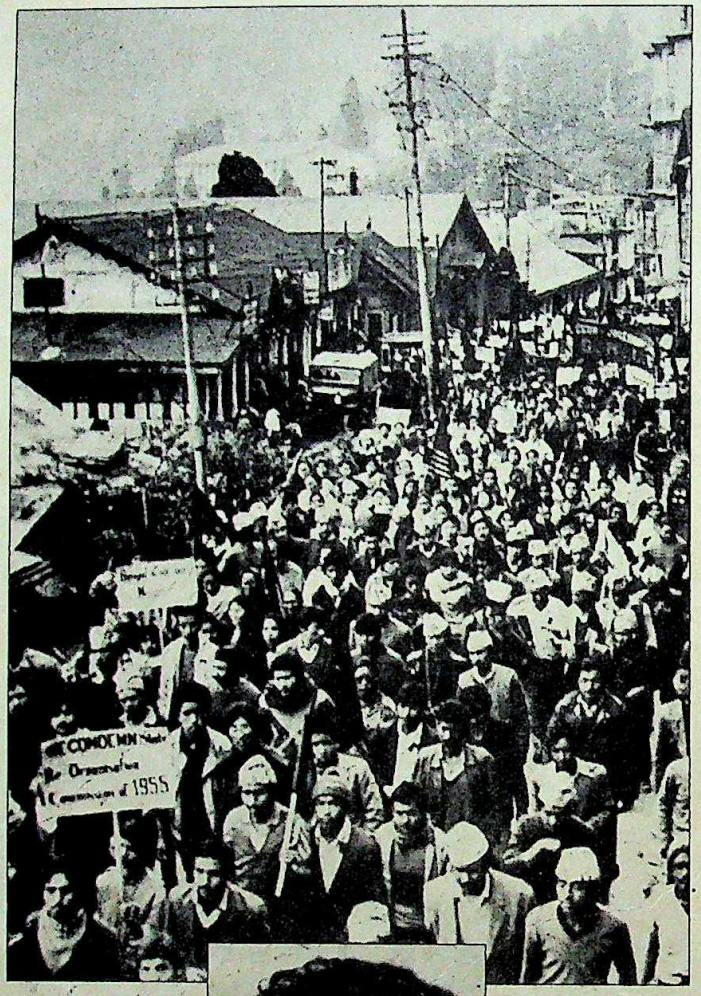
"The root of the present crisis is the feeling among us that Indians consider all Nepalis to be citizens of Nepal," explains Professor Nar Bahadur Rai of Shillong College, whose forefathers were among the first recruits for the Gorkha Regiment raised at Shillong by the British in the 1820s. Nepalis are not off the mark in their presumption. In 1979, former prime minister Morarji Desai refused to accord official status to the Nepali language, publicly declaring it to be a foreign language—a view held by officialdom since the Official Languages Committee president B.G.Kher pronounced it in 1956. "We have grown tired of explaining that we are not immigrant settlers but indigenous people of this country," frets a prominent Darjeeling-based Nepali.

The GNLF is taking advantage of the subsurface despondence among Darjeeling's 8 lakh-odd Nepalis and pointing out that the present-day Darjeeling district was carved out of parts of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan by the British and was never a part of West Bengal. Argues Ghising: "As long as we remain in West Bengal, we will not be treated as indigenous people."

Leaders of JACANO are just as bitter with the Union Government and the Assam Government. "Two years ago, we had been assured by the Union Home Ministry that Nepalis who had legally settled in Assam before July 1976 or those who had their names in the 1977 voters' list would be protected and not considered foreigners," says Sharma. Further, Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta had assured a six-member Nepali delegation that the accord would not be applicable to Nepalis.

But Mahanta told INDIA TODAY categorically: "The Assam accord is applicable to Nepalis and all other communities." Eviction notices have already been served on hundreds of Nepali families in Kokrajhar district, where the Nepalis have launched a peaceful agitation against the district administration.

Ghising's call for the abrogation of clause 7 of the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty—which grants citizens of the two countries reciprocal rights in the matter of residence, ownership and prop-



"After 34 years of service to my country, if I can be insulted by a mere constable and asked to prove my Indian citizenship every time I return to Meghalaya, I think it is not worth living in the country."

MAN BAHADUR RAI
retired IAS officer

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SUBHASH GHISING

Key Figure

EX-CORPORAL Subhash Ghising, 50, undisputed leader of the separatist Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), is the most sought-after man in Darjeeling today. Worshipful commoners yearn for a glimpse, lesser political leaders want to build bridges and the local police want to question and perhaps arrest him. But to all of them, Ghising is currently also the most elusive figure.

"I have 17 charges against me at present and the police have tried to arrest me several times in the past," Ghising wrote in reply to INDIA TODAY's queries last fortnight, explaining his inability to meet people openly. His present contact point is an anonymous house in the heart of Darjeeling town, guarded by Gorkhas attired in camouflage fatigues and hunter boots.

Ghising was, however, easily accessible before the May 12-14 bandh. At that time, he had seemed an unlikely candidate for persecution: a frail, gangly man seen lying in striped pyjamas, his bulging glaucous eyes giving him an expression of perpetual surprise. His tiny bedroom was crammed with hardcore supporters who addressed him as "Daaju"—elder brother. "We are not secessionists," he had explained. "Just as West Bengal gives identity to the Bengalis, we want a state that will confer an Indian identity to the Nepali-speaking people of this country."

Ridding Indian Nepalis of their "foreign" stigma has been Ghising's solitary aim since 1979 when the then prime minister Morarji Desai had shocked the community by publicly declaring Nepali a "foreign language", implying that all Nepalis are foreigners. "I had started becoming political since 1964 and in the earlier years was involved in helping our youth," recalled Ghising. Earlier, between 1954 and 1960, he had served on a short service commission in the 1/8 Gorkha Rifles from where he retired as a corporal, returning to Darjeeling to become a schoolteacher.

Ghising's political ambitions during the '60s and most of the '70s were secondary, busy as he was writing novels and poetry in Nepali. His 18-odd novels are racy pot-boilers published in pocket books. "His books are meant for adults," says a Ghising fan, citing as an example, his novel *Neelo Choli*, which describes the escapades of a Gorkha medical student, complete with boy-meets-girl situations and torrid sex scenes. "The only thing wrong with Ghising's heroes," comments the fan, "is that they have no character."

Curiously, it is Ghising's own integrity that is posing the biggest question mark for the Gorkhaland movement. Intelligence reports suggest that GNLF emissaries have established contacts with Pakistani and Chinese agents in Kathmandu, begging the question whether Ghising is leader or pawn. Though he has repeatedly refuted the allegation that his party has received foreign funds, Central intelligence sources insist otherwise.

Ghising at a rally: sole leader

Many educated Nepalis, moreover, still have quite a few reservations about him. The essentially patriotic Nepalis are troubled by his call to boycott the Independence Day celebrations, whatever the rationale, and by his claim that he has complained about the maltreatment of Nepalis to the United Nations and countries like France. "He should also not harp on the Indo-Nepal Treaty, which is a national issue upon which good relations between the two countries depend," says a professor of Kurseong College.

And CPI(M) MP Ananda Pathak claims that the GNLF has circulated a seditious pamphlet urging Gorkha soldiers of the Indian army to come forward for their cause. Says Pathak: "We know that the GNLF is planning to liquidate the opposition in the district. The people are being misled by Ghising's emotional claims."

People who have known Ghising for years also point out how jealously the GNLF chief guards his newfound eminence. The organisation has no second rank leadership to speak of and all rallies and meetings have to be led by Ghising. Leaders of other parties who have tried to get into the movement have also been warded off. On May 30, Pranta Parishad, another separatist organisation, had convened an all-party meeting in Darjeeling to build up a "joint and more effective movement" for statehood. The Parishad leaders, as well as the Congress(I)'s Dawa Narbula and Swatantra Manch (Kalimpong) leaders, who attended the meeting, were heckled by Ghising's supporters and the meeting ended in pandemonium.

Yet, Ghising is the key figure for any future possible settlement—a fact that even the Centre has ultimately realised. But to the Left Front, he is a potential Bhindranwale—an evil that must be stamped out at the earliest. Devil or saint, it is Ghising's handling that will determine the future of the Gorkhaland stir.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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erty, participation in trade and commerce and movement and other privileges in either country—has stirred a responsive chord among the Nepalis. "We look and speak like our brethren from Nepal," says retired IAS officer Man Bahadur Rai of Umlaka village in Meghalaya. "And because of this no distinction is made between us and the immigrants."

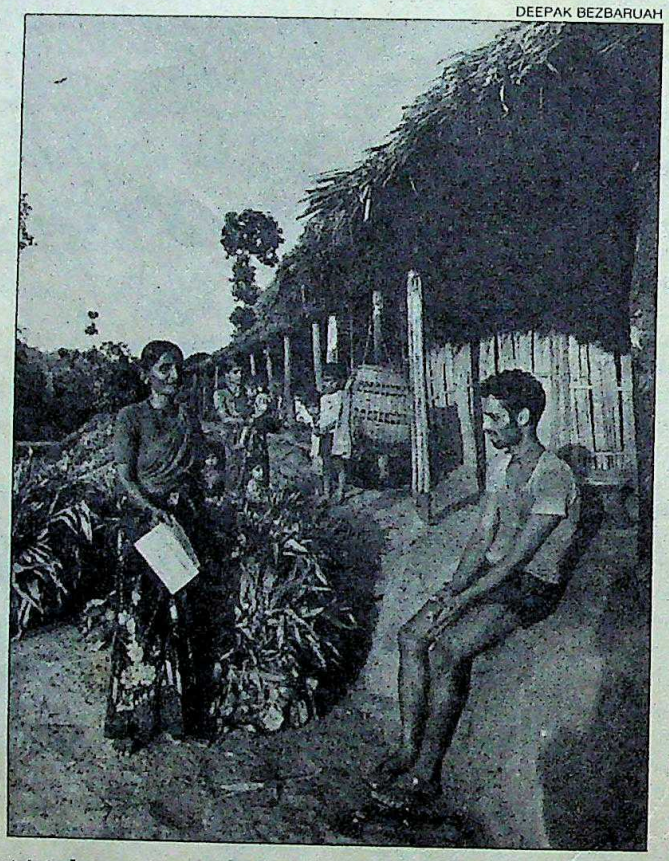
Rai recently had to suffer the humiliation of being ordered out of his car at the infamous Byrnihat check-post on the Assam-Meghalaya border, which has become a nightmare for the state's Nepali-speaking population since the Government has got tough on foreigners following the agitation by the All-Meghalaya Students' Union (AMSU). Rages Rai justifiably: "After 34 years of service to my country, if I can be insulted by a mere constable and asked to prove my Indian citizenship every time I return to Meghalaya, I think it is not worth living in the country."

When ultimately forced to justify the summary eviction of immigrants, without referring the matter to the foreigners' tribunal, the Meghalaya Government disclosed that since 1976 Nepali nationals entering restricted areas—comprising five north Bengal districts and the whole of the North-east—were to carry a permit but, "only a few Nepali nationals who entered Meghalaya after the crucial date applied for restricted-area permits (RAP's)". As a result, 1,956 Nepalis and 58 Bangladeshi nationals were deported. The Government later admitted that another 5,000 nationals left on their own, adding: "Some of those who wanted to leave the place on their own were also assisted by the police whenever required."

The RAP requirement represents a typical catch-22 situation created by an insensitive bureaucracy. Ananda Pathak, the highly respected CPI(M) Lok Sabha MP from Darjeeling who toured the North-east last month, confessed: "I was astonished to find that nobody, not even the state Government, could tell me where to get a permit." Enquiries revealed that the only office from where Nepalis could get RAP's was in Delhi. Wondered Pathak: "How can illiterate, starving Nepalis trickling into India on the assurance of the Indo-Nepal treaty be expected to trek all the way to Delhi to get a permit when no one even tells them it is necessary?"

Darjeeling district, however, remains the tinderbox and only the Centre can douse the tense situation there. Ghising has consistently maintained that he will have no truck with the West Bengal Government—a position that has hardened following the May 25 police firing in Kurseong which took a toll of five, including a Marwari shopkeeper. Till now, all that the Centre has done is to send a "secret" emissary to have talks with Ghising.

DEEPAK BEZBARUAH



Couple displaying expulsion notice

The power in Ghising's emotional appeal for Gorkhaland is making inroads both into the ranks of the CPI(M) and the Congress(I). CPI(M) trade unions have long had a stranglehold over the district's 78 tea gardens but during the "Gorkhaland bandh" last month, at least 27 gardens were totally closed. "All these years, I have been shouting about Nepali problems in Parliament, but all my warnings were ignored and today we are faced with a movement that will destroy us," laments Pathak.

The Congress(I)'s plight is even more embarrassing. The district's most prominent Congress(I) leader, Dawa Narbula, has demanded Union territory status for Darjeeling though the Congress(I) backs the Left Front's stand of total opposition to the demand. But Narbula has no intention of capitulating and has openly expressed the desire to dissociate the Darjeeling unit from the state body. State party General Secretary Subroto Mukherjee says Narbula will be expelled if he persists in flouting the party stand.

Finding their foothold in Darjeeling crumbling before the GNLF's advance, the Congress(I) and the CPI(M), instead of formulating a joint strategy, have been sniping at each other. To the Marxist charge that the Congress(I) was helping the separatists, state party President P.R. Das Munshi reacted by accusing the Left Front Government of ignoring the hill areas. Union Minister of State for Planning Ajit Panja followed up by remarking that the Marxists had failed to provide matching grants for Darjeeling's development. The chief minister countered this by claiming that his government was spending twice the amount on the hill people compared to those living in the plains.

But Basu seems to have realised that he will need the support of the Centre to combat the separatists. Declaring that Rajiv Gandhi had promised full support to contain the Darjeeling stir, Basu said at a public meeting: "The communists and Congress will work unitedly to save the integrity of the nation." Meanwhile, in Darjeeling, the Marxists have launched a determined propaganda campaign to convince the people that the Gorkhaland stir is an "anti-people and violent movement."

The next step of the GNLF's programme will be directed against the Centre and will include the blockade of timber and tea, a step bound to create unprecedented hardship for the hill people. For the first time in years, a leader has emerged who has a wide appeal. Unless the Centre steps in, the bush fire started in North Bengal could well become a wildfire in the entire North-east.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE
in Shillong and Darjeeling

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ANDHRA PRADESH

More Sops

IN ANDHRA Pradesh it is now the turn of the farmer. Prompted by Telugu Desam General Secretary N. Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao moved decisively last fortnight to woo the state's 74 lakh farmers when he dramatically unveiled an ambitious three-tier plan at the party's annual *mahanadu* (convention) in an obvious bid to firm up the party's political base.

Underlining his personal interest in farmers' problems, Rama Rao picked up a piece of chalk and drew the proposed organisational flow chart on a blackboard at a session of select activists of the party's farmers' wing, Telugu Rythu, as well as legislators and MP's. The state agriculture development board—presided over by the chief minister and comprising government nominees—will be the apex body, formulating policies and planning the strategies for production and marketing.

The lowest rung of the structure will be constituted of crop-wise cooperative farmers' councils in each of the state's 1,104 mandals. They will be in charge of issuing loans and arranging storage and marketing facilities. The next tier will have a cluster of state-level federations for various crops to regulate trade, arrange cash credit flow and recommend the minimum remunerative price.

The top tier will be the state farmers' council, comprising presidents of the mandal farmers' councils and the state federations to coordinate the activities of the lower-level organisations, assess overall needs and suggest priorities in farm research. Says Naidu: "The Central Government's pricing policy has affected the income of farmers and the federation is the only answer to their problems." Maintained Rama Rao: "There will be no government interference and the federations will be free from politics."

However, the plan has never been anything but political. The idea of a multi-tiered farmers' union was mooted by Naidu, Rama Rao's son-in-law, after a tour of the districts. Apart from Rama Rao's undoubted charisma, the Telugu Desam derives its popularity from the support of the Harijans and the backward classes, the main beneficiaries of the Rs 2-a-kg-rice scheme and the rural housing programmes. Naidu found, however, that the farmers wanted a better deal. Now, Naidu plans to tie up the plan with the party's needs: the mandal cooperatives will be used to give small zones of influence to Telugu Desam activists.

There is little doubt that the state farmer needs help. Maharashtra—thanks to its monopoly cotton purchase scheme—buys cotton at Rs 6.10 and more per kg. In Andhra Pradesh, the price crashed to Rs 3.50 per kg in the 1985 season. Other crops have hardly fared better. Paddy sells at Rs 120 a quintal instead of Rs 145 four years ago, and chilli prices (for the better varieties) have dropped from Rs 1,800 to Rs 500 a quintal. Telugu Rythu activists at the party convention argued that farming had been reduced to a gamble for tens of thousands of small farmers, even when they were assured of water.

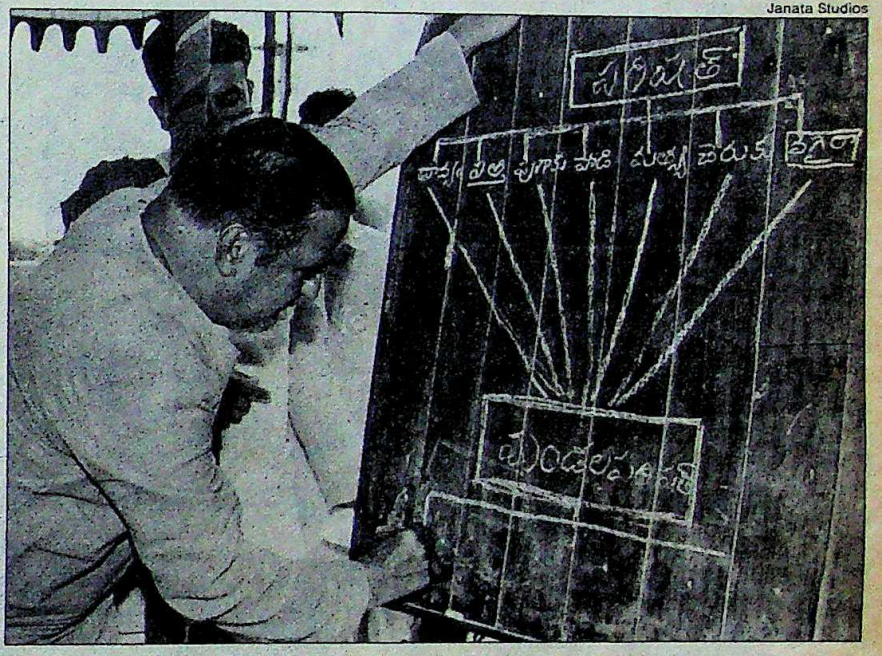
Though the federations are consistent with their demand, they are sceptical about the federation taking shape for another two years. Said one of Naidu's detractors: "A comprehensive farmers' federation from the mandal level is impractical." Opposition parties are equally unconvinced. Argued N. Giriprasad, state secretary of the CPI: "This plan will only create another set of intermediaries." But, said Naidu: "We are shaping the policy with caution; it will not be implemented in a hurry and made a mess."

Rama Rao has already announced that electricity arrears of farmers in drought-stricken areas are to be waived, cane-growers will get Rs 230 a tonne—Rs 10 more than last year—and cooperative sugar factories may be handed over to them. With the sops coming even before the creation of the farmers' federations, Rama Rao has left no doubt about his party's intentions.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

NTR outlining the farmers federation: political plans

Janata Studios



Naidu: moving force

The plan for mandal-level farmers' federations is basically political. Mooted by Chandrababu Naidu, they will be used to give small zones of influence to Telugu Desam activists.

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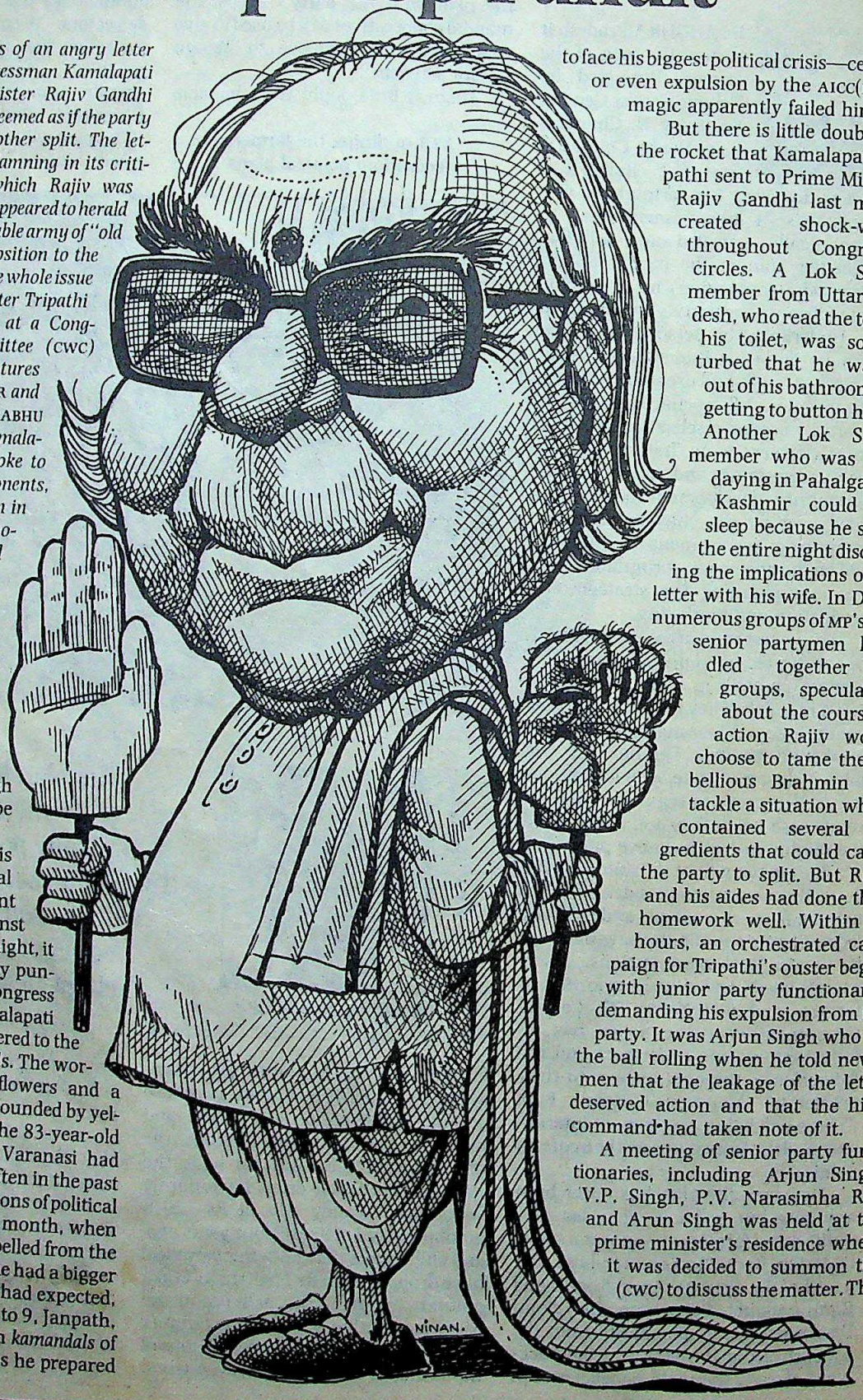
KAMALAPATI TRIPATHI

The Flip-Flop Pandit

WHEN the contents of an angry letter signed by veteran Congressman Kamalapati Tripathi to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi leaked out last month it seemed as if the party was heading for yet another split. The letter—bold in language, damning in its criticism of the way in which Rajiv was handling party affairs—appeared to herald the formation of a formidable army of "old guard" dissidents in opposition to the party's leadership. But the whole issue subsided in a whimper after Tripathi was roundly humiliated at a Congress(I) Working Committee (CWC) session last fortnight. Features Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR *and Assistant Editor* PRABHU CHAWLA *looked into Kamalapati's background and spoke to dozens of his friends, opponents, as well as senior partymen in order to understand his motives as well as the political impact of his action. Their report:*



Hlin baglamukhi sarvadushtanam vachmukhi stambhaya jivvhakdolaya kolaya buddhinashaya hlin on swahaha. (He who speaks against me, let a spike be driven through his tongue, let his brain be destroyed).

This Tantrik mantra is said to be a potent magical weapon employed by ardent Durga worshippers against their detractors. Last fortnight, it was invoked frequently by pundits for the well-being of Congress Working President Kamalapati Tripathi. The *jaap* was uttered to the counting of turmeric beads. The worshippers offered yellow flowers and a ghee-fed yellow flame surrounded by yellow rice to the goddess. The 83-year-old Brahmin politician from Varanasi had resorted to Tantric ritual often in the past in order to exorcise the demons of political or personal adversity. Last month, when Pranab Mukherjee was expelled from the party and Tripathi sensed he had a bigger fight on his hands than he had expected, Varanasi pundits travelled to 9, Janpath, Tripathi's Delhi home, with *kamandals* of Gangajal. But this time—as he prepared to face his biggest political crisis—censure or even expulsion by the AICC(I), the magic apparently failed him.

But there is little doubt that the rocket that Kamalapati Tripathi sent to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi last month created shock-waves throughout Congress(I) circles. A Lok Sabha member from Uttar Pradesh, who read the text in his toilet, was so disturbed that he walked out of his bathroom forgetting to button his fly. Another Lok Sabha member who was holidaying in Pahalgam in Kashmir could not sleep because he spent the entire night discussing the implications of the letter with his wife. In Delhi, numerous groups of MP's and senior partymen huddled together in groups, speculating about the course of action Rajiv would choose to tame the rebellious Brahmin and tackle a situation which contained several ingredients that could cause the party to split. But Rajiv and his aides had done their homework well. Within 48 hours, an orchestrated campaign for Tripathi's ouster began with junior party functionaries demanding his expulsion from the party. It was Arjun Singh who set the ball rolling when he told newsmen that the leakage of the letter deserved action and that the high command had taken note of it.

A meeting of senior party functionaries, including Arjun Singh, V.P. Singh, P.V. Narasimha Rao and Arun Singh was held at the prime minister's residence where it was decided to summon the (CWC) to discuss the matter. This

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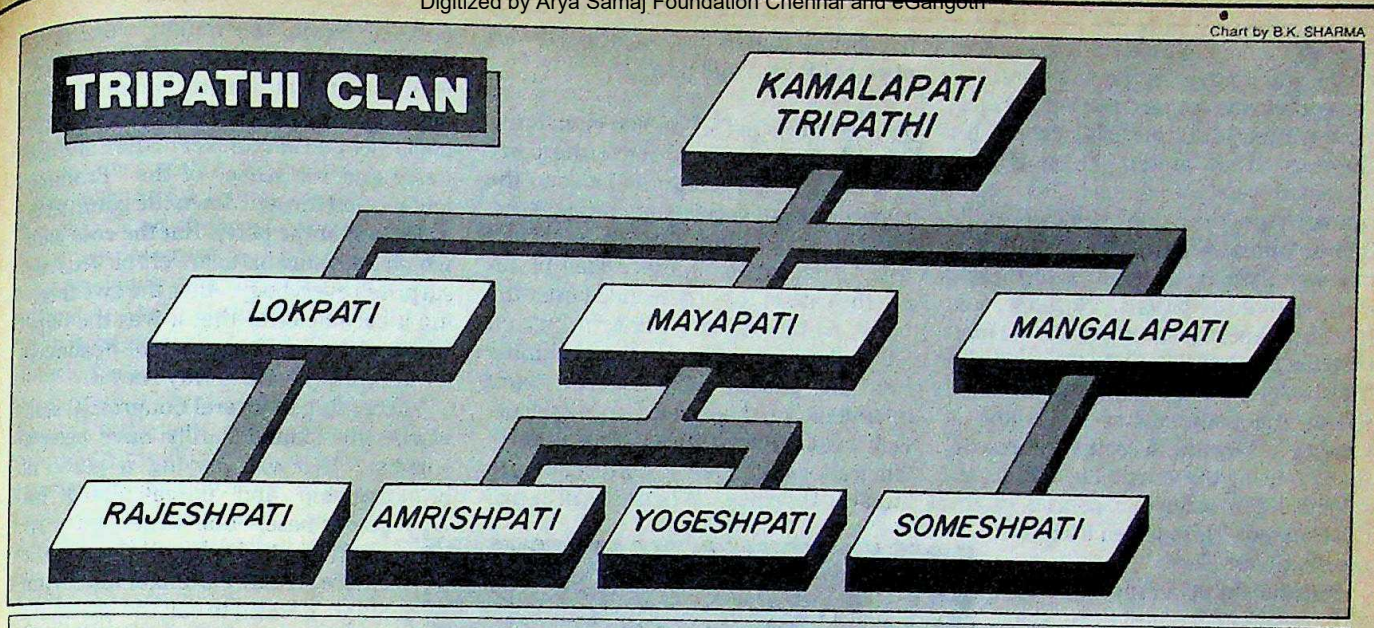

Kamalapati worked hard to promote interests of his family. Lokpati is UP health minister and his wife Chandra is an MP from Chandoli. Other sons are successful businessmen.

was the first time since Rajiv's election as prime minister that the cwc was being called to discuss just one subject. The strategy they decided upon was to humiliate the party's working president. With this in mind, the prime minister's office began sending out invitations for the crucial meeting on June 2 at 7, Race Course Road. Tripathi was kept on tenterhooks. He was invited for the meeting only at the last minute, following a private meeting with Rajiv. His sons, the ambitious Lokpati, 60, health minister in Uttar Pradesh, and the fiery Mayapati, 56, had advised caution. In the end, he offered an apology and was spared the ignominy of expulsion. In politics, the loser compromises. Panditji was clearly in retreat.

During the cwc session, Rajiv and Arjun Singh did not speak. But those who did blasted Tripathi for writing the letter. Sitaram Kesri, looking directly at him said that if the party tolerated challenge to the leadership "from any quarter, it will boomerang on us later on". Bhagwat Jha Azad urged "strong action" against dissidence. Rajiv picked Indira loyalists like Kerala Chief Minister K. Karunakaran to lead the attack in the form of a resolution which ridiculed those who "want to grab power in Indiraji's name". Despite unanimous condemnation however, Rajiv did not yield to pressure from senior partymen to expel him. During the meeting, members insisted that Tripathi withdraw his letter but the old man refused to do so. Said he: "I have written this letter myself and whatever I wrote in the letter has now been taken care of." When it became apparent that he would not withdraw it, he was made party to a resolution which, because it rebutted all the points in the letter amounted, in effect, to a humiliating self-condemnation. In his letter he had raised the question of Indira loyalists being side-lined, criticised Rajiv for his style of functioning and questioned the logic behind the Assam and Punjab accords. Referring to the use of Indira's name, the resolution said: "The cwc reminds the people that this is not for the first time when persons...have invoked the memory of a great figure in history to comouflage their selfish aims...The dramatis personae have changed but the

Tripathi's Charges

"Congressmen are puzzled and bewildered at the rapid disintegration of the party at all levels and shocked at the casual, ad hoc and inept handling of party matters by you and your so-called operators."

"My contention is that Congress is rapidly losing its contact with the masses and you are surrounded by a number of sycophants who were not only 'Indira-baiters', but most of them were 'Indira-haters.'"

"In handling some of the issues like problems in Punjab and Assam, you have shown impatience and your measures have not only been casual and ad hoc, but have aggravated the problems."

"This Government is primarily concerned with the welfare of the well-to-do sections of society. The pro-poor stance of your mother's policy is a story of the past."

CWC's Rebuttal

"Rajiv is carrying forward the task (of strengthening the party). The Working Committee notes that at this crucial juncture some individuals have chosen to raise baseless and diversionary issues."

"Disguised under the garb of loyalty to Indiraji, unabashed hankering for the accoutrements of power is writ large across the lengthy but confused chronicle of allegations against the leadership."

"The Punjab and Assam agreements reflected the desire of the people of India. The accords were universally welcomed as important steps towards the restoration of amity and trust."

"This Government has undertaken major incentives to accelerate growth and social justice. Anti-poverty programmes have been vastly strengthened."

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language and the motives are the language and motives of the wreckers."

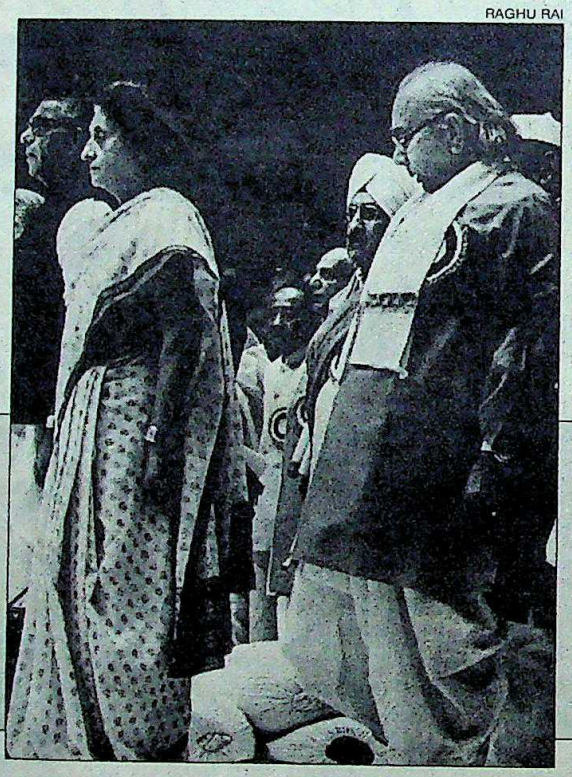
And the resolution delivered a critical blow to Tripathi and his side-kicks when it charged: "They protest too much and thereby reveal too much. Their main concern is not the vision of Indira Gandhi; their sole purpose is to make her hallowed memory their instrument of furthering their personal ambitions." Nothing could have been more insulting to the old man than the part which said that "some live in the shadowy past, oblivious of the rapid strides the country has made and is making". Tripathi accepted the resolution, ignoring the fact that he had earlier ridiculed the economic policies of the Government. He emerged from the meeting crestfallen.

But he put up a brave front before reporters, telling them that though he was satisfied by the proceedings, he would write again if the need arose. But for partymen, the writing was clearly on the wall. As Arjun Singh put it: "The Tripathi chapter is finally closed. It is clear that any attempt to create a separate centre of power will not be tolerated by the rank and file."

Tripathi survived by being purged. But it was clear that his following had evaporated. His house in Delhi, once a beehive of activity, is virtually deserted. Where hundreds used to flock to touch Panditji's feet every day, there are now only a handful of visitors. The only visible sign of activity at his house last fortnight was the pitter-patter of the feet of his grandchildren chit-chatting with aides manning telephones which rang rarely. As his following plummeted, his *pooja* hours soared from an hour a day to three hours. He receives visitors in a well-appointed living-room, looking like a wizened old bird. The face is remarkably free of wrinkles. But the voice is soft, shaky, and he strains to listen to questions. A large red round *tilak* adorns his forehead and his earlobes are coloured with vermillion powder. When he speaks it is obvious that he has lost little of the art of verbal thrust and parry.

Mrs Gandhi inducted Tripathi into the Congress Working Committee but she had an uneasy relationship with him...

"MY EFFORTS," he said in an interview, "were to make the party strong. I wrote the letter to the party president drawing attention to certain issues bothering the workers." When asked if he had sent another letter pleading the case of those suspended from the party, he responded: "I have not given journalists the right to cross-examine me." He praised Rajiv for his "pure intentions" and appealed to dissidents who are planning to hold a convention of "Indira loyalists" not to do anything to "weaken the party". When asked if he had written the letter at the behest of others, he shot back: "Am I such a fool? I have worked with Gandhiji, Nehruji, and Indiraji. I have been in politics for a long time and I know what is to be written."



RAGHU RAI

For more than 30 years, Tripathi had appeared to straddle the Congress like a colossus. He held important party and government posts like the PCC presidentship, was chief minister of Uttar Pradesh (1971-73) and Union minister (1973-1977; 1980). And, in the letter he wrote to Rajiv, he reminded him of his links with Gandhiji and Nehru and his mother, as well as his days as a freedom fighter. The tone of the letter was clearly that of a stern school headmaster chastising a novitiate student and hinting at dire consequences if the pupil failed to fall into line. In political terms, the nation was set to believe that the crunch had finally arrived—that Kamalapati, unchallenged doyen of the "old guard," self-styled guru, godfather and kingmaker of the Congress Party and the leader of the "Brahmin lobby", had thrown down the gauntlet in order to split the party. But the ease with which Rajiv and his followers picked it up surprised everybody. After the CWC meeting it became clear that it was the pupil who had the power to expel the headmaster and not the other way round.

According to several Congress(I) stalwarts, this should hardly have been a surprise. "He was playing a game of brinkmanship and miscalculated his power base," one senior party MP confided. And when Rajiv, on the advice of P. Shiv Shankar and Arjun Singh, decided to call the old man's bluff by expelling Mukherjee and suspending several others from the party and by convening an AICC(I) session to "discuss" his leaked letter, it became nakedly evident that the Emperor had no clothes.

"Seeing in this confrontation a fight between the old and new guard or between the Brahmin and Thakur lobby is nonsense, a creation of the press," one party official said. "It was clearly Kamalapati versus Rajiv. The old man felt his power—and that of his family—eroding, which he was hell bent to protect." He wanted to flex his muscle but he didn't want sudden death. Several of his partymen had written letters to the prime minister and to law enforcement agencies demanding inquiries into allegations of corruption and the misuse of his family's offices for personal gain. As one MP close to Rajiv put it: "There have been land ceiling violation charges against him and his family. He has enormous property holdings. He still needs the protection of the party." But Tripathi pooh-poohs these allegations as the handiwork of malcontents "whose dirty work I have not done. Neither Rajivji or Indiraji asked me to explain anything".

...She sacked him first as Uttar Pradesh chief minister and later as railways minister.

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"But the advantage of being in power," said one Congress(I) Rajya Sabha member, "is that you can generally avoid investigations." Tripathi presides over a tripartite power base of politics and patronage. His son, Lokpati, as a minister, weilds power in Lucknow; Lokpati's wife, Chandra, 55, an MP from Chandoli, holds sway over Varanasi in her capacity as DCC(I) president; and Tripathi commands influence in Delhi. He likes to tell friends: *"Main hoon siddhak, Lokpati hain sadhak aur Bahuji hain chatur sujan"* (I am the wise one, Lokpati is the achiever, and Bahuji, Chandra, is the jack of all trades). And he has made it his life's work to protect and preserve this configuration of power. In Varanasi, his home base, friends and foes alike maintain that he has gained more from Congress than contributed to it. As a lawyer friend of the family put it: "Congress minus Tripathi equals Congress. But Tripathi minus Congress equals zero." The family, whose wealth is reputed to be in crores of rupees, owns apartment complexes, a circus exhibition ground, several businesses, including Jai industries and hundreds of acres of land in Mirzapur and Chakia. In Varanasi and its adjoining districts, no government official moves without the blessings of the Aurangabad darbar—Tripathi's family home. But this combination of political power and patronage was in distinct danger of unjelling. Lokpati had been passed over for chief ministership several times in Uttar Pradesh. Chandra remained only an MP, while Sheila Dixit, daughter-in-law of Uma Shanker Dixit, a veteran Congressman and rival, was made a minister of state. And finally, what hit home directly was Arjun Singh's being made vice-president of the party—a slight to Tripathi. During the AICC(I) session in Bombay where Rajiv vowed to drive the power brokers out of the party, Kamalapati felt ignored and unwanted. He had confided in a friend: *"Pahle Congress ki sarkar hoti thi, ab hai sarkar ki Congress."* (Earlier, it used to be the Congress Government, now it is the Government's Congress).

BUT THE power broker was not about to give up without at least one flex of his political muscle. And the timing seemed just about right. Rajiv's Government had bumbled its way into a price hike. The Punjab situation was getting messier. Communal conflagrations were flaring across the country. "The real purpose of the letter," said a minister who is close, both to Rajiv and the old guard, "was to show Rajiv as weak, indecisive, and unable to control his own party. It also served to test the right to dissent." It had also hoped to fire the imagination of partymen. For it is true that there has developed a sense of unease and malaise within the party—even among die-hard Rajiv loyalists, many of whom claim that Rajiv's style of governance has become faceless, mechanistic and has lost its sense of urgency.

The issues selected for inclusion in the letter touched upon several genuine grievances—electoral reverses, national disintegration and lack of cohesiveness and the presence of "turncoats" (former anti-Indira politicians) in positions of power. While several Congressmen agree on the turncoat issue—Rajiv's pampering of politicians like Margaret Alva(Congress(U), 1979), Arif Mohammad Khan (Janata, 1978), Amarjeet Kaur (Janata, 1978), K.C. Pant (Congress(S), 1977-79), who were abusive toward his mother or had hopped parties—they maintain that the other issues were often taken out of their historical context. "The declining electoral performance," said one MP "is really not pertinent. It refers to mid-term elections and municipal polls. But which party in power has ever won mid-term and municipal polls? The Opposition is always more successful." And, they were quick to point out that as far as bogus membership was concerned—one of the main issues raised in the Tripathi letter—there were more bogus members in Varanasi than anywhere else. In fact, a leading Congressman from Varanasi pointed out that Tripathi began to raise this issue only when he discovered that opposing factions within his own party had signed up more members in Chandoli—his pocket borough and Chandra's parliamentary constituency—than he had in order to pull weight during the upcoming organisational elections. "In the mirror of Chandoli," he said, "Panditji had a vision of India."

Tripathi was supposed to be the catalyst for the party split which never materialised. Rajiv's forces decided quickly to dispel the mirage of the Brahmin lobby. They calculated that A.P. Sharma (who incidentally is not a Brahmin though he is associated with the "lobby") was not as powerful in the trade union movement as he had once been. Sripat Mishra—like Pranab Mukherjee—had little or no following. Jagannath Mishra had a formidable power base but a bad image. "There is little doubt," said one of Rajiv's advisers, "that there was a conspiracy. We even heard there was talk of forming a new Congress which would be backed by V.C. Shukla, Gundu Rao, the Janata and even Bahuguna. We were not bothered about who was using whom. The main thing was to send a quick and effective message."

If Tripathi's base was proven untena-

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Tripathi was always nervous about Rajiv, who gave him little importance from the start...

...Cut to the quick, Tripathi responded by playing the Brahmin card, but did not receive the support he expected.

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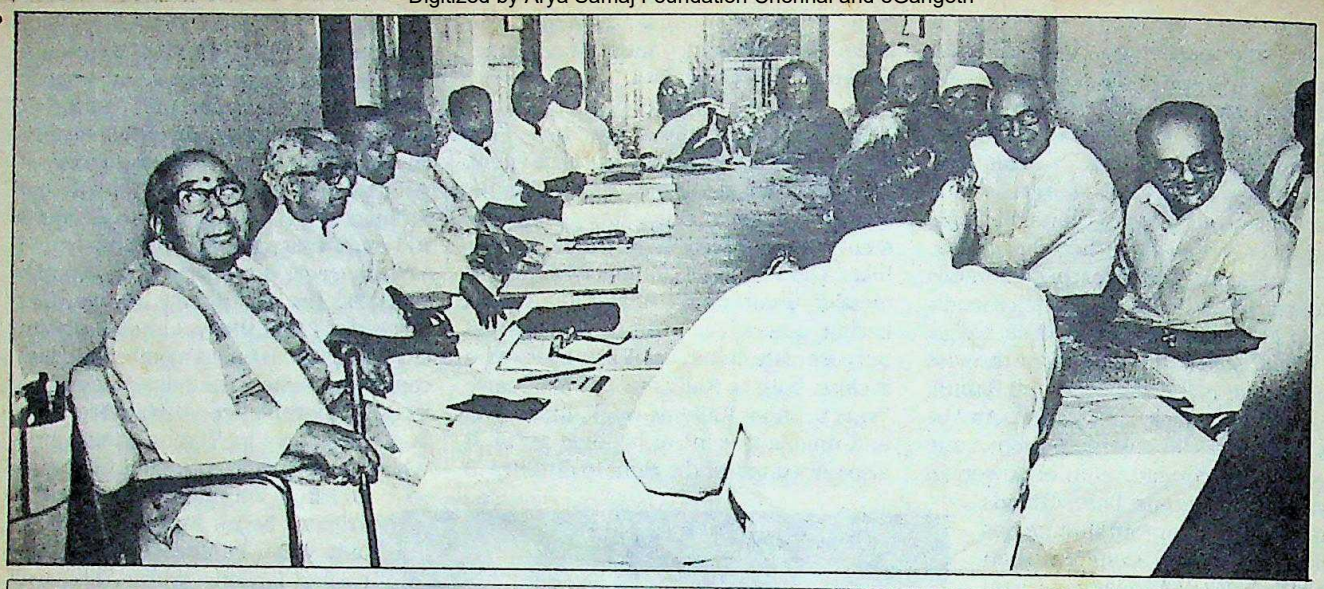

Tripathi was not invited to committee meetings, until the last minute. Here, behind closed doors, he was roundly humiliated.

ble within the so-called national Brahmin lobby, it is even more insecure in Varanasi and surrounding areas. Banarasis at all levels—paanwallas, Congress(I) workers, aging freedom fighters, lawyers—say that there could not be an image more false. A Sanskrit Vidyalaya teacher, Swami Keshavaracharaya, said: "There are 80,000 Brahmin families here. But we don't recognise Panditji as a leading Brahmin. He has done nothing for us." Says Satyen Basu, friend of Subhash Chandra Bose and Tagore and legendary freedom fighter: "The way he has played politics, he has disgraced Varanasi."

These sources point out that Tripathi, notwithstanding his much ballyhooed "loyalty" to Indira and the party, has played a duplicitous game throughout his career—in which he has used the Brahmin card as a facade. Following his humiliation at the CWC session, he was himself to admit during an interview: "What Brahmin lobby? It is a creation of the press. There is only a Congress lobby." But during the last MLA elections, even as he professed loyalty to the Congress(I), his supporters did not work for several Congress(I) candidates, particularly Dr Rajnikant Dutta, who was elected from Varanasi. And in the parliamentary elections his son, Mayapati, openly challenged Rajiv's aunt, Shiela Kaul.

Accounts of disloyalty—not loyalty—are legend in Tripathi's own backyard. In 1960, he deserted his Guru, Dr Sampurnanand and helped elect his rival C.B. Gupta as PCC president. When Gupta came into power, Tripathi said he would play the role of Bharat to Gupta's Rama. But later he was to desert Gupta and become a follower of Bahuguna.

MRS GANDHI first inducted him into the CWC in 1969 but, according to former MLC and AICC member Ishwar Saran Singh (Bhaiji) who was Tripathi's lieutenant for 25 years, he failed her during the first acid test of loyalty. In 1977, when Brahmananda Reddy and Y.B. Chavan were ousting Indira loyalists from Karnataka, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Assam, she appealed to Tripathi to requisition an AICC meeting as a test of strength. He refused. But the following year, when the party convention was held and the Congress(I) formed, he pledged unswerving loyalty to Mrs Gandhi. In 1975, after Mrs Gandhi lost her election petition in the courts and a party meeting was called in Delhi, Tripathi and Chandra departed from Varanasi amidst the chanting of slogans: *"Hindustan ka pyara hai, Kamalapati hamara hai"* (Kamalapati is the beloved of the land) and *"Aaj ki Chandra kal ki Indira"* (Today's Chandra, Tomorrow's Indira).

But Tripathi, who was sacked as railways minister by Mrs Gandhi for his ineptitude, remains only a Rajya Sabha member and Chandra, far from having metamorphosised into an other Indira, remains an MP, notwithstanding several efforts by her father-in-law to have her inducted into the Central cabinet. So too has Tripathi's lobbying to install Lokpati as Uttar Pradesh chief minister been a failure. According to family sources, Lokpati was the first to begin expressing nervousness when Pranab Mukherjee was expelled from the Congress(I). The family had not expected the high command to act with such swiftness. Originally, he had cautiously backed the rebel movement. But after the Mukherjee affair, he toured 42 districts in eastern Uttar Pradesh to test his grassroots strength. He had determined that a full-fledged rebellion would be unsuccessful and that the family would wind up losing its muscle. It was he who advised his father that the jig was up and so Kamalapati, who has jumped ship in the past quickly enough, began distancing himself from the rebels. His status now, said a relative, is like the sage Trishankhu. He has been left dangling in a sort of political limbo. And Rajiv, by not taking stronger action against him has emerged as merciful, respectful of older Congressmen, and willing to be tolerant in the interests of party unity. But Rajiv has made it clear that the sword is in his hands—he can either use it to cut off Kamalapati's roots by having Lokpati dismissed from the ministry and later denying Bahuji a ticket, or he can stay his hand in an act of Damoclean finesse.

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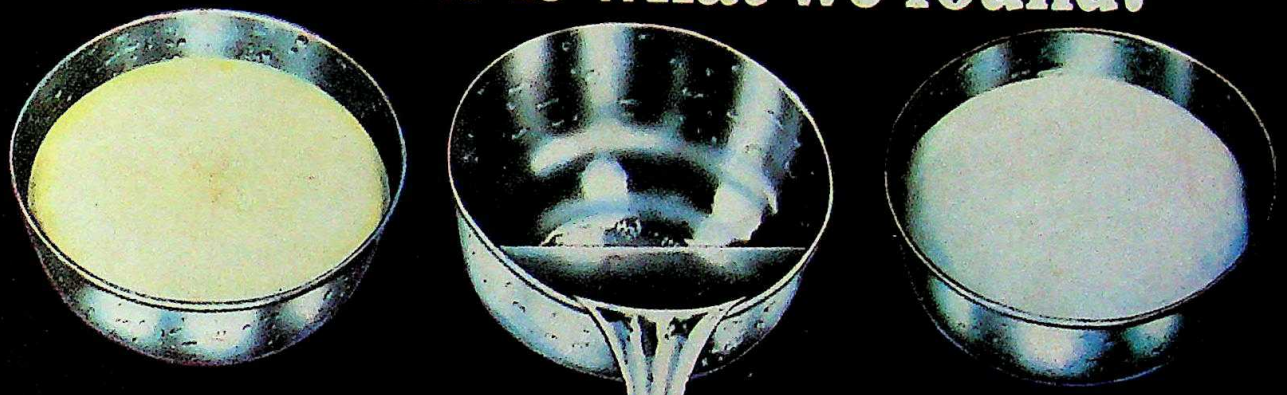

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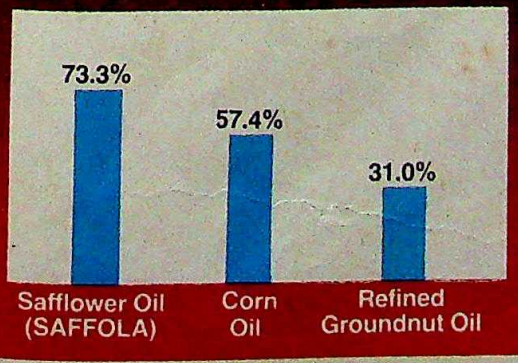

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"As each day goes by, I begin to feel older, I want to shoot everyday. I feel that life is passing me by."
SABIA

"I like the Famous Five series and the Secret Seven, and of course Richie Rich."
SABIA
14-year-old actress

with the bottle or the affairs of Dev Anand, the venerable Dilip Kumar or Raj Kapoor with their heroines were mere whispers which only added to the mystique of these stars. Today some of the starlets embroider their private lives with titillating threads to satisfy the ever-curious film magazines. Often, they simulate affairs with their screen partners for the benefit of these magazines and in the larger interest of publicity. Kimi Katkar, the bare-almost-all Tarzan girl is romancing Sunjay Dutt in print; she is slated to appear with him in a few films. When we see her on the sets of a film with Govinda, there is hardly a word exchanged between the two: he remains ensconced with his friends in his make-up room and she downstairs with her mother. But the moment the photographers appear, the cooing and lovey-dovey vibes come on heavy.

Says Amit Khanna: "If *Stardust* had not come around, this mystique would have been dumped; peephole journalism has unnecessarily given a sheen to these stars. Imagine over 500 magazines and these young people even start believing that kind of shit."

Life, and work, for the fledgeling stars is certainly no bowl of cherries. The day starts at dawn and they are on the sets till late evening, bunny-hopping from one shift to another with little time for privacy or friends. Says Mandakini: "I don't go out with anybody. Just my family. I don't have time for friends." Most of them come from middle class backgrounds and live and commute from tiny bed-sitters in the suburbs of the city which reveal their one concession to their youth—cuddly teddy bears and comics. Their intellectual diet is limited to film magazines which they duly condemn but compulsively read, and comics. Mandakini says she used to read "classics like Harold Robbins and Sidney Sheldon". Most of them are also drop-outs from school. Mandakini left school in the tenth standard. Neelam quit school at the same level, and so did Khushboo. Sabia dropped out in the ninth standard and childhood also got dropped somewhere along the line between the nursery and the arc lights. She has a determined glint in her eyes when she insists that she wants to be a star ("I want to be like Sridevi"). She is already frustrated (her word) at 14: "I am 14 until the day I turn 15, not a day sooner... as each day goes by I begin to feel older. I want to shoot everyday. I feel that life is passing me by." Her only contact with her childhood are her toys and books: "I like the Famous Five series and Secret Seven, and of course Richie Rich," but the minute the photographer turns on the lights and begins to click, she is transformed into a sultry, seductive and voluptuous little Lolita.

Sixteen is no longer so sweet in tinseltown; the silver lining on the cotton candy clouds of the starry teenagers is indeed dark, with desperate producers looking for younger and younger faces, but mature bodies, each year. Says Rajeev Kapoor, Raj Kapoor's youngest son, who starred opposite Mandakini in *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*: "You shouldn't mistake youth for innocence. The girls mature very fast these days. They see so much of life." The young blood may fade out as fast as they have appeared on screen. For the moment, however, they have become an integral part of Bombay's film factory—the new princes and princesses of the silver screen and adolescent heirs to the Royal House of Illusion.

—MADHU JAIN

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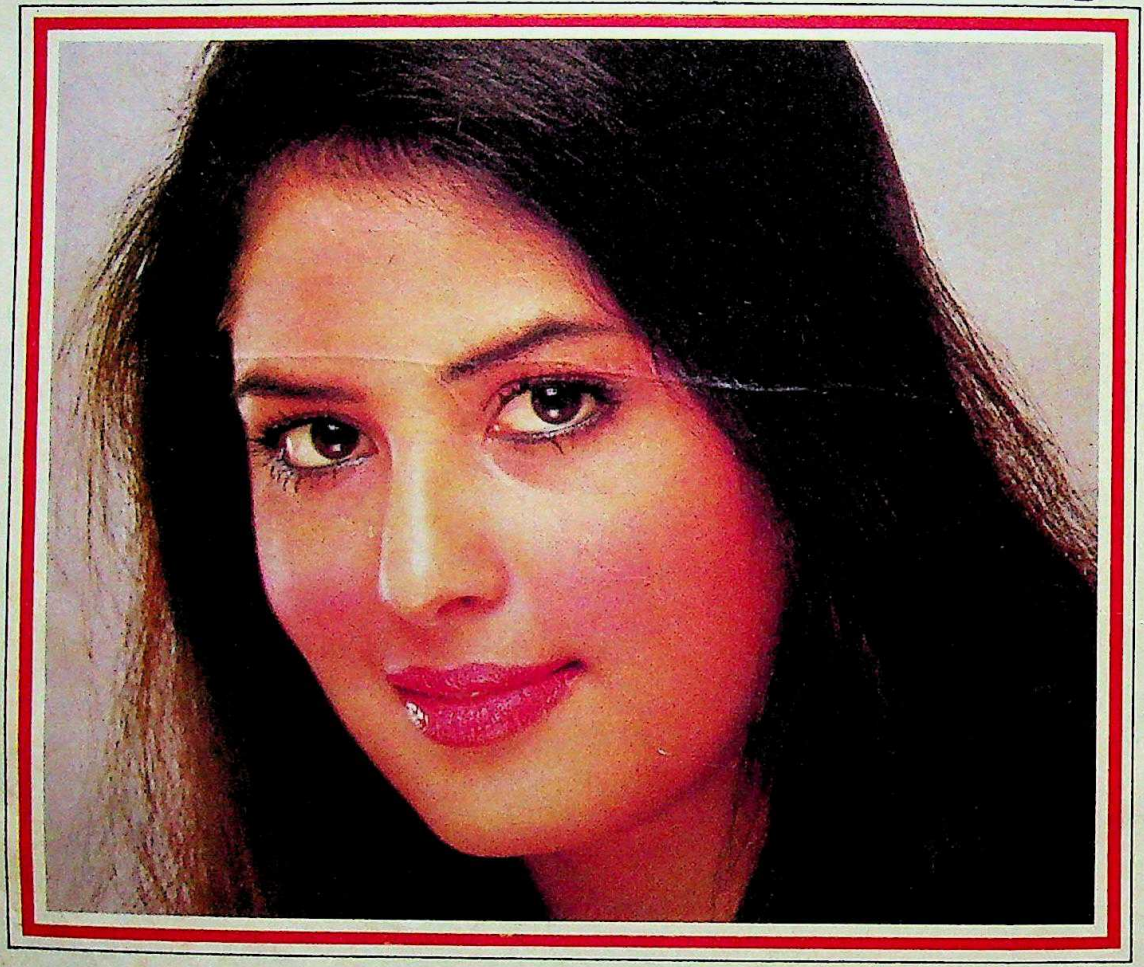

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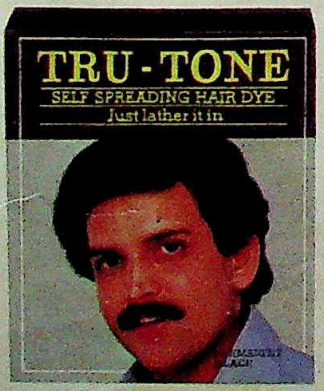

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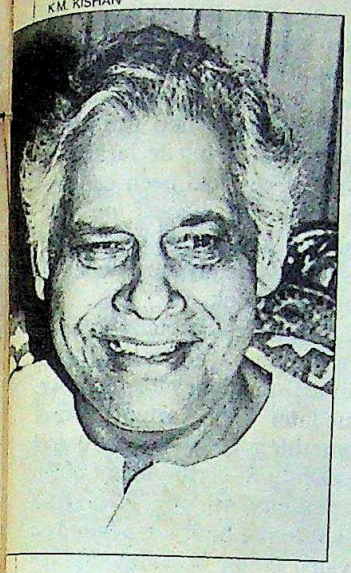
Cooler Climes

KM. KISHAN



Dubey: drawing the line

RUNNING a state like Bihar is no joke. And Bindeshwari Dubey, being the concerned chief minister that he is, has seen to it that those who run it—the ministers and bureaucrats—do so in cooler climes, or to be precise, air-conditioned climes. To facilitate the decision-making process, last fortnight the chief minister ordered that the offices of all ministers and secretary-rank officers should be provided with air-conditioners and those belonging to lesser ones be fitted with desert coolers. Not to leave anything to chance—or a power cut—the order also provided for a brand-new sub-station in the secretariat complex if need be. The cost of the whole exercise was estimated at Rs 1 crore, and the necessary funds were sanctioned forthwith. Said the government order: "The state Government is committed to creating a proper atmosphere and providing necessary facilities to its officers and employees for enhancing their efficiency." When it comes to providing facilities, the Bihar Government certainly knows where to draw the line.

Correspondence Course

IF KARNATAKA Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde has an air of the intellectual around him, it is not without reason. The chief minister is a veritable man of letters, though the letters in his case happen to be more of the mailbag variety. Ever since he came to power the first time, Hegde has kept up a steady correspondence with anybody and everybody—from party MLA's to the prime minister himself—with the subjects ranging from the state's small-scale industry to the absence of any statue of Mahatma Gandhi at North Block-South Block. The average rate of correspondence works out to three letters to the prime minister and some dozen others to sundry ministers and others every month. In the last five months alone, Hegde is said to have written 38 letters to Rajiv Gandhi, 14 of them dictated from the hospital where he was recovering from a slipped disc. "If they were letter bombs," a bureaucrat remarked, "the South Block would have exploded several times over." But for all the response that Hegde has got, the bombs could well have been duds.

BHAWAN SINGH

Hegde: man of letters

Thirsty Protest

WHEN the five-year term of Pallemalli Maheshwar, the popular gram sarpanch of Nacharam—a northern Hyderabad suburb—came to an end last fortnight, he stepped down with a strong sense of resignation. The leader had failed to keep his promise of providing drinking water to his 35,000-odd constituents, despite his sincere efforts to push chase a water supply scheme sanctioned way back in 1979. But he need not have despaired. For, not long after this, the suburbanites launched a spirited campaign for clean air and water. And Maheshwar was their natural leader. This time round, the leader decided to change tactics. To begin with, he 'impounded' a government water tanker and refused to return it until the piped supply came, threatening violence if pressurised. Intimidated, the authorities let him keep the tanker. And a triumphant Maheshwar gloated: "I have never received such support; and it will not go waste. The Government can no longer remain indifferent. If only I got this support three-four years ago." As they say, it is better late than never.

Civic Ploy

WEST Bengal's Marxist rulers are known to come up with ingenious schemes from time to time, though the means and the ends of these scheme may not always be for, of or by the people. The latest is a scheme to privatise all civic facilities in Calcutta. Last fortnight, the Marxist-controlled Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) announced a scheme offering 11 major municipal markets and three public parks for redevelopment and maintenance to bidders for a 60-year period, during which they would be free to convert them into multi-storied commercial complexes. The idea, according to the CMC tender document, is to "augment and improve amenities and facilities to citizens" while simultaneously opening "avenues for private participation in civic services." There is one snag though: no formal proposal to this effect has been approved either by the Cabinet or the CMC. Since, in the absence of formal sanction, court cases could easily jeopardise investments in this scheme, developers are chary of jumping into something that might later turn out to be no-man's-land.

KALYAN CHAKRABORTY

Lake Market: commercial complex or no man's land

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BHOPAL

Real Life Drama

TRAGICALLY, it was the only show put up by renowned theatre personality, B.V. Karanth, that the city of Bhopal lapped up. As head of Bharat Bhavan, the high-profile government-sponsored centre for the arts, Karanth was considered too avant garde and too intellectual for the small-town audience. Till he played the lead role in a tragic real life drama that has rocked the city and sent shockwaves through the country's artistic circles. The bearded Karanth today sits brooding in a prison cell, charged with the attempted murder of his colleague and alleged mistress, stage actress Vibha Misra.

The actress is in a hospital bed, hovering between life and death, her attractive face and body hideously disfigured by third degree burns. The contradictory statements and confessions made by the key players in the tragedy have succeeded in distorting the details. But residents of Professor's Colony, where both Karanth and Vibha lived, were accustomed to the two visiting each other at all hours. Thus, nobody clearly remembers seeing Karanth arrive at Vibha's one-bedroom house on the morning of May 24.

Vibha's landlady, A.H. Qutbi, says she visited her around 11.15 a.m. and found her alone. But a maidservant, Ameena Bee, told the police later that she saw a bearded man arrive at about 9.30 a.m. and that she overheard Vibha and Karanth quarrel heatedly for over an hour and at one point, she heard Vibha shout: "You swine, you've burnt me."

Another neighbour has also said that he heard muffled screams but did not bother to check because he presumed Vibha and her colleagues were rehearsing. But the commotion was loud enough for Farooq Qutbi, the landlady's son, to investigate. He knocked at the door and after a gap of 10 minutes, Karanth opened the door. He was in a dishevelled state and his eyes were blood-shot. "He looked frightened and behind him we could see Vibha who appeared badly burnt," says Sita, another neighbour who arrived on the scene. Mrs Qutbi also says she saw Karanth standing dazedly in the bedroom doorway with burn-marks on his hands: "I could smell kerosene and asked him where it was coming from. He said the stove had burst but the smell was coming from the bedroom. I checked in the kitchen and I saw the stove in one corner. It was dusty and unused. In any case, the cooking was done on gas and there were two full cylinders lying there."

Vibha was rushed to hospital in a critical condition and when the police asked her to make a "dying declaration", she claimed that she had been cooking and accidentally set herself on fire. Karanth made a similar statement and added that she was already burnt when he came to borrow a book.

At first, the police accepted the story. Karanth was a national figure and highly respected in artistic circles for his work. But later they started to smell something fishy. Says Bhopal Assistant Superintendent of Police Alok Tandon: "When we went to the house, we found no evidence of burning in the kitchen but there were several signs of it in the bedroom. The clothes she had been wearing smelt of kerosene." What added to their suspicions was the fact that neighbours had heard sounds of a quarrel and the fact that Karanth had taken unusually long to open the door.

R.C. SAHU

The tragic scandal involving Karanth has rocked the city and sent shockwaves through the country's artistic circles.

Further investigation unearthed a series of letters the two had exchanged, which indicated that their relationship had become strained. In one letter, Vibha had accused Karanth of "spoiling many young flowers and forcing many abortions". The police, after interrogating Karanth, arrested him the next day. The drama heightened that same night when Karanth, in a sensational late-night confession, admitted that he had lost his temper and set Vibha on fire because she had called him impotent and threatened to leave the repertory company of Bharat Bhavan. Karanth admitted to throwing some kerosene, taken from the kitchen, on Vibha's back and then setting her alight. He said he then panicked and in trying to save her, burnt his hands.

The confession was puzzling. For one, the only portion of Vibha's body that is not burnt is her back. For another, why did Karanth confess if, as his supporters say, he was not capable of murder? A signed statement issued by leading artistes has claimed that Karanth was bul-

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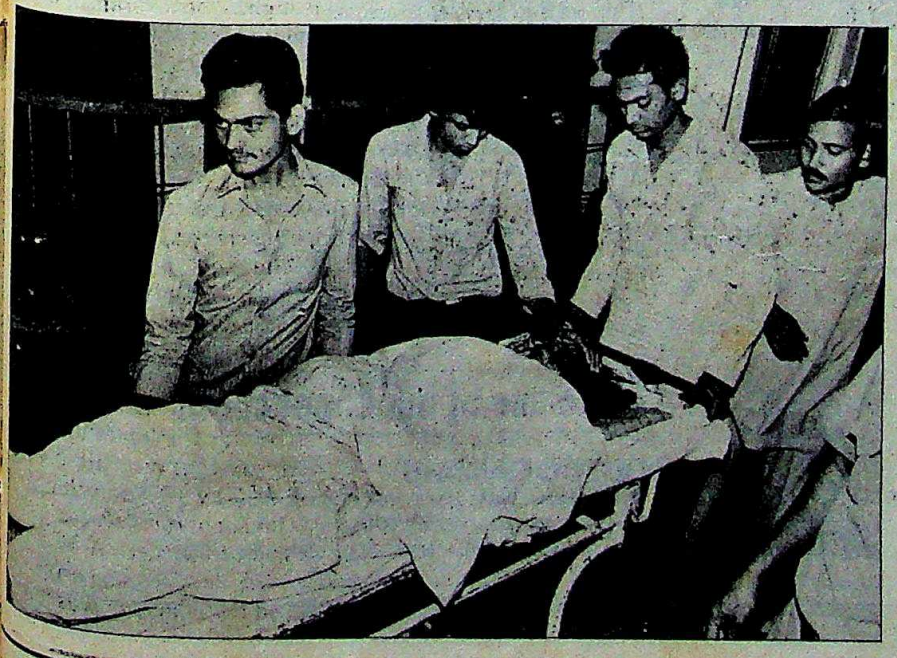
lied into confessing in the presence of the press with a view to "sensationalising the case". Said Karanth's friend, actor and playwright Girish Karnad who visited Bhopal after the incident: "The role of the press and the police has been to show Karanth as guilty even before the case has gone to court. Karanth is a simple man who was under great strain after the incident and after he was wrongly told that Vibha had accused him of setting fire to her, he made that statement to the police." Karnad added that the press was led in to listen to the confession while Karanth's wife Prema waited outside, having been refused permission to see her husband. Artist J. Swaminathan, who heads the art section of Bharat Bhavan, also feels that police harassment got too much so that Karanth lost patience and admitted to the crime.

Among those who know Karanth, there is almost unanimous agreement that he is incapable of the crime. Clearly, he is a man of fiery artistic temperament, brilliant, creative and dedicated to the theatre. But even those who respect him admit that he had his weaknessess.

Wife Prema, herself an award-winning film director, admits that he had started drinking heavily in the recent past. "I used to sometimes joke about it and say that perhaps it would be a good thing for him to spend a month in jail so that he could kick the habit. Little did I imagine what would happen. But it is simply not true that he was drunk on the morning of the incident," she says. Prema also discounts the possibility that Karanth was having an extra-marital affair with Vibha but adds that even if he was, it would not have affected her relationship with her husband. They have been married for 28 years and have no children because, as she says: "We both felt this would be the only way we could dedicate our lives to our work."

Vibha in *The Three Sisters*; and entering Safdarjung Hospital



HOWEVER, the letters Vibha wrote to Karanth certainly indicate that their relationship went beyond artistic limits. Vibha, whom Prema describes as a "very bright and very talented actress", is also spoken of with respect and affection by her fellow artistes. She was, in the words of one colleague, "a winner all the way". She comes from an ordinary lower middle class family and has been supporting her elderly mother and sister. Mrs Qutbi describes her as a "very nice girl but she also seemed quite naive. When I went to see her in hospital, Girish Karnad and Anant Nag were there and she said: 'Look Aunty, they have left their shooting to come and see me.' I wanted to tell her that they had come to save Karanth but I didn't want to upset her". Doctors treating her at Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital, where she was moved in a state government aircraft, are astonished at her almost superhuman determination to live despite over 75 per cent burns.

That, of course, only adds one more odd piece to the jigsaw puzzle. If Karanth is described as the sort of man who would not commit murder, Vibha hardly seems the kind of person who would try and kill herself either. But in the eyes of a lot of local residents, the episode has confirmed what conservative Bhopal has always believed—that Bharat Bhavan is a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah with the Karanth-Vibha affair indicative of what they describe as the "dung culture" of the centre. Petitions have been fired off to the chief minister by outraged citizens demanding its closure. And there has been criticism of Vibha's removal to New Delhi when the Madhya Pradesh police were still trying to question her.

Unfortunately, the local press has played up to the mood of the city by linking a personal tragedy with the Bhavan,

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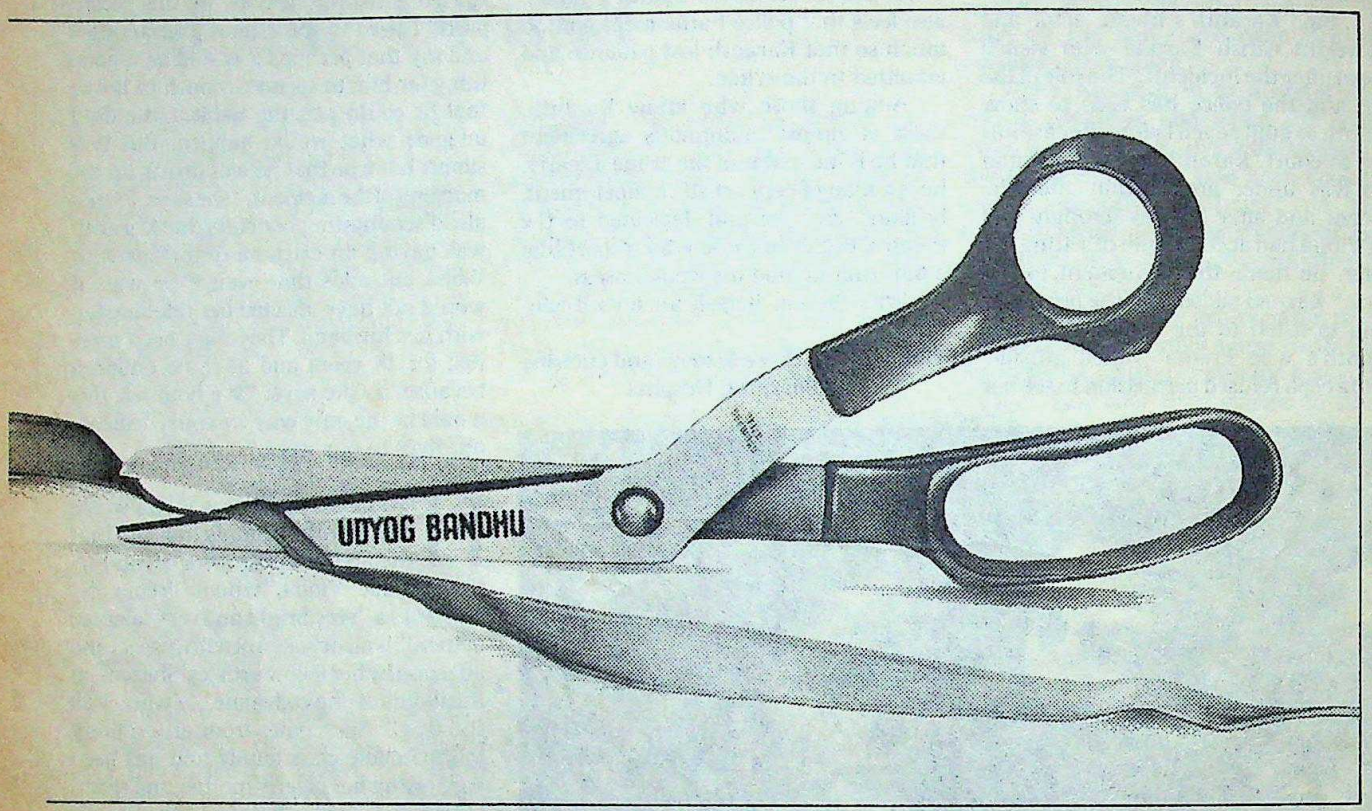

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which is portrayed as a den of iniquity. One newspaper featured a cartoon which showed Karanth drinking Vat 69 with the devil's horns on his head and a knife and a can of kerosene by his side. The backdrop has three pictures under the caption 'Bharat Bhavan today'. One, titled 'art', shows a naked woman. 'Literature' shows a man reading pornography, while 'culture' features a couple making love. The people and press of Bhopal have already pronounced judgement.

But the Karanth affair is hardly likely to be confined to Bhopal or Bharat Bhavan. Already, opportunistic politicians have leaped into the fray in awareness of the fact that one of the founders and life trustees of the institution is Arjun Singh, Congress(I) vice-president. Meanwhile, leading personalities in the field of the performing arts like Karnad, Shyam Benegal, Rohini Hattangady and others have issued signed statements defending Karanth and Bharat Bhavan, indicating that the Karanth case is destined to become a major cause celebre that will extend far beyond the bounds of what appears to be a *crime passionnel*.

—TAVLEEN SINGH

BHARAT BHAVAN

Storm's Eye

BHARAT Bhavan, the eye of the storm unleashed by the B.V. Karanth-Vibha Mishra affair, has for long been the centre of controversy and criticism. So it was not very surprising that the Vibha-Karanth scandal threw up protest rallies and dharnas. Within hours of the incident, groups of women, theatre artistes and various other social and cultural organisations were up in arms demanding the Bhavan's reorganisation, even its closure.

One of the most prestigious arts complexes of the country, Bharat Bhavan is the brainchild of Indira Gandhi. In 1972, Mrs Gandhi proposed cultural set-ups in state capitals. Arjun Singh, then education minister of Madhya Pradesh, took up the proposal but had to shelve the plan when the Centre could not spare money for the project.

It was only when Arjun Singh became chief minister in 1980 that things began moving, and Bharat Bhavan was inaugurated by Mrs Gandhi in February, 1982. The state Government footed the Rs 2 crore bill for the building and sanctioned Rs 1 crore as initial capital. The Centre pooled in an equal amount and the state Government has been giving Rs 18 lakh every year and maintaining its building.

Today the Bhavan boasts of a repertory company famous for its productions, a collection of tribal art that is one of the best in the land and a museum and libraries that have enviable catalogues. It also has a well-equipped ceramic workshop, a library of folk music and a printing workshop. But the Bhavan also has more than its share of critics, who say its plays showed to audiences that were smaller than the cast.

Among the Bhavan's 10 trustees are Pupul Jayakar, Krishen Khanna, Habib Tanveer, Kumar Gandharva, Mani Kaul, Yamini Krishnamurti and Karanth, who resigned 'orally' after the scandal. Arjun Singh (who is also the chairman of the trust), Ashok Vajpeyi and J. Swaminathan are life trustees. Once again, there has been criticism of a politician (Arjun Singh) and a state bureaucrat who helped set up the project (Vajpeyi) becoming life trustees when the Bhavan has been set up with public funds. But Arjun Singh argued that "any trust is entitled to have its own trustees, no matter where the money comes from."

Inside the Bhavan: troubled times

BHAWAN SINGH

Bharat Bhavan has come under attack in the wake of the Karanth case.

The Bhavan has all along been accused of being an elitist island run by a clique of people who did little apart from promoting one another. Soon after the Vibha-Karanth incident, General Secretary of the state Janata Party unit Savita Bajpeyi was demanding a judicial inquiry into the functioning of the Bhavan, which she said had become "a den of debauchery for certain politicians and senior IAS officials." This was followed by protest marches and representations by the Self Employed Women's Association, the Janvadi Lekhak Sangh and various other groups demanding an inquiry into the Bhavan's affairs and urging its takeover by the state Government.

Vajpeyi felt that the criticism came mainly from those who believed that excellence was wrong because it was an insult to mediocrity. And if the institution was exclusive and elitist, according to him it was only right since "the best of art anywhere in the world is always elitist".

On the other hand, there were also those who have deplored the deliberate linking of the scandal to the affairs of the institutions. Reacting to the demand that the Bhavan should either be reorganised or completely dissolved, Arjun Singh says he will staunchly resist any such move. "I have a right to," he says. "I have been personally involved in the creation of this institute." Before the fortnight was through, the Government decided to order an inquiry by trustee Pupul Jayakar into the Bhavan's affairs. With Arjun Singh vowing to hold his ground, Bharat Bhavan seemed all set to slide deeper into controversy.

—TAVLEEN SINGH

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DELHI'S INITIATIVE

Electricity From Domestic Waste

- Delhi Administration with the assistance of the Department of Non-Conventional Energy Sources, Govt. of India is the first in the country to take the initiative to extract combustible gas and eventually generate electricity from a sanitary landfill at Timarpur. Landfills are used for disposing of municipal solid wastes.

- The process is simple. Using perforated pipes, a well is bored into a sanitary landfill and then a vacuum created at its bottom. The vacuum sucks the gas which is then fed into a nearby generator through pipes for producing electricity.

- Eight such wells have already been bored 200 feet apart from each other. One well is adequate for one acre of landfill to produce 100 kilowatts of electricity and thus ten acres can produce 1000 kilowatts (one Megawatt) of electricity. The Timarpur landfill is spread over about 80 acres and so has the potential to produce 8 Megawatts of electricity.

- The cost per well is approximately Rs 10 lakhs which includes installation of generators, compressor pumps and pipes.

- The cost of electricity so produced has been worked out to be just 10 Paise per unit as compared to about 60 Paise per unit through the conventional methods of power generation.

- At present there are about 50 landfills in use by different agencies like the MCD, DDA, NDMC and the Cantonment Board in Delhi. About 8000 tonnes of garbage is generated per day in the Union Territory of Delhi. This quantity is likely to double by the turn of the century.

- The gas is formed through bacterial action on garbage through fermentation process. This process is common in nature.

- The peak consumption of electricity in Delhi is 850 Megawatts per day and it is increasing at a rate of 15 per cent per annum.

- If the entire refuse of Delhi is systematically taken to the landfills, Delhi will have the potential to produce about 60 Megawatts of electricity a day which will be equal to about 8 per cent of the total peak demand. This per day generation can be further increased by 16 Megawatts annually. Electricity so produced can be fed into DESU's grid for distribution to consumers.

- A single landfill is sufficient for generating electricity for a minimum period of 10 years. After this the refuse can be taken out of the landfill and used as valuable manure. The emptied landfills can be refilled with urban waste and this cycle can continue indefinitely.

- At present the gas formed in the landfills is diffusing into the atmosphere and is polluting the environment. This new project would serve a dual purpose; help check pollution and keep the environment cleaner and also, to an extent, meet the growing electricity demand of the Capital.

If you have any ideas for augmenting the production of electricity through some other means, please write to

JAG PARVESH CHANDRA
Chief Executive Councillor
Old Secretariat, Delhi-110054

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DOLLAR BAITING

BUSINESSMEN have responded quickly to the finance minister's announcement of amendments to the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA) and the promise of a deal under which money stashed away abroad illegally can be brought back without the Government asking too many questions. The Finance Ministry estimates that as much as Rs 30,000 crore may have been kept abroad by resident Indians, and that even if a small part of this comes back to the country it will help relieve pressure on the country's foreign exchange reserves. Enthusiastic businessmen point out that Pakistan has tried a similar scheme and got Rs 600 crore in foreign exchange, while a scheme in China saw a million bank accounts being opened. If the estimates are correct, resident Indians have more dollars abroad than non-resident Indians.

EYEING ELECTRONICS

THE JK group is eyeing the lucrative electronics market once more. Although an earlier sortie into electronics was not successful (JK TV wound up soon after an initial splash), a JK team has gone to Japan to identify collaborators and possible items of manufacture. For JK Synthetics, this will be the second recent diversification from its existing lines of business, which are synthetic yarn and cement. It has already applied for Monopolies Restrictive Trade Practicies clearance to set up a 12,000-tonne white cement plant in Rajasthan. Production capacities at the cement unit are now being expanded by nearly 60 per cent.

VACANT SEGMENT

AFTER THE recent boom in toilet soap, with a host of new brands being introduced to capture the captive market, it now seems to be the turn of toothpaste. Ponds India has decided to diversify and enter the toothpaste market and is carrying out market surveys to identify a vacant segment in an area which is already very crowded, the effort being to get a fix on what would be the right image for its proposed product, and one that is distinct from the existing brands. Ponds has only recently moved out of its traditional lines of cosmetics and toiletries—creams, talcum powder and shampoo—and introduced three kinds of toilet soap (including herbal and sandal), and the company is clearly looking for new avenues for growth.

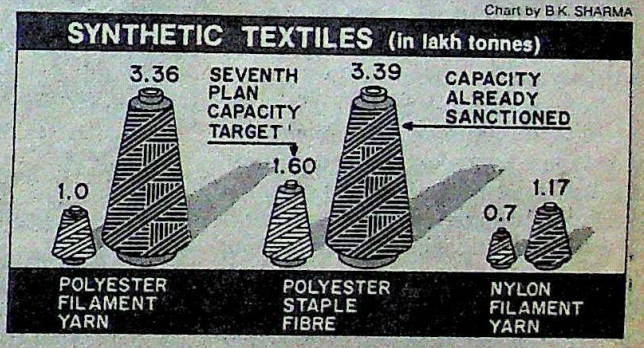
NEW VENTURE

STATE Bank of India plans to set up a new subsidiary, to be called State Bank of India Capital Markets, which will undertake a variety of activities including leasing, and merchant banking functions like the promotion of share issues and investment portfolio management for non-resident Indians. The venture, with an authorised capital of Rs 50 crore and an initial paid up capital of Rs 20 crore, will also handle some international banking functions and perhaps play a role in handling specific work relating to sick medium and small-scale companies. The new venture it is hoped should be off to a flying start because the State Bank of India already handles a quarter of the new lines floated in the capital market, and has a substantial chunk of the international business done by public sector companies. The subsidiary operation is expected to have greater flexibility because of its smaller size.

NEW FAVOURITE

THE SYNTHETIC textile industry has become a new favourite for companies seeking opportunities for growth. No fewer than 20 companies have already sanctioned capacities totalling 1.17 lakh tonnes of nylon filament yarn, against the seventh plan capacity target of 0.7

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



lakh tonnes. The sanctioned capacity for polyester filament yarn is 3.36 lakh tonnes, divided among 30 companies (seventh plan target: 1 lakh tonnes), while the rush for polyester staple fibre has resulted in 13 companies getting a sanctioned capacity of 3.39 lakh tonnes (seventh plan target: 1.6 lakh tonnes). In addition, existing manufacturers can expand because of a new stipulation regarding minimum economic capacities. This takes the potential capacity in all three sectors combined to 11.2 lakh tonnes, against the plan target of 3.3 lakh tonnes. Either the plan projections were hopeless underestimates or a good number of the sanctioned projects may never see the light of day.

CITROEN BID

ESCORTS has submitted a fresh proposal to the Government in its bid to get clearance to manufacture passenger cars. It has given a revised proposal for making a small Citroen car and also promises to reduce foreign exchange expenditure by achieving 60 per cent indigenous content in the first year and 80 per cent in the second. It also proposes a lower investment cost. The company's earlier proposal had run into problems with the Government, which decided that broadbanding did not permit a tractor company to manufacture cars. Escorts has now argued that its car manufacturing policy conforms to the spirit (if not the letter) of the broadbanding policy, and that there are significant complementarities in manufacturing cars and tractors, far more than in the case of cars and trucks.

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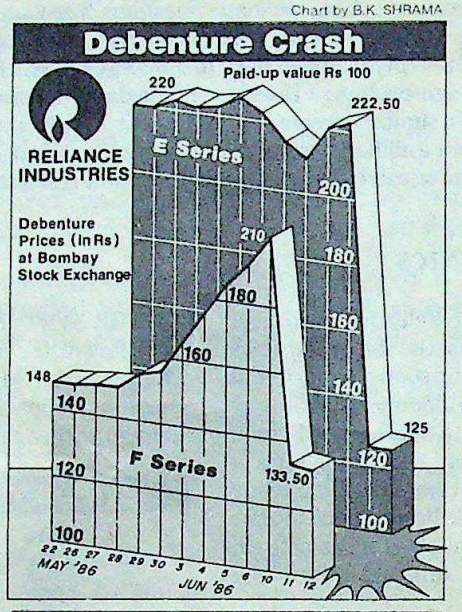
RELIANCE INDUSTRIES

Embattled Giant

Chart by B.K. SHRAMA



JUNE 11 is a day that the investors in Reliance Industries will never forget. After weeks of buoyant trading, when the prices of the trail-blazing company's shares and debentures had scaled dizzy heights, this was the day of the big crash. And 1.5 million Reliance investors lost anything up to Rs 300 crore in a few hours of frenetic selling that followed a surprise government decision—a decision which rocked the company on its heels, sent shock-waves through the stock market, and brought the prices of two series of Reliance debentures tumbling from Rs 222.50 to Rs 125 in one case, and from Rs 210 to Rs 134 in the other. The company's shares accompanied the debentures for a part of the way down, dropping from Rs 389.50 to Rs 367.

Nothing of the kind had ever happened to the controversial company before. Worse, for the first time in its history, the Government had handed Reliance a public slap in the face, stopped its directors in their tracks just when they were about to take a major decision on converting the debentures into shares, and raised the inevitable questions about whether more steps were in the offing that would slow down the Rs 700-crore company's phenomenal climb up the growth charts. The even bigger question loomed large: had a company constantly accused of bending the Government to its will finally lost favour in New Delhi?

1.5 million Reliance investors lost Rs 300 crore in a few hours of frenetic trading.

The attacks came from other quarters too. For weeks the *Indian Express* chain of newspapers had been carrying on a relentless, hard-hitting campaign to expose what it saw as Reliance's misdeeds, a shareholder had filed a potentially troublesome case in the Delhi High Court, and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was investigating charges in the *Express* that, in violation of RBI guidelines, the company management had used the funds of 17 banks to buy Reliance debentures in 1984 and 1985. For good measure, officials from the Enforcement Directorate had gone to London to dig into the true ownership of companies that had bought Rs 22.5 crore worth of Reliance stock in 1982.

Even at the best of times, this would have been a handful. But Reliance was now particularly vulnerable because its founder chairman and industrial wizard, Dhirubhai Ambani, had been incapacitated for three months by a stroke that forced him to spend more than two months recuperating in San Diego, in faraway California. Ambani had only just returned home, almost fully recovered and—contrary to reports—his mind as razor-sharp as ever. And the Reliance board had decided to meet in order to clear the decks for a fresh burst of expansion.

The attacks on Reliance came at a particularly vulnerable time because Chairman Dhirubhai Ambani had been incapacitated for three months by a stroke.

The board was meeting to consider buying back Reliance debentures from investors, and offering Reliance shares in return. Also, since debentures are accounted for as borrowed money, this would at one stroke wipe out most of the company's debt (Rs 323 crore) while increasing the share capital. Since companies can usually borrow up to twice the total of their share capital and reserves, this would enable Reliance to go into the market and borrow another Rs 1,000 crore: money required to finance a clutch of petrochemical and electronics projects for which government clearances had come in. A great deal hinged on the decision to be taken at the board meeting.

There was one hitch. Some debentures can be partly converted into shares, and others can't. One set of Reliance debentures had already been partially converted into shares, and the rest were non-convertible. The second series was wholly non-convertible. So the board's decision to convert both into shares would require the ratification of the shareholders, and the Government's approval.

Once in the past, Reliance had managed to get similar government permission to convert its first four sets of debentures into shares. That was the first time such permission had been given, and remains one of only two such cases ever approved by the Government. Because of this past record, the stock markets assumed that Reliance would pull the trick off once again; so the debenture prices climbed steadily up the graphs in anticipation of the good news—in one case from Rs 149 on May 28 to Rs 210 on June 9.

This time, however, it was going to be different. On the night of June 10, Finance Minister V.P.Singh sat in his North Block office in New Delhi and decided that the Government would not allow any more non-convertible debentures to be converted into shares, a decision that he says he took to "curb unhealthy speculation"

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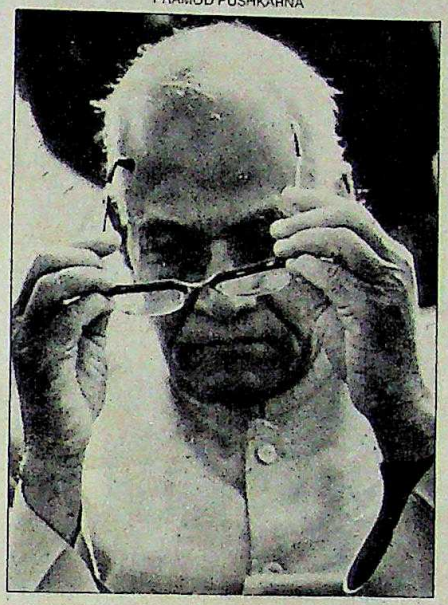
in debentures. Within the hour, the news was on the agency wires to newspaper offices, and government officers telephoned Doordarshan with instructions to carry the item on the 9.30 news—unusual for a TV network that almost never carries hard-core financial reports.

Anil Ambani, Dhirubhai's younger son, was right then at Delhi airport, waiting for a delayed flight to take him back to Bombay in time for the crucial board meeting the next day. Anil did not hear of V.P. Singh's decision till he reached Bombay; the next morning the headlines screamed out the disastrous news, and the board finally met only to defer its decision on the subject, "pending clarifications" from the Government.

THE ONLY clarification that was really required was whether the *Express* campaign and ceaseless lobbying by Reliance's rivals had influenced the Government's thinking. Four weeks before V.P.Singh's decision, the *Express* had revealed on its front page that several companies linked to the Reliance management had borrowed money from banks at 18 per cent interest in order to buy debentures that earned only 13.5 per cent interest in one case and 15 per cent in the other. There was only one way in which this peculiar transaction could make sense: if the Reliance management intended to convert the debentures into the company's over-priced shares at some stage. The *Express* warned that this was precisely what the Ambanis had in mind. Forewarned, the Government decided to act.

But there seemed more to the line-up against Reliance than just the *Indian Express*. A week before V.P. Singh's decision, when expectations of the debentures getting converted were building up, a close friend of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had forecast to INDIA TODAY that "those debentures will never be allowed to be converted into shares." This came amid persistent reports that Nusli Wadia, chairman of the Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Company and a man who has permanently locked horns with the Ambanis, had gained access to the coterie around the prime minister. Wadia denies this, but admits to a close friendship with Ramnath Goenka, who owns the *Indian Express* group; and the embattled Ambanis were quick to argue that an unholy combine had got together against them. As evidence, it was pointed out that three times in the last year the Government had amended import rules or hiked customs duties in order to protect Wadia's company's operations—decisions which Wadia sees as legitimate.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



For weeks, Ramnath Goenka's *Indian Express* ran a relentless, hard-hitting campaign to expose what it saw as Reliance's misdeeds.

Dhirubhai Ambani's sons, Mukesh and Anil, accused the *Indian Express* of getting its facts wrong and twisting the figures to suit its arguments.

The duty hikes were meant specifically to help Wadia's plant for manufacturing dimethyl terephthalate (DMT), one of the two primary raw materials that can be used for manufacturing polyester yarn and fibre. But the Ambanis have concentrated on using the alternative raw material, purefied terephthalic acid (PTA), importing this till their own PTA plant goes on stream at the end of the year. Meanwhile, gallingly enough, Wadia's DMT plant has remained closed through all of 1986, duty hike or no duty hike.

There is little doubt that the climate in New Delhi is less favourable to the Ambanis than it has been in the past, and the thrust of the *Express* campaign is that it was Pranab Mukherjee as finance minister who helped Reliance with its non-resident investments, changes in duty levels when the company needed them, and clearance for several projects (though this is not something that directly concerns a finance minister). Nusli Wadia had suffered through this period, for after getting a couple of clearances during the Janata phase (Reliance spokesmen say Wadia was a Janata supporter), he found a number of projects that he had applied for during Mrs Gandhi's rule going to the Ambanis. This after the Goverment had told him the projects were reserved for the joint sector. So if Wadia had relatively easy going during Janata rule, and the Ambanis made hay after that, it now seemed that the wheel was turning yet again, though how completely remained to be seen.

With several guns now trained on Reliance, the key question was whether other government decisions would follow? Would the *Express* campaign against Reliance yield other fruit? For instance, the newspaper had run a series of reports on how the Reliance management was trying to bag the Rs 600-crore aromatics project (a downstream unit from the Mathura Oil Refinery), at Salempur in Uttar Pradesh. At one stage Reliance had been at the top of the list of companies short-listed by the Uttar Pradesh Government, but coincidentally, the state Cabinet met a day after V.P. Singh dropped his bombshell and postponed a decision on which company would get the project.

Yet a third coincidence: the *Express* ran another series of reports, disclosing the startling information that 11 companies based in the Isle of Man which had invested Rs 22.5 crore in Reliance stock

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four years ago had sold out, moved base or been acquired by companies in the Virgin Islands, which has even stricter secrecy laws and more flexible corporate regulations than the Isle of Man. The only objective, the *Express* argued, could have been to completely shroud in secrecy the real identity of the people who owned these companies, identities that had come into question following INDIA TODAY's investigations (*see issue of January* 15, 1984). Interestingly enough, this latest sortie from the *Express* appeared just when enforcement directorate officials had returned from an investigative trip to the Isle of Man.

AND THEN, of course, there was the court case in Delhi by a Reliance shareholder who took up from where the *Express* left off regarding the use of bank funds to buy Reliance debentures. The RBI had also stepped in to conduct its own investigations into the affair, which the *Express* had termed with typical panache the "Reliance loan mela".

Rarely has any newspaper pursued a company with such doggedness, or with such success. Even more uniquely, the *Express* reports were written not by a journalist but by Goenka's accounting and legal brain, S. Gurumurthy. The Reliance establishment—never one to take things lying down—responded with typical alacrity, accusing Gurumurthy of having business links with Wadia (which both Gurumurthy and Wadia denied), of getting several of his facts wrong, of deliberately twisting figures to suit his argument, and furiously denying all wrongdoing. "Look at these figures," said Anil Ambani. "Gurumurthy says we have cornered the bulk of the licences in half a dozen areas. But he has ignored a whole lot of licences that have been issued to others." In substantiation, out comes a detailed fact sheet to show that the *Express* is wrong. "Gurumurthy has twisted the facts," chips in older brother Mukesh Ambani. "He says the non-resident investment in Reliance has resulted in a loss of foreign exchange for the country. But he ignores the devaluation of the rupee and the capital gains tax levied by the Government. In fact, the country has gained foreign exchange. Is this honest journalism?"

But some Reliance spokesmen also contradicted themselves. One argued that investment firms linked to the Ambanis had not borrowed Rs 101 crore from the banks in order to finance debenture purchases (as the *Express* reported), but only Rs 24 crore. And of this, only Rs 8 crore were used for debentures; the rest went to finance trading activities and property acquisitions. Yet an unsigned rejoinder to the *Express* articles, clearly released on behalf of Reliance, put the loan figure at Rs 50 crore, and a third company source mentioned Rs 60 crore.

More convincingly, the Ambanis argued stoutly that neither they nor their companies had invested a rupee in the second set of debentures, totalling Rs 270 crore issued in 1985. And responding to the charge that they had used their position in Reliance in order to promise the banks hefty deposits, in return for which the banks gave loans to debenture investors, the Ambanis claimed that the deposits had no connection with the loans, and that some of the deposits had in fact been withdrawn as and when they had been needed.

Some Reliance spokesmen also claimed that the RBI had found nothing wrong with the bank loans, concluding that these did not violate RBI guidelines. But Finance Ministry sources confirmed that the RBI's interim report had in fact indicted two banks, and that investigations were continuing. The banks themselves denied any wrongdoing, arguing that the loans were good business, that the money was safe, and that no RBI guidelines had been violated. But a counter-view was expressed by State Bank of India Chairman D.N. Ghosh, who said: "I drafted the original RBI guidelines in 1970, when I was a junior officer. And this was not the purpose for which banks were supposed to give loans, according to those guidelines." A lot of the money was in fact lent to non-residents to buy Reliance debentures, including that by the Bank of Baroda, which, however, argued that if non-residents abroad could borrow from foreign banks they might as well borrow from Indian banks. But once again, this begged the question of whether RBI guidelines had been violated.

HARI OM GULATI

Bombay Dyeing Chairman Nusli Wadia was himself under attack in the form of a court case over charges of fraudulent account-keeping.

Meanwhile, there came the offensive against Wadia himself. A Bombay Dyeing shareholder filed a law suit in Calcutta, three days before the company's annual meeting of shareholders, charging the company with having doctored its books, not providing properly for depreciation of machinery, and with misreporting Rs 26 crore expenditure in order to convert a staggering loss into a modest profit. Calling the whole exercise a "glaring illegality and fraud", the shareholder—one K.S. Bhansali, who owns five shares in Bombay Dyeing—hired the most expensive counsel in Calcutta to argue that Wadia's company had no business declaring any dividend to its shareholders. Wadia argued in his defence that other textile companies had used similar methods for calculating depreciation, that his accounting practices were approved by two chartered accountancy firms and by the best-known lawyers, and that similar accounting devices had been employed by public sector companies with official approval. The high court restrained the company from closing its books of accounts and from paying out any dividend till it disposed of the petition.

If that was one round that went against Wadia, he was soon under attack on a dozen other counts. Reliance scouts worked overtime to dig up all the dirt they could on the chairman of Bombay Dyeing (which a senior Reliance executive derisively dismissed as 'Bombay Dead'), and winged their way to Nepal to unearth information on companies there which owned another company in India to which Bombay Dyeing was allegedly showing undue

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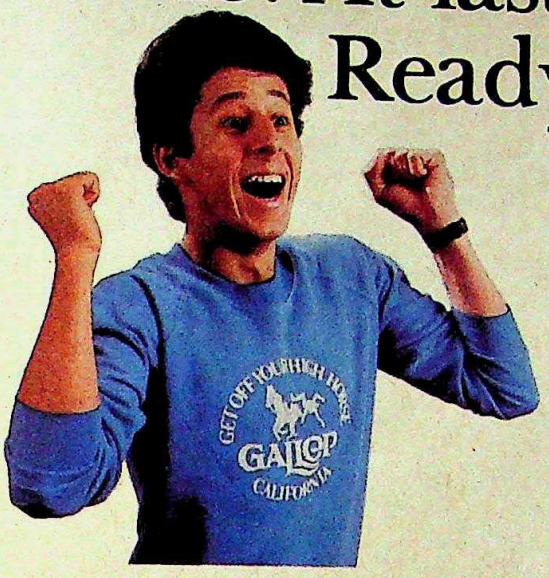

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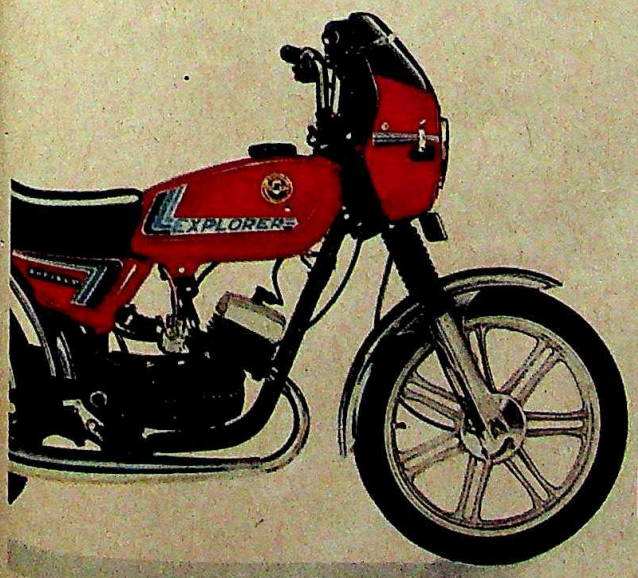
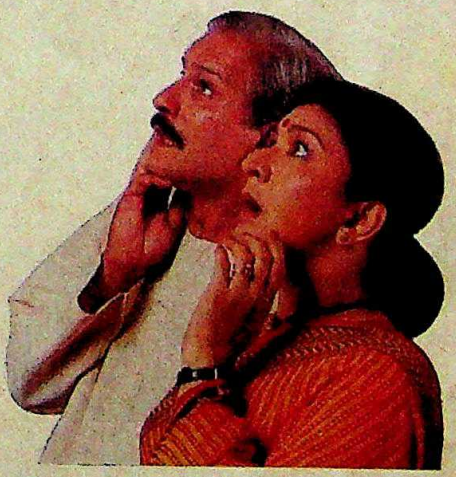


"18? Already? ... Ready for a bike?"



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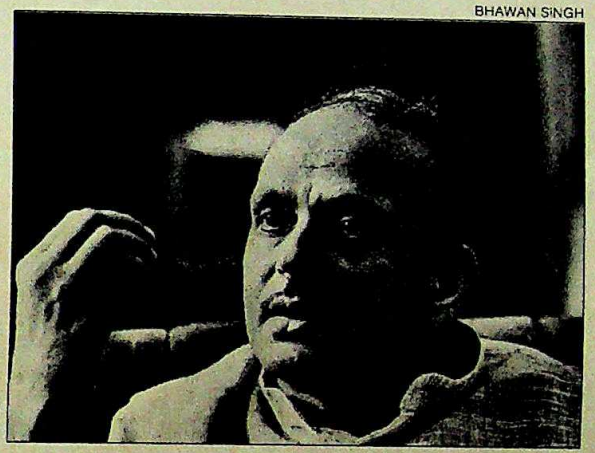
favours. The Nepalese companies are controlled by Wadia's father Neville, and by relatives of Minister of State for Railways Madhav Rao Scindia, who also happens to be a major shareholder in Bombay Dyeing. Soon enough, anonymous notes were doing the rounds with a series of charges against Wadia, including the accusation that his own companies had used bank funds to buy shares, and that he was diverting money from Bombay Dyeing into his own privately-held companies

As with the Ambanis denying all wrongdoing, so did Wadia too plead innocence: "Not one of my companies' share investments has been financed by bank loans; all the investments have been made, using retained profits." Had he set up a private company with his wife as chairman, and given it business from one of Wadia's publicly held companies? Again, a detailed explanation of the reasons for this, and the information that the entire deal was approved by the board of directors as well as by the financial institutions.

How much of the charges and counter-charges is true, and how much false, it is almost impossible to judge. But quite obviously, mud is being thrown by both sides in the hope that some of it will stick. And both sides tell the inquiring journalist: "The only chaps who benefit out of all this are you journalists. You must be having a good laugh."

BHAWAN SINGH



"If Reliance wants money, let it come to us with a proposal. We are not pro- or anti-anybody."
V.P. SINGH
finance minister

NEVERTHELESS, some of the charges are no laughing matter. The Ambanis say that telephone calls were made to E.I.du Pont De Nemours in the US (Reliance's collaborator), asking hopefully whether Dhirubhai Ambani had suffered a second stroke in San Diego. Inquiries were made at the RBI as to how Ambani was financing his extended stay in California (he had taken a permit for $ 1.5 lakh). And, the Ambanis allege, some of the information used in the *Express* reports on the banks was collected from the banks by men posing as officers from the Home Ministry. On top of all this, word went around that the minute Ambani returned to India from California, he would be arrested by V.P.Singh's men. Nothing of the sort happened, of course.

Yet other charges are now doing the rounds: that Reliance has imported second-hand machinery for its fibre plant from Germany and Canada (hotly denied by Anil Ambani, who said importing second-hand machinery was a Bombay Dyeing specialisation), that the Government is investigating charges that machinery imports have been over-invoiced by both Reliance and Bombay Dyeing, and much more. The battle is obviously getting vicious, and the market was rife with speculation that the Ambanis would give back twice as much as they got.

Other battles have already been joined. Reliance's 45,000-tonne polyester fibre plant in Maharashtra was commissioned last March. Around then, a proposal went from fibre manufacturers to the Government that the customs duty on imported fibre be raised substantially. But last fortnight the Mill Owners' Association of Bombay sent a furious telegram to the Government urging it to reject the duty-hike proposal.

Meanwhile, the word was whispered around that Reliance was having trouble with its fibre plant. Commissioned in March with a monthly capacity of almost 4,000 tonnes, the plant released no more than 15 tonnes in March, and less than one tonne in April. But it was explained on behalf of Reliance that the plant was under a process of testing, and that full production and regular market releases were just starting. The plant was in fact supposed to have been commissioned as far back as November 1985, and Reliance had got the Government's licence to import raw materials on this account. But full commercial production is still to get properly under way: a development that is thoroughly uncharacteristic of a company that prides itself on super-fast project implementation and record production in next to no time of starting operations.

The inevitable question: is Reliance slipping? In some ways, perhaps yes—given the performance of the polyester fibre plant. But in other ways, no. As Anil Ambani points out, his PTA plant will be commissioned a full year ahead of its twin in Taiwan, with both having started work at the same time. Also, despite having a clutch of projects in hand, the company is already busy with plans to ask the Government for expanded PTA capacity, and clearly intends to push for growth as hard as ever.

But that brings up the key question: will the Government oblige? The refusal to allow debentures to be converted into shares places unexpected limits on Reliance's ability to finance its projects, because projected borrowings of Rs 1,000 crore will now not be possible. And at the moment, the company has only one financial option, in the form of the proposed Reliance Capital Finance Trust. This is proposed to be set up as a leasing company with an initial share capital base of Rs 100 crore. And, unlike normal firms, leasing companies can borrow up to ten times their capital, giving this venture a borrowing capacity of Rs 1,000 crore. At least some of that money can be used to finance new Reliance projects.

But this Rs 100 crore share issue also needs government approval, especially since the Ambanis have proposed the unprecedented step of issuing shares in a new company at a 250 per cent premium. Finance Minister V.P. Singh told INDIA TODAY: "If Reliance wants more money let it come to us with a proposal to raise its share capital, and we will consider it on merits. We are not pro- or anti-anybody here." Nevertheless, if the Government turns down the proposal from the Reliance Capital Finance Trust, the political message will have come across loud and clear. No share issue proposal will be watched with greater interest by the corporate world, for on this hinges Reliance's image with the investing public, with other government departments, as well as the company's much-vaunted ability to keep burning up the rubber in the fast lane.

—T.N. NINAN with bureau reports

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SWRAJ PAUL

Coming to Terms

I WILL never sell my shares in Escorts and DCM," London-based corporate raider Swraj Paul had declared repeatedly through three years of slugging it out in the biggest, most celebrated corporate battle in Indian history. Yet last fortnight Paul agreed to finally sell his shares in both companies, at a loss of anything up to Rs 2 crore.

"I do not have the money to buy Paul's shares," Escorts Chairman H.P. Nanda had said early in the battle. Yet Nanda was busy last fortnight putting together Rs 9.5 crore to pay Paul for his 8.6 lakh shares in Escorts, even as the Shriram family that controls DCM scrabbled around to find the Rs 10 crore it needed to buy out the London-based businessman.

The peace pipe was smoked quietly on May 30, by Swraj's Calcutta-based older brother Jit, and by H.P. Nanda's older son Rajan, who is president of Escorts. If that marked the anti-climactic end of an epic battle that had been fought out in the press as much as anywhere else, H.P. Nanda was now strangely shy of the press, declining all comment. Paul was beyond reach, travelling through North America. And Bharat Ram, DCM chairman when the battle began, had retired and was uninvolved in the proceedings.

The crucial negotiations for a possible settlement began late last year, after Rajan Nanda had made persistent attempts to get Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi interested in the business of getting the two sides across a table. Rajiv is believed to have said that the affair should be sorted out to mutual satisfaction, and that his Government was willing to try and get the two sides to at least start talking.

Paul's broker Harish Bhasin said: "The two parties had no choice but to settle. These were the Government's orders." DCM Chairman Bansi Dhar said equally candidly: "The Government pressurised both parties." A third person said the prime minister had felt the only feasible solution was one that would not destabilise company managements while at the same time avoid sending negative signals to non-residents about the possible fate of their investments.

G.K. Arora, additional secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, then made some of the initial moves. After that the lead was taken by Finance Secretary S. Venkitaraman, who called a meeting attended by several officials and Jit Paul. By now the ball was rolling.

The initial parleys between Rajan Nanda and Jit Paul resulted in Nanda making three offers: that the Nandas and the Shriram family would buy Paul out at the price at which he had invested, or at the prices ruling in the stock market for the two companies' shares, or at Paul's cost price plus his interest cost for the period since his investment.

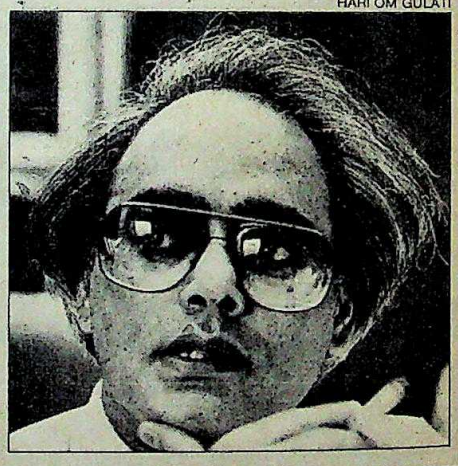
Jit Paul initially indicated that he preferred the last of these, because this would fetch him the highest price. But then came an inexplicable cooling-off period before the threads were picked up again. Eventually, Jit Paul and Rajan Nanda met no fewer than 20 times before a settlement was hammered out. Considering the public abuse that had been exchanged earlier between the two sides, there was a surprising lack of acrimony at the meetings, only some initial uncertainty about the other side's true intentions. But the meetings were short. As Rajan Nanda said, "with Jit Paul the meetings are never very long. He grasps issues quickly".

When the deal was finally clinched, Rajan Nanda said: "My only feeling was one of numbness. We had been through so much in 39 months." If that gave some indication of the toll that the battle had taken on the Nandas, the others were more down-to-earth in their response. Jit Paul, very much the phlegmatic man concerned with money, said mater-of-factly about the settlement: "Swarj has lost some money, but it is good to have closed the chapter." And a member of the Bharat Ram family said: "What was there to feel? I never had any doubt that a settlement would be worked out."

HARI OM GULATI

Jit Paul

Jit Paul and Rajan Nanda met no fewer than 20 times before a settlement was hammered out.



Rajan Nanda

At the end of a three year-long public slanging match, both sides also seemed to have developed a new respect for each other. "Rajan is a good negotiator," Jit Paul said. And Nanda returned the compliment: "Jit Paul has the ability to reduce anything to the basic issues, and bring this quickly down to what matters, money. He never puts ink to paper, but he is as good as his word. In fact I would like to see his signature."

Nevertheless, there was the occasional sleight of hand. When Jit Paul was trying to stall in the initial stages of the negotiations, he said he had to get a power of attorney from brother Swraj in London. But when everything was finally settled, it turned out that he had had a general power of attorney all along.

If the mood at the end was one of mutual respect and relief, there was tough, hard bargaining that went on for

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veral months. While the Nandas and ams initially made it clear that their offer buy out the shares at cost plus interest Paul's borrowing rate of 12 per cent was e most they could offer, the Pauls held t for 18 per cent interest, calculated arterly. Finally, a compromise was rked out at 15 per cent.

The Pauls then insisted that they ould be compensated for the tax burden capital gains, and compensated also for e loss incurred because of e devaluation of the rupee nce the investments were ade in early 1983. But anda pointed out that it was ways the investor who bore e risk of an exchange loss, d that the tax burden deended on how the returns ere filed, and how the conrned income tax officer interpreted the tax laws.

The chairman of the Cenal Board of Direct Taxes was lled in at this stage, and he clarified that e Government could not give any prior arantees concerning tax. The Governent also explained that it could not do ything about the exchange loss that aul would suffer as this would set a recedent for all other non-resident inves-rs. That paved the way for the price to be aled down from the Pauls' initial deand of Rs 22 crore, and up from the itial counter-offer of around Rs 16 crore. he final figure: Rs 19.5 crore, against aul's investment of Rs 12.6 crore. Alough the Pauls say they will lose oney, the Nandas estimate that Swraj ill end up more or less even.

The formalities of impleenting the agreement were ing rushed through last rtnight. Paul's broker hasin was filing lakhs of are transfer forms (some of em eaten by white ants, d turned mouldy or dogared through three years of ing in forgotten cupboards) r registration. And applicaons were sent to the Reserve ank for permission to sell the ares.

Escorts was due to close its share gisters on June 3, in preparation for the mpany's annual meeting of shareholrs on June 26. But the register closing was st extended to June 12 and then again to ne 18 in the anxiety to buy Paul out fore the shareholders' meeting. DCM, pically, was going through the same ocess in a more leisurely fashion, and expected to complete the formalities in another couple of months.

Both the Nandas and the Rams were also scrabbling around to find the money needed to pay Paul. True to their normal style, the Nandas had taken advance action and identified the companies which would buy the shares: Escorts Tractors, a sister company that is a joint venture with Ford, and Goetze India, another company controlled by the Nandas. Both companies had prepared for the big pay-off by calling extraordinary general meetings of their shareholders late last year and early this year, getting the shareholders' approval for an investment of this order, and applying to the Government for permission to invest: the Companies Act prohibits any company from investing more than 30 per cent of its paid-up capital and reserves. Punjab National Bank seems to have been approached at one stage by both DCM anbd Escorts for a loan, but this was turned down.

Paul (left) and H.P. Nanda: settling accounts

"The Government pressurised both sides."
BANSI DHAR
chairman, DCM

The DCM management did not seem to have worked out all its options quite as smoothly, and seemed to be strapped for cash. A sister company, Shriram Fibres, would buy some of the shares, and a few friends and associates were being asked to buy some of the rest. If the family failed to find enough takers for all Rs 10 crore worth of shares, the only way out might be to offer the balance to the financial institutions themselves, who already own 42 per cent of DCM stock. Coming after a fight during which the institutions had been accused of backing Paul against the existing managements, this will be a strange denouement.

The Pauls themselves do not seem very clear as to what they will do with the money, and whether it will be immediately repatriated back to England. The original 13 investing companies are in fact selling their shares first to domestic companies of the Apeejay group (run by Swraj Paul's brothers in India), which are selling the shares to the Nandas and Bharat Rams. Paul may in fact end up keeping the money in India, instead of repatriating it abroad, and invest it in the Apeejay group's fertiliser and caustic soda projects.

The settlement among the giants leaves open the question of what happens to the few lakh shares of DCM that were bought last year by Paul's broker, Harish Bhasin. Most of these were acquired at prices much higher than those on the market today, and the agreement that has been hammered out says nothing about this lot, which too was not registered by the DCM management. Bhasin hopes that his shares will be settled soon enough, and he was busy last fortnight withdrawing the court cases that had been instituted following DCM's refusal to register the shares. But even if there is a settlement on this, Bhasin stands to lose large sums on his investment gambit. But he takes the loss philosophically: "It is all in the game."

That cliche in fact sums up all that happened during a double-pronged corporate raid unprecedented for its daring and for the shockwaves that it sent through the Indian business world. The man who said he would clean up Indian business has quietly sold his investments at a loss, and those who fought to keep him out (sometimes bragging that they would get him clapped in jail for violating the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act) are paying him a king's ransom in order to protect their fiefdoms. Neither side finally seems to have the inclination or the energy to ask who won, or who lost. •

—T.N. NINAN

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MARUTI

Bumpy Ride

LOGIC is not the strong point of the Indian automobile market, and there was ample evidence of this last fortnight, when Maruti Udyog announced its second price increase in three months, only to find the open market premium for its cars shooting up still higher, to Rs 30,000. To add to the illogic, although the people's car has clearly changed its definition of 'people' (the company price today is 34 per cent higher than two-and-a-half years ago), there were no signs yet of the interminable waiting list thinning down.

But all this could change very soon. A Maruti at Rs 73,500 on the road is not the same bargain as one at slightly more than Rs 50,000, and the price difference between the Maruti and the Premier has narrowed. So there is worry in Maruti Udyog offices, for as Managing Director R.C.Bhargava admits, "nobody knows what coefficient of demand Maruti commands right now". It is only when the company reopens bookings for cars next month, that some estimate of this can be attempted. Bhargava says: "If demand drops sharply, the Government will have to sit up and take notice." The Government itself does not seem overly concerned. Said Industry Minister N.D. Tiwari: "The segment of people towards which the Maruti was directed can still afford it."

The price hike had been coming, with the rising yen sending costs soaring. Then came the budget increase in customs duty and a new system of excise calculation, each of which hurt the little car. And though the additional excise burden was later reduced by 5 per cent as a special concession to Maruti, the Maruti management itself decided to compound matters by cashing in on the duty hikes to add a little profit margin. Of the total price increase of Rs 14,000 since March, Rs 5,000 is money for jam. Justifying this increase, Bhargava claims that the standard Maruti car was so far being sold at a loss. Said Bhargava, "It is only now that we will more or less break even."

If prices have changed, other things have too: the Maruti car itself, and the company's indigenisation schedule. On both counts, the company has faced steady bursts of flak. The new model gives more leg room (9.5 cm), has a sturdier body and is supposed to yield greater fuel efficiency (15 per cent more). But what happens to the 52,000 people who have bought the old model, and how are they going to get the spare parts? This problem will be particularly acute for the body panels since there are no facilities for their production in India. So Maruti now intends continuing to import body panels for the old model as replacement sets.

The new model also means a further setback to Maruti Udyog's indigenisation programme, which has come under fire from none other than Tiwari himself. The minister told INDIA TODAY: "There must be some deterrent if somebody does not adhere to the indigenisation programme which they themselves agreed to, unless they can explain it. What the exact nature of it (the deterrent) will be I will not mention just now, because I don't want to create a controversy."

That reprimand is well deserved. Last year Maruti Udyog was supposed to have achieved 42.5 per cent but did no more than 27 per cent. The target for this year was 57 per cent but has now been scaled down to 47 per cent. The introduction of the new model has instantly reduced the indigenous content of the car from 38 per cent to 31 per cent leaving a greater leeway that has to be made up.

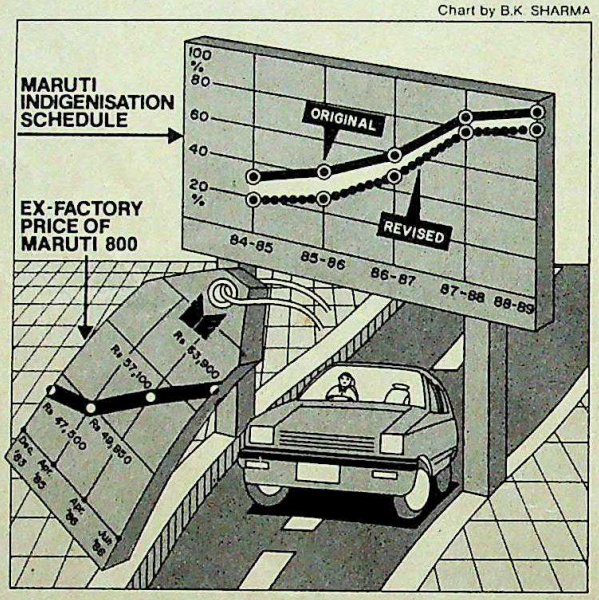
There are major differences between the old and new models in respect of components but Bhargava claimed that his company had given enough advance notice of the change of model to ancillary manufacturers, and that these had geared their facilities to suit the new model.

Maruti Udyog itself is now trying to hasten the troubled indigenisation process and has agreed to take a 10 per cent to 20 per cent equity stake in some six ancilliary projects—those for glass, seats, fuel tanks, steering gear, injection moulded parts and smaller pressed body parts. Four of these projects will be situated in the Maruti complex itself. The Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL), meanwhile, is trying to produce indigenously the kind of steel that Maruti requires, and this plan should go well since both Maruti and SAIL have a common chairman, V. Krishnamurthy.

But indigenisation or no indigenisation, there are many Cassandras in the automobile industry who now forecast that at its new prices, Maruti Udyog cannot ever hope to hit its full licensed capacity of 1.4 lakh vehicles. The response to the reopening of bookings next month will show whether that is true, or whether the expensive people's car still has a smooth ride ahead.

—TANIA MIDHA

Chart by B.K SHARMA



Production line of the new model Maruti

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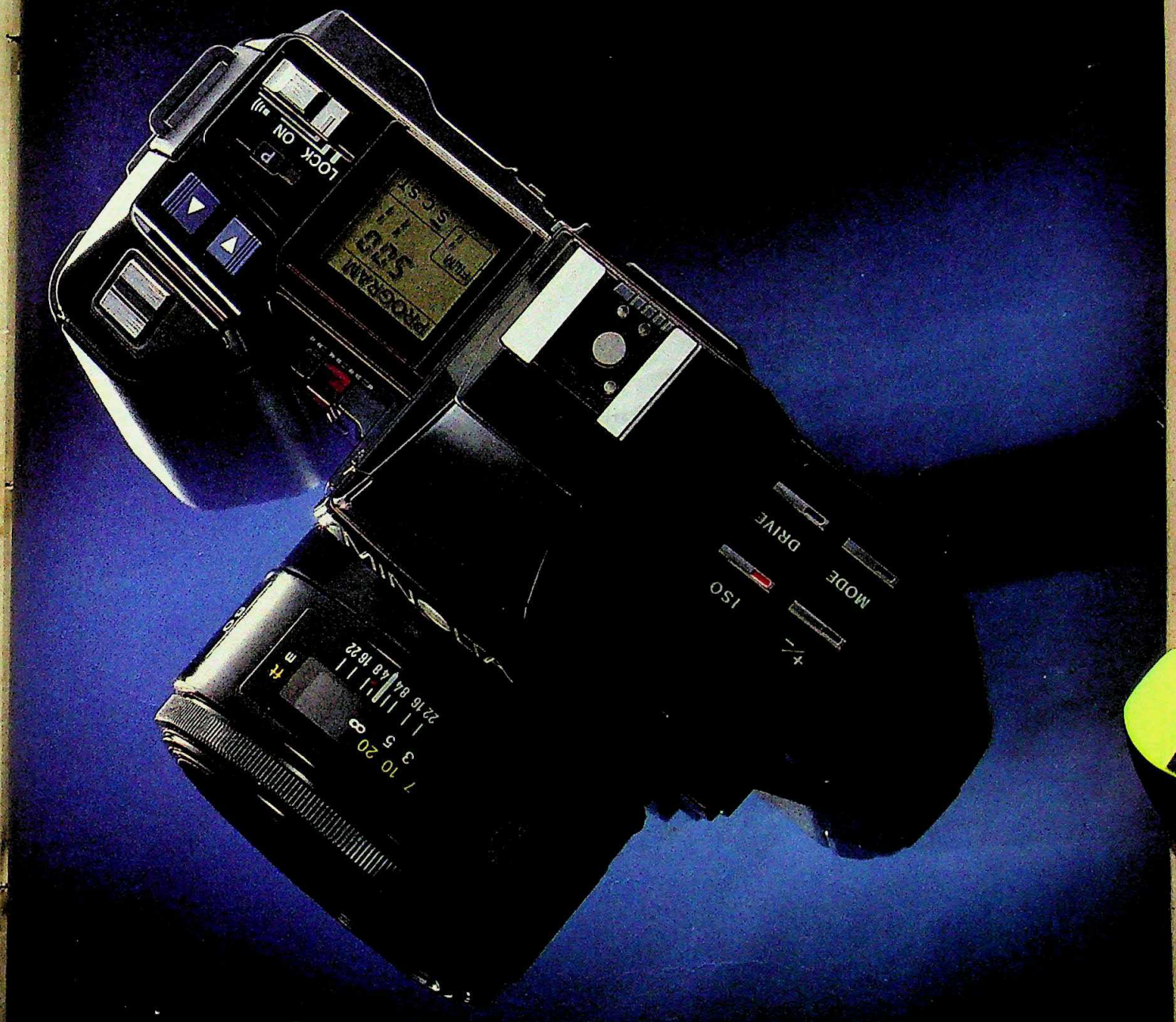
MINOLTA



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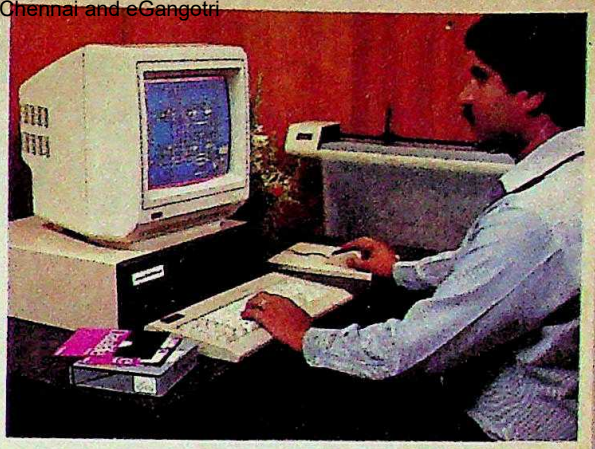

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DIAMOND INDUSTRY

A New Edge

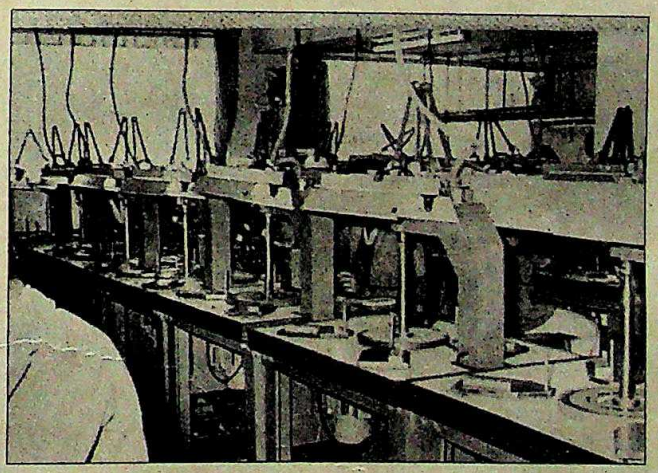
A TELEPHONE bill rip-off in Antwerp, tax raids in Bombay, searches and seizures, accusations and acrimony—hitting headlines is nothing new for the Indian diamond industry. But the free-wheeling business, which has grown from a scant Rs 28 crore in 1970-71 to Rs 1,334 crore in 1985-86, is shaking off its troubles, including a slump a couple of years ago, and heading once again for the big time. With renewed growth has also come the ambition to take on the big boys in Israel and Belgium.

Today, the diamond cutting and polishing industry is on a modernisation spree. Having established a virtual monopoly on 'makeables' (small stones with irregular grain structure), firms are now going over to the bigger, regular variety—'sawables'. "We already are the biggest," says Arvind Parikh, vice-chairman of the Diamond Exporters' Association, "Soon, we'll be the best."

That is no idle boast. Three factories to process 'sawables' are already operational and more are in the pipeline. With its prime asset of cheap labour, India has already ousted Antwerp from primacy in the small stones market, and diamantaires in Bombay give Israel one year before it too is outpriced.

In some ways, the new drive for modernisation and diversification has been more the result of market pressures than of deliberate policy decisions. "With the makeables market nearly saturated, this is the only way to maintain our track record of rapid growth," says Jatin Mehta, chairman of Su-Raj Diamonds, the first diamond company to go public—yet another manifestation of the change that's sweeping an industry long dominated by partnership firms.

There was an external spur too. The early '80s saw the diamond merchants in Israel and Antwerp come an expensive cropper. They had salted away hoards of gems which were reduced to pretty pebbles overnight when the market crashed. In its bail-out bid, the Diamond Trading Company, the marketing arm of De Beers which channelises 75 per cent of the world's production of rough diamonds, reduced the price difference between makeables, for which there was an undiminished Indian demand, and the sawables. The man on the street found that he could buy a better stone for a few dollars more. Many Indian firms decided to cut themselves a slice of this pricier cake.



Diamond cutting then and now: modernisation moves

"Quite a few of us did contemplate entering the new business," says Arun Mehta of B. Arunkumar and Co. "Eventually, only a handful took the plunge. But seeing our success, others are perking up now." But the laggards were not sitting back, depending on their traditional skills to see them through. "Everybody modernised," Parikh explains. "Some installed machinery and went in for larger stones. Others diversified into fancy shapes—marquises, pears and baguettes." This was necessary to survive. For though the 3,50,000 artisans in cottage-sized units in Surat, Navsari and Bombay earn only $80 a month each compared to the $1,000 earned by their Antwerp counterparts, traditional methods can produce only three stones a day compared to 15 a day turned out by modern techniques.

Those who did try to move upmarket have done well indeed. Su-Raj is already looking for sites to set up one or two more factories, as are B. ArunKumar and London Star, two other companies that have gone in for modern, mechanised factories.

India already has a one-third share of the $4 billion global trade in diamonds. The share of sawables in this is negligible so far, but the industry estimates that it could pick up 20 per cent of the sawable market too by 1990. Says a successful exporter: "We want to make India the last word in diamonds. Israel and Antwerp will eventually be left with only the top end of the market." This ambition hinges largely on how far the sortie into pricier sawables is successful.

"We can export diamonds worth Rs 3,000 crore by 1990 if everyone pulls together," says an optimistic Arun Mehta. There are, of course, some problems. More than half the machinery required will have to be imported. For a factory employing 100 people, the equipment cost alone will come to Rs 15 lakh. But thankfully, money is available for the asking and the Government seems awake to the needs of the gem and jewellery exporters.

"All we have to do," Mehta adds, "is to think big. For this long, we have practised driving in a Maruti. It's time now to switch over to a Mercedes." There's no better mode of transport down the road to becoming No.1.

—PARTHASARATHI SWAMI

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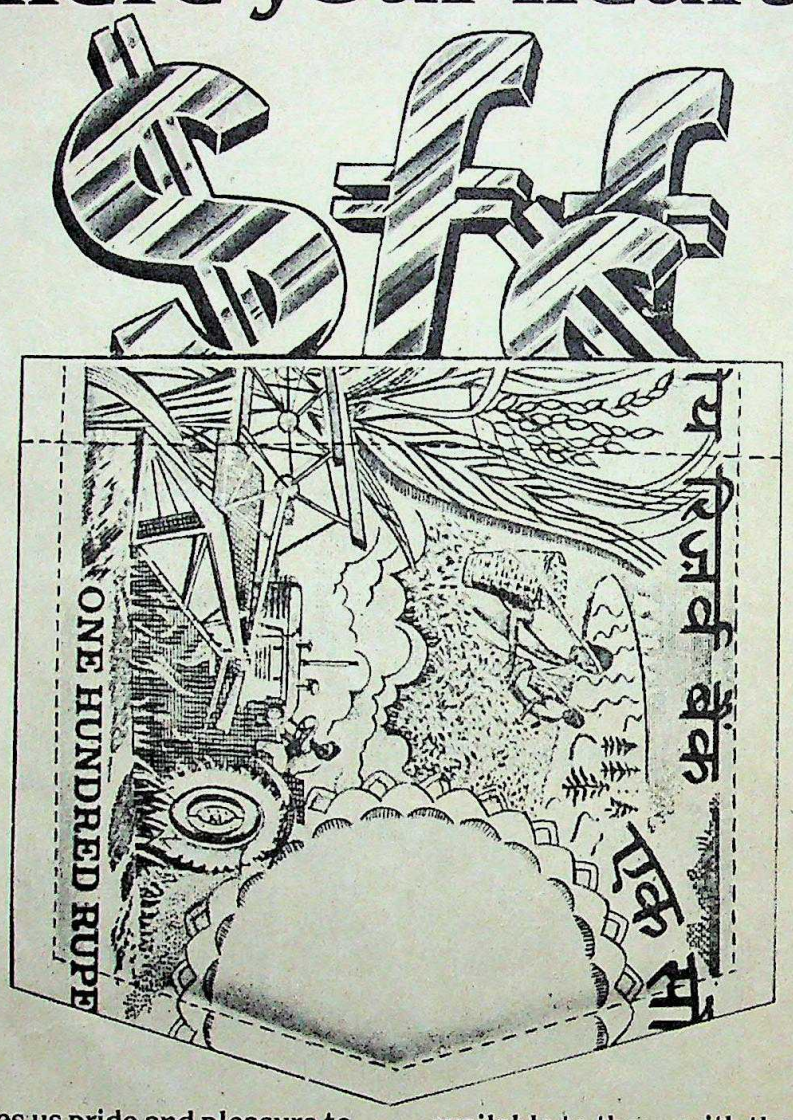
Keep your money where your heart is



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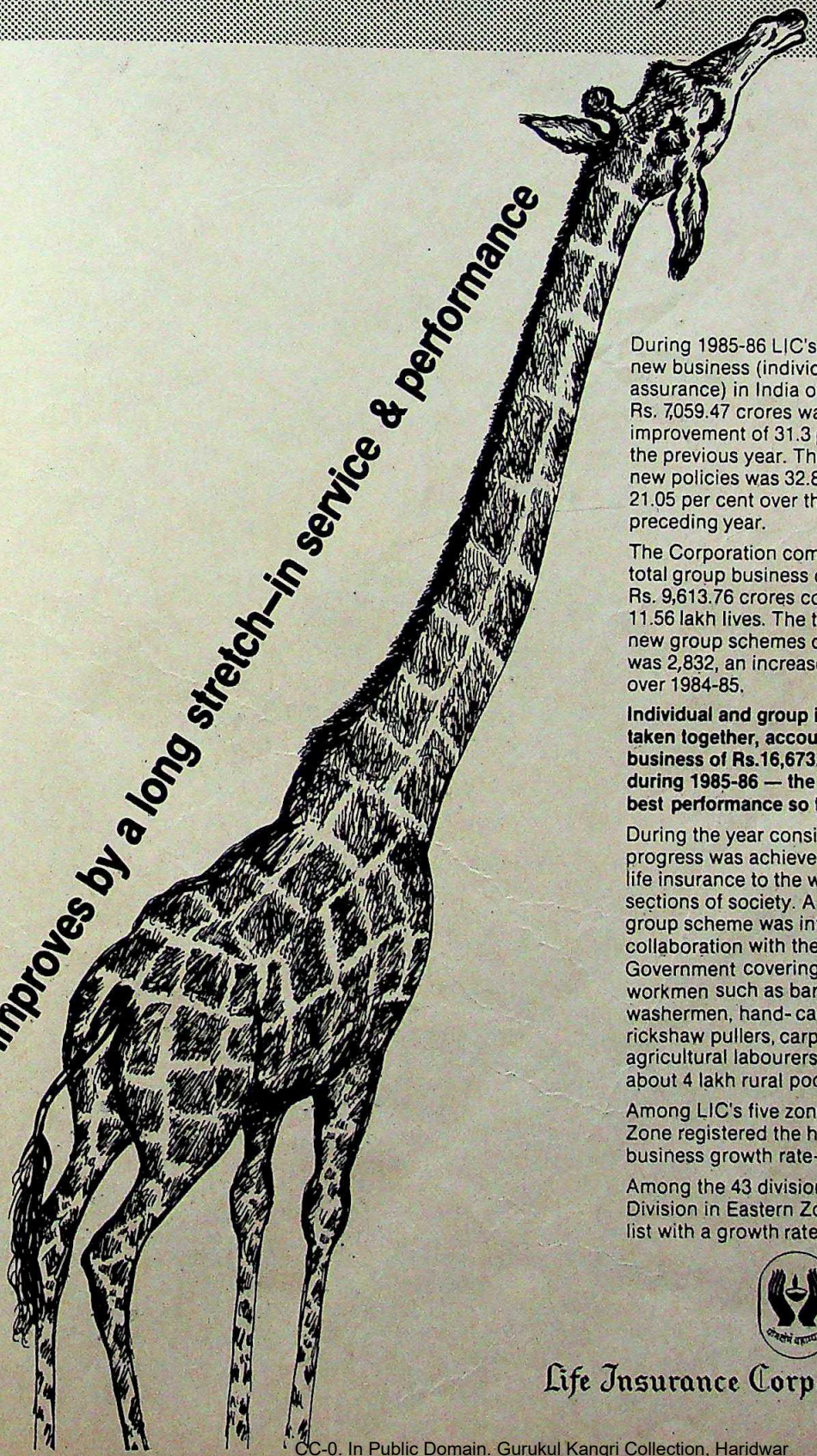
New business crosses Rs.7,000 crores!



During 1985-86 LIC's completed new business (individual assurance) in India of Rs. 7,059.47 crores was an improvement of 31.3 per cent over the previous year. The number of new policies was 32.82 lakhs, up 21.05 per cent over the preceding year.

The Corporation completed total group business of Rs. 9,613.76 crores covering 11.56 lakh lives. The total number of new group schemes during 1985-86 was 2,832, an increase of 20 per cent over 1984-85.

Individual and group insurance, taken together, accounted for new business of Rs.16,673.23 crores during 1985-86 — the Corporation's best performance so far.

During the year considerable progress was achieved in extending life insurance to the weaker sections of society. A major group scheme was introduced in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Government covering unorganised workmen such as barbers, washermen, hand-cart pullers, rickshaw pullers, carpenters, agricultural labourers, etc., covering about 4 lakh rural poor.

Among LIC's five zones, the Eastern Zone registered the highest business growth rate—35 per cent.

Among the 43 divisions, the Cuttack Division in Eastern Zone topped the list with a growth rate of 64.6 per cent.

Life Insurance Corporation of India

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NICCO

Aiming High

THE AMBIENCE at the Calcutta headquarters of the National Insulated Cable Company of India (NICCO) is deceptive, situated as it is in a hoary building that suggests a corporate relic of the Raj. But there's more to the company than meets the eye: television sets that will reach for a national market by the end of next year, with video cassette recorders and industrial electronic products to follow; a bid for a refinery in Assam which is pending with the Government; a Rs 9-crore car batteries project, now taking shape near the capital; a venture with a World Bank affiliate to lease out imported equipment; and plans to turn out a downstream petrochemicals product that could make the synthetic textile giants sit up in alarm.

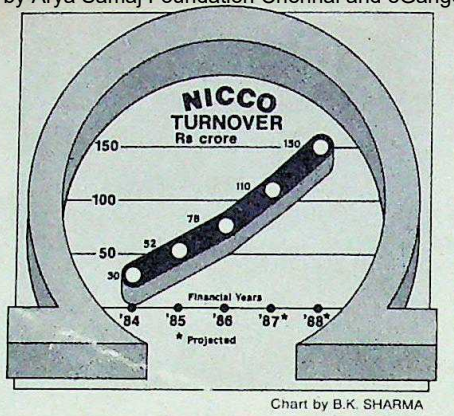

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

Clearly, this is no brown sahib corporation wearily soldiering on. In an unprecedented flurry of activity, NICCO and its five stablemates are shooting for the big time. Over the next two years, an array of greenfield projects and a corporate acquisition will get into full stride, almost doubling the Calcutta-based group's Rs 78-crore turnover figure for last year to a heady Rs 150 crore or more. Says a senior company executive: "The greenfield projects will add a dollop of turnover."

A Rs 18-crore jelly filled cables plant that is coming up near Calcutta may contribute up to Rs 30 crore worth of business next year. By then, Nicco Batteries also will get going (sales target: over Rs 15 crore). Webel Nicco Electronics, a loss-making West Bengal Government company that NICCO moved into last April, is putting up a factory in Calcutta to turn out 50,000 colour television sets a year and will hawk TV's worth some Rs 9 crore in two years. Finally, the high profile group recently took over Oriental Power Cables, another company that has been in the red. The Government has yet to formally clear some of the financial details of the takeover, but NICCO executives talk of speedily turning the company round and pushing sales to Rs 30 crore.

Certainly, these are ambitious goals for a group that was in the doldrums a decade ago. With annual sales of Rs 7 crore, NICCO was drifting along producing low tech cables. Nicco Steel, a sister steel rods and wires concern, was awash in red ink and had to be shut down, and the top management was riven by dissensions.

NICCO's television production line (top); and Kaul (left); and Sen: fast track

Enter Rajive Kaul. The former ITC executive married into the company and promptly gave the steel company to the Tatas to run, thereby assuring it of scarce raw materials. Next followed a series of rapid-fire expansion programmes. The group's flagship invested Rs 6 crore in power cables, a project that helped sales climb quickly. This was followed by sorties into engineering services, banking, and leasing. Managing Director Kaul was abroad last fortnight, but explained in a telexed response to questions that the diversification was meant "to have a wider product base which will guard against the cyclical fluctuations in any particular industry." Added group Deputy Chairman Abhijit Sen: "Our philosophy is to seize business opportunities whenever we see them."

That's true enough. The steel company, for example, will soon float a small welding company and a "metal stitching" or cast iron equipment repairing division to offset the cyclical fluctuations in the steel industry, while the foray into industrial electronics is meant to be "the profit cushion for the consumer electronics company." Some of the group's forays were calculated leaps into new terrain, but others arose from NICCO seizing the main chance. As a senior executive tells it, company executives wooed the visiting head of Furmanite International, the British company that specialises in sealing plant leaks, some years ago. The upshot: a collaboration agreement and the launching of the small but profitable Furmanite Nicco.

If quickly seizing opportunities is one hallmark of the NICCO group, canny tax planning is another. By expanding speedily and going in for in-house leasing, the group has saved on tax bills. Says a group executive: "Instead of paying taxes, we bought assets and took the depreciation on them."

Critics, however, are quick to point out that the group has been strapped for cash and so has expanded by joining hands with state governments in some cases, that it has been niggardly in rewarding shareholders, and that its bid for the Assam refinery is over-ambitious because it may not be in a position to raise the money for this.

It is true that the group went in for joint sector projects in Orissa (cables) and West Bengal (electronics) because it didn't have the cash to go it alone, and that NICCO's dividends have hovered around 12.5 per cent for the last few years. But Sen is equally quick to suggest that his companies are investing in the future: "The group's annual gross profit is around Rs 5 crore, income tax and dividend payments account for hardly Rs 50 lakh of this. So Rs 4.5 crore is being ploughed back every year." With the big projects five or six years away, the kitty should be full enough by then. So in the final analysis, prudence may pay off for a once troubled group that is now on the fast track.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI in Calcutta

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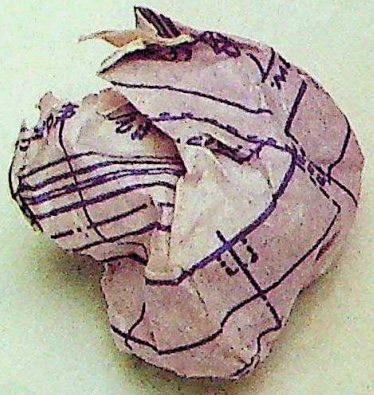

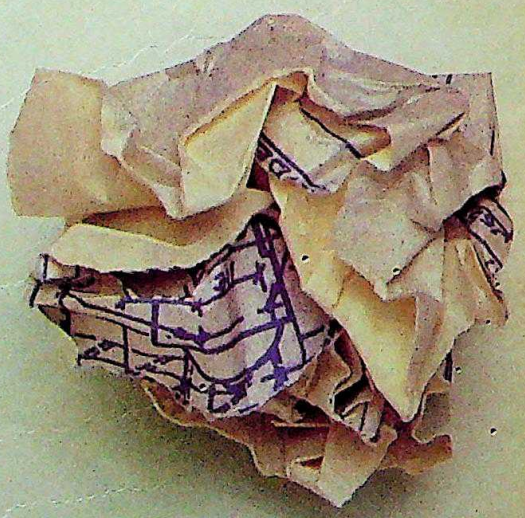

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CROP INSURANCE

Risky Venture

ON PAPER it sounded marvellous. A crop insurance scheme that had got off the ground after years of pilot projects, and 2.2 million farmers in 11 states and two Union territories insured against crop failure for a handsome Rs 537 crore.

But this exercise, launched for the kharif crop by the General Insurance Corporation (GIC) and fully underwritten by the Government now seems to have ended up with a major scandal in Gujarat. Farmers were allowed to insure their crops long after the monsoons had failed and it was known that the harvest would be poor. The GIC faces claims totalling Rs 73 crore from Gujarat alone, out of a country-wide claim of Rs 100 crore. But the total country-wide insurance premium was Rs 9.33 crore.

Corrective action has followed swiftly. The GIC is re-examining the scheme, and the Union Agriculture Ministry has sent experts to the groundnut districts in Gujarat, whose claims alone totalled Rs 67 crore. They found that in Amreli and Bhavnagar, cooperative banks had extended insurance cover to farmers after it was known that the groundnut crop had failed.

Gujarat agricultural department officials said that last year's groundnut crop was the lowest in 20 years, yielding just 3.9 lakh tonnes against the 22 lakh tonnes in a good year like 1981-82. And the fraud followed the blight. The district cooperative banks in Amreli and Bhavnagar extended loans to groundnut farmers (the insurance is compulsorily provided against loans) as late as October and November, almost a month after harvesting ended the kharif season. The banks explained that the farmers were in trouble and had to be bailed out. This benevolence has extracted a heavy price: of the Rs 30 crore insurance claims from Amreli and Bhavnagar, Rs 11 crore were against loans extended after the kharif season was over.

"The banks' lending was mala fide," said K.N.Ardanareswaran, additional secretary, Agriculture Ministry. "We are not satisfied. The Centre has asked each cooperative bank for its accounts. We have to disallow the claims."

The Gujarat State Cooperative Bank (GSCB) gave another explanation for the delayed insurance. They claim that the district banks' action was justified, as unseasonal rains in October had raised the possibility of sowing a delayed second crop. But state agriculture department officials pointed out that it was impossible to harvest groundnut in winter, since, apart from sufficient moisture in the earth, the crop also needs the right temperature and sunlight to flower. Scepticism about the GSCB's explanation mounted because both Amreli and Bhavnagar are considered Janata Party strongholds, and GSCB Chairman D.M. Patel belongs to this party.

"What was done in Amreli and Bhavnagar was not proper," said Gujarat Agriculture Minister Mahant Vijaydasji, and the Central Government has held back payments against the claims in Amreli and Bhavnagar. Payments are being made in the other districts and also in Maharashtra, where GIC Chairman A. Goenka handed over a cheque for Rs 4.27 crore. But Goenka claimed that even in Maharashtra, "the claims and losses will exceed the premium collected. The claims may exceed Rs 19 crore, while the premium was Rs 1.35 crore".

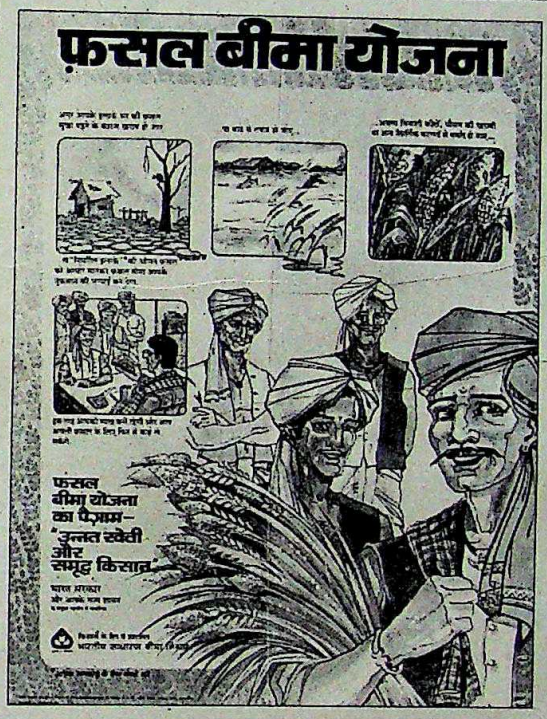
This experience in the very first year of crop insurance has brought home the need for closer supervision of the scheme, which is primarily implemented by local-level banks under broad directions from the GIC. "This case has demonstrated that we will have to frame clearer ground rules for crop insurance," said a GIC official.

But the crop insurance scheme is perceived, not as a commercial proposition, but as a way of encouraging lakhs of small and medium farmers to take the risk of shifting to an advanced form of agriculture. "It is one of the best things that has happened to the Indian farmer," said GIC Managing Director C.N.S. Shastri. "It institutionalises relief to farmers when the monsoon fails. But it also encourages the farmer to take more risks and introduce modern technological inputs. The scheme has proved its value in the very first year."

"Experience in other countries has shown that the crop insurance scheme becomes viable only in the long term," added Professor V.R. Gaikwad of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. "We have found that it has changed a farmer's perception of risk. By instinct, when a farmer takes a risk he looks at what he will lose. After five years of crop insurance he will look at what he will gain."

However, the Union Government is worried that the objective of the scheme may be sabotaged by instances of fraud. Besides Gujarat, alarm bells went off in Maharashtra also, but an investigation into the pattern of loans in Ahmednagar did not reveal any fraud. "There is no immediate move to give up the scheme, but it may have to be done if instances of fraud recur," said a member of the Central team which visited Gujarat.

—M. RAHMAN with bureau reports



Crop insurance poster: tall claims

Scandal has followed the drought in Gujarat, with crop insurance being extended after the rains had failed, leading to massive insurance claims that are now being rejected.

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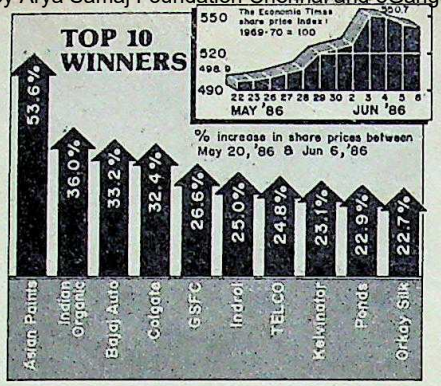
THE MARKETS

Buoyant Again



EVEN if quite unintentionally, Finance Minister V.P. Singh seems to have taken on the role of a master puppeteer controlling the bulls and bears as they storm around the stock exchange trading ring. His 1985 budget set off an unprecedented boom in equity prices, and his 1986 budget just as effectively dampened the euphoria. Last fortnight, Singh sent the bulls chasing bears yet again when he made a string of announcements that bolstered the trading mood, including the promise of reduced interest rates and some form of limited amnesty of violators of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act. Other official announcements of further industrial policy liberalisations helped the new buoyancy, and the stock-market index climbed 15 per cent in the space of a month, to 550.7, bringing it very close to the all-time peak of 559.5 reached just before the last budget. Subsequent profit-taking brought the index down to 541.1 by the close of the fortnight, but the new mood of confidence marked a sharp change from the earlier listlessness and uncertainty about the future.

This upswing was helped by the decision of the Bombay Stock Exchange to bring 14 actively traded cash scrips on to the forward trading list, one example being Orkay Silk Mills which gained Rs 35 at Rs 173. Another example was Bajaj Auto. Besides, there were expectations of a bonus issue by Reliance Industries later in the year, after August. A bonus issue was similarly expected from TISCO, which might also come out with a convertible debenture issue when it announces the dividend for its financial year ending last March. Other companies also came out with long-awaited announcements of debenture issues.

Gains were notched up on virtually every counter, with advances recorded by Bajaj Auto, GSFC and TELCO. GSFC's rise was helped by the company's decision to split its Rs 100 share into Rs 10 shares in order to help buying by investors of limited means. Meanwhile, the news of a settlement being reached between corporate raider Swraj Paul and the managements of Escorts and DCM resulted in the shares of both these companies gaining fresh ground.

The new issues market also saw new life being breathed into it. After a slump around March, when several issues floated on the market met with a lukewarm response, investors seem to have started flocking in greater numbers once again to the new issues market.

The future now looks distinctly brighter than it did as recently as a month ago. The monsoons have arrived on time, and if they prove to be normal over the next couple of months (after years of successive droughts in a number of states), the markets should prove lively and cheerful about the future.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1986 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 6.6.86	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	45.00	26.00	29.25	1.75 +
Associated Cement	389.00	228.00	276.00	15.00 +
Atlas Copco	92.50	64.00	80.00	14.00 +
AsianPaints	225.00	130.00	215.00	72.50 +
Avery India	146.00	100.00	118.50	5.50 +
Bajaj Auto	3450.00	1950.00	3350.00	820.00 +
Baroda Rayon	490.00	315.00	360.00	nil
Bata India	82.50	54.00	62.75	2.75 +
Bayer	680.00	445.00	540.00	10.00 +
Bharat Forge	86.00	48.00	70.00	10.00 +
Birla Jute	97.00	42.90	51.25	0.75 +
Blow Plast	160.00	98.00	108.00	2.00 -
Blue Star	110.00	75.00	95.00	12.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	123.00	77.00	102.00	5.50 -
Brooke Bond	96.75	74.00	84.00	1.00 +
Ceat Tyres	520.00	240.00	410.00	nil
Century Spinning	1690.00	790.00	850.00	35.00 +
Chloride India	123.00	86.00	120.00	28.00 +
Citurgia	65.00	42.00	54.00	4.00 -
Colgate	307.50	200.00	290.00	70.00 +
DCM	58.50	32.62	40.00	2.00 +
Dunlop	74.50	49.75	68.25	5.00 +
Elecon	117.50	80.00	100.00	10.00 +
Escorts	107.00	69.00	103.00	8.50 +
Finolex Cables	70.00	36.00	63.00	2.50 +
Food Specialities	327.50	215.00	310.00	35.00 +
Garware Nylon	61.50	36.00	47.00	0.50 +
Glaxo	87.00	62.00	68.50	1.50 -
G.E. Shipping	36.00	21.25	26.50	1.50 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	1820.00	925.00	1765.00	230.00 +
Gwalior Rayon	88.00	59.00	79.00	2.50 +
Hindustan Lever	163.00	124.00	155.00	8.00 +
Hindustan Motors	128.50	45.80	52.75	4.15 +
Hind. Dorr	505.00	380.00	485.00	35.00 +
IEL	84.50	61.50	68.25	4.25 +
Indian Hotels	157.00	115.00	145.00	15.00 +
Indian Organic	97.00	63.00	86.00	15.00 +
Indian Rayon	151.00	100.00	137.00	9.00 +
Indrol	390.00	200.00	310.00	40.00 +
Ingersoll-Rand	480.00	360.00	435.00	50.00 +
ITC	76.50	53.00	67.00	1.00 +
J.K. Synthetics	132.00	90.00	120.00	13.00 +
Kinetic Engineering	345.00	220.00	330.00	50.00 +
Lakme	195.00	120.00	145.00	10.00 +
Larson & Toubro	204.00	135.00	136.00	47.50 -
Lipton	69.00	46.50	63.00	6.00 +
Lohia Machines	70.00	42.00	52.00	nil
Madura Coats	92.00	53.00	59.00	4.25 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	86.00	52.00	55.00	4.00 -
Motor Industries	1000.00	605.00	920.00	95.00 +
National Organic	830.00	530.00	795.00	50.00 +
Nirlon	77.00	43.50	43.50	5.50 -
Orkay Silk Mills	186.00	111.00	173.00	35.00 +
Peico Electronics	104.50	48.00	56.85	3.85 +
Pfizer	125.00	78.00	102.00	1.50 +
Ponds	295.00	200.00	295.00	60.00 +
Premier Auto	870.00	555.00	812.50	57.50 +
Ranbaxy	160.00	105.00	137.00	19.00 +
Raymond	97.00	72.00	84.00	3.00 +
Reliance Industries	392.00	226.00	388.00	24.00 +
Shriram Fibres	88.00	49.00	59.00	4.00 +
SPIC	184.00	129.50	163.00	15.00 +
Tata Steel	1535.00	1090.00	1490.00	170.00 +
Telco	910.00	575.00	750.00	117.50 +
Vulcan Laval	162.50	85.00	112.50	15.00 +
Wimco	98.00	54.00	64.00	4.00 +

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	8.8937	8.8511
Austria	Schilling	100	80.9795	80.6466
Bahrain	Dinar	1	33.2430	33.1210
Bangladesh	Taka	100	42.1732	42.1019
Canada	Dollar	1	9.1081	9.0733
Denmark	Kroner	1	1.5354	1.5286
Egypt	Pound	1	15.0320	15.0001
France	Franc	1	1.7761	1.7730
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.6297	1.6245
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	1.0913	1.0710
Iran	Rial	100	15.7300	15.6810
Italy	Lira	100	0.8001	0.7911
Japan	Yen	100	7.5645	7.5389
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7610	0.7530
Kuwait	Dinar	1	43.7010	43.6001
Malaysia	Dollar	1	4.8714	4.8443
Mauritius	Rupee	1	0.9003	0.8919
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.5732	0.5601
Netherlands	Guilder	1	5.4670	5.0299
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7440	0.7010
Singapore	Dollar	1	5.7177	5.6901
Spain	Peseta	1	0.0730	0.0701
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4390	0.4201
Sweden	Kroner	1	1.7615	1.7544
Switzerland	Franc	1	6.8712	6.8625
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.6401	0.6320
Thailand	Baht	100	47.9910	47.8320
UK	Pound	1	19.0069	18.9681
USA	Dollar	1	12.7075	12.6825
UAE	Dirham	1	3.3730	3.3510
USSR	Rouble	1	17.6530	17.6010
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	5.6593	5.6465

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 10.6.86.

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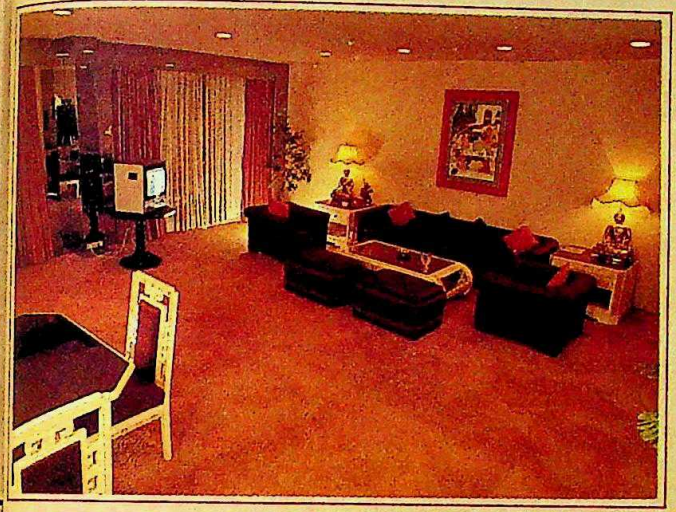
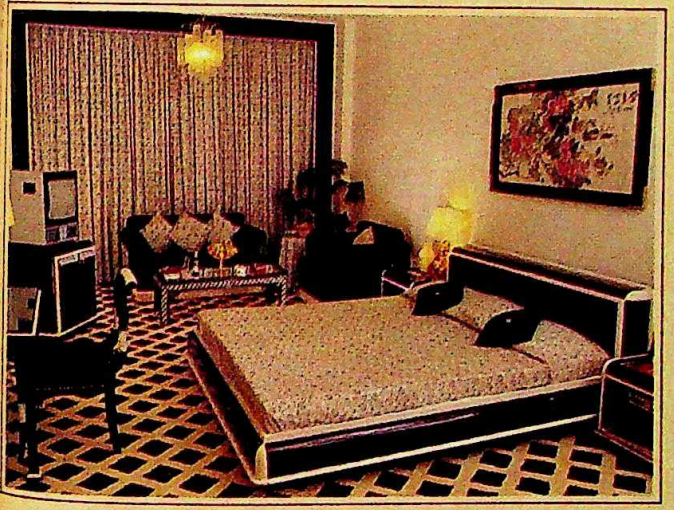
Those rooms at Hotel Banjara look a little different since your last visit, don't they?





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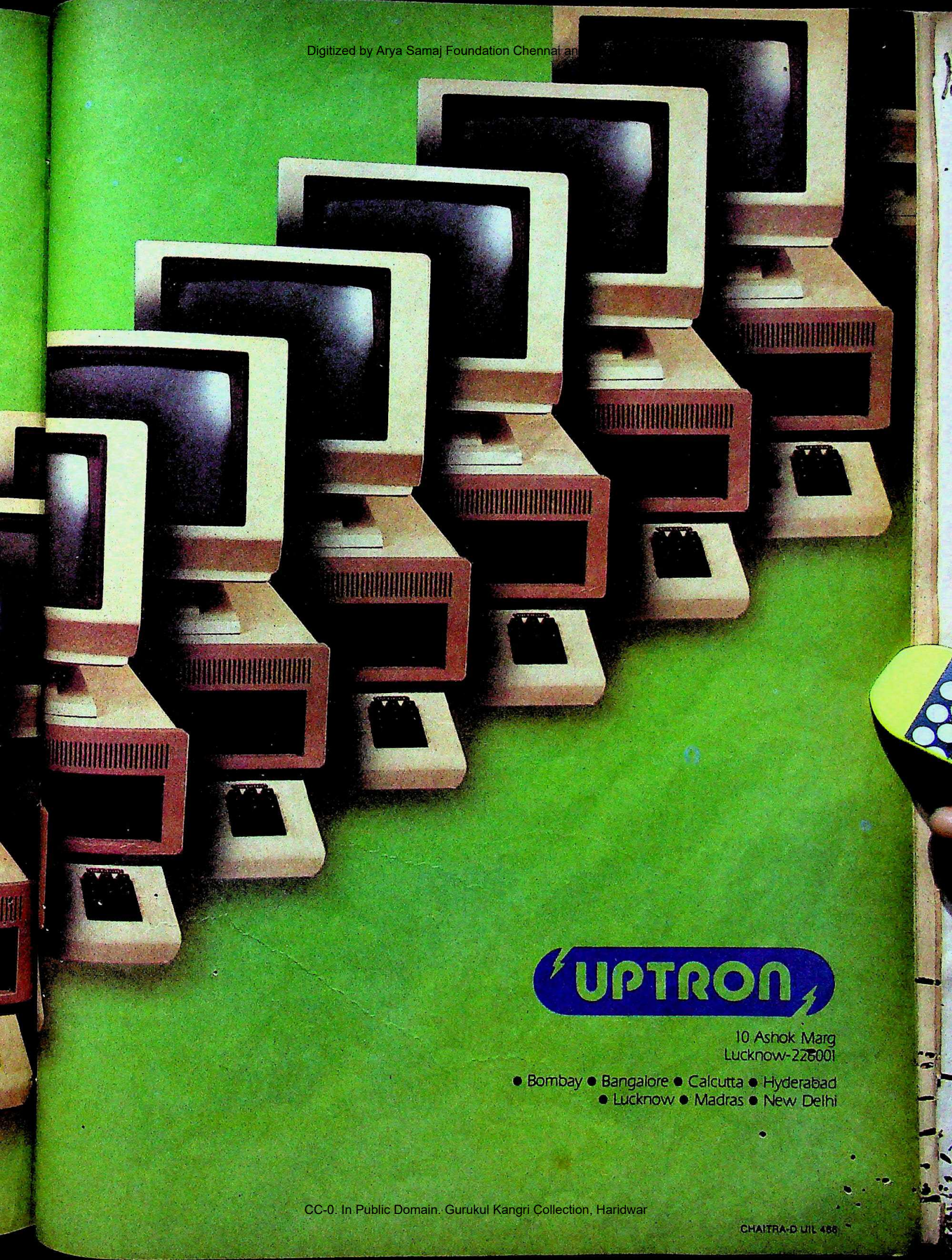

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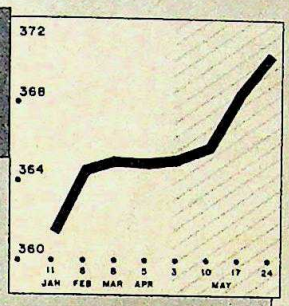
THE RATE of inflation is continuing to run at less than 5 per cent. There has been a sudden spurt, both in industrial production as well as in power generation. Money supply, however, has tightened to some extent. Gold prices are on the rise and the stock exchange was at its bearish worst before a sharp upswing restored the original balance.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of the last six months data to which a regression is fitted.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
4.6% p.a.

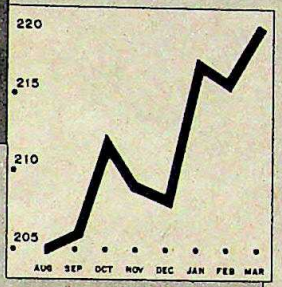


In spite of a 1% rise in wholesale prices in May, inflation seems to have remained constant at around 4.6% per year.

Industrial Product Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend
10.4% p.a.

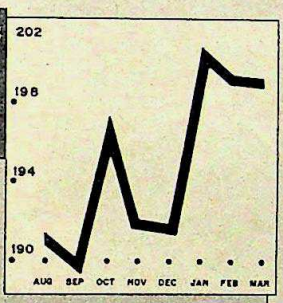


The index of industrial production has soared into double-digit growth for the first time in a long while, helped by a good power situation.

Manufacturing Output Index

1970 = 100

Current Trend
7.2% p.a.

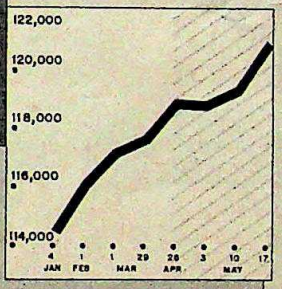


Growth in manufacturing output is good, at over 7%, but nevertheless, it clearly falls short of what is possible

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
13.5% p.a.

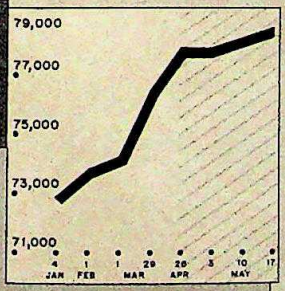


A 1.7% squeeze between 26 April and 17 May saw a drop in the money supply growth-rate. RBI seems to be moving to a "tight money" phase.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
14.0% p.a.

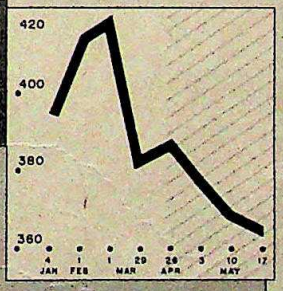


Commercial bank credit, in contrast, has picked up momentum, and the long-term growth rate has risen to 14%.

Share Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
5.0% p.a.

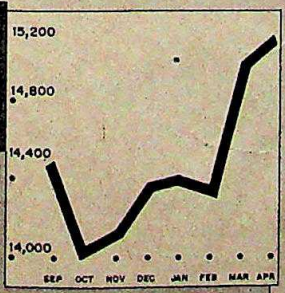


Share prices have crashed by 13% between March and mid-May. But there has been a sharp recovery since then.

Power Generation

Million KWH

Current Trend
9.6% p.a.

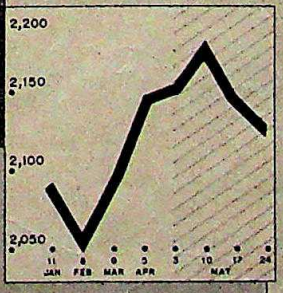


Power generation shot up by 4.89% between January and April which, in turn, lifted the trend to a healthy 9.6% per year.

Closing Gold Price

Rs per 10 gm.

Current Trend
5.1% p.a.



Though there was a fall in the middle of May, the 6% jump between February and May contributed to a growth in gold prices.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Growth of Items in February, 1986

	% Growth
Metallurgical Machinery	54.3
Motor Cars	45.03
Electrical Motors	35.08
Synthetic Rubber	32.71
Ferro-Alloys	26.73
Newsprint	19.07
Synthetic Resins and Plastics	18.54
Insecticides and Pesticides	16.84
Beverage Industry	15.84
Telecommunications	14.66
Explosives	12.82
Artificial Leather and Oil Cloth	10.37
Soaps and Glycerine	10.08
Drugs and Pharmaceuticals	8.36
Cotton and Blended Mixed Fabrics	8.14
Boilers Steam Generating Plants	7.68
Power-Driven Pumps	7.03
Iron and Steel (Metal)	6.73
Cotton and Blended Yarn	6.53
Motorcycles and Bicycles	6.03
Non-Ferrous Basic Metal Industries	5.61
Matches	5.49
Electrical Lamps	5.28
Storage Batteries	5.1
Construction Machinery	4.76
Tea	4.38
Sugar Machinery	4.22
Airconditioners and Refrigerators	4.12
Cosmetics	3.61
Inorganic Chemicals	3.41
Internal Combustion Engines	2.61
Dry Cells	2.33
Iron and Steel Pipes	2.01
Organic Chemicals	1.91
Paper	1.55
Man-Made Fibres	1.44
Mining and Quarrying	0.84
Dye-Stuffs	0.73
Typewriters & Duplicators	0.59
Cement (Hydraulic)	0.46
Coffee Curing Works	0.27
Grain Mill Products	- .04
Railway Rolling Stock	- .05
Paints and Varnishes	- .07
Dairy Products	- .2
Watches and Clocks	- .32

Of the 86 series considered, 41 of them with a total weight of 49.907 had a positive growth and 45 of them with a total weight of 38.068 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1986	1985
Petroleum Crude		
Thousand Tonnes, May	2688	2468
Petroleum Refinery Products		
Thousand Tonnes, May	3393	3453
Fertilizers		
Thousand Tonnes, April	396.0	370.5
Thermal Plant Load Factor		
Percentage, April	58.2	54.8
Rail Movement		
Net Tonne-km., April	21.75	19.01

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V. PRABAKARAN

Profile of a Tiger

AMONG the militant Tamil groups battling for Eelam, he is already a legend in his comparatively short lifetime, a larger-than-life figure whose military exploits and derring-do have turned him into something of a folk hero. Tales abound of his unerring marksmanship and his ability to hit a cigarette at a hundred paces with a pistol or strip and reassemble a revolver blindfolded in seconds. To his enemies, including rival Tamil militant groups, he is a ruthless, blood-thirsty, over-ambitious desperado, intent only on self-promotion—and self-preservation. But in the context of Sri Lanka's increasingly bloody ethnic strife, Velupillai Prabakaran, 32, has become the predominant figure after the brief but brutal fratricidal battle between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which he heads, and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), the two most militarily powerful Tamil groups. The TELO forces were virtually wiped out as was most of their top leadership, including Srisabaratnam, Prabakaran's arch-rival for the Tamil guerrilla leadership.

With TELO virtually out of the picture, the supremacy of LTTE, popularly known as the "Tigers", and its chairman, Prabakaran, is unquestioned, particularly after they reconfirmed their near-total military control over the island's northern peninsula. Prabakaran's writ now runs supreme in the north, with the LTTE not only collecting taxes from the locals but also controlling law and order.

Prabakaran remains something of an enigma. Stripped of the propaganda hype that surrounds him, he is still a mystery man with a paradoxically low profile. His movements are a closely-guarded secret, but he is known to spend most of his time shuttling between hideouts in Tamil Nadu, sometimes crossing the Palk Strait to don his battle fatigues and personally direct his troops in combat.

Born on November 26, 1954, in Sri Lanka's northern coastal town of Velvettithurai, he belongs to the fishing caste though his father was an educated government servant employed as a district land officer. As a student, he was inspired by historical military heroes like Alexander the Great and Napolean Bonaparte and by Indian freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh and Subhash Chandra Bose. As he says: "I was a studious boy in school, confined to reading books at home." When he was four years old, he was witness to the racial riots of 1958 and virtually grew up listening to stories of the brutalities committed by the Sri Lankan army on the Tamil population.

He was a student when he began playing an active role in organising protest movements against the Government and acquired a Marxist image. When he was 16, in protest against the Government's discriminatory education policy, the "revolutionary youth", as he describes his fellow-travellers, distanced themselves from the existing Tamil political party and formed the Revolutionary Youth Federation.

Prabakaran was 17 when he joined the "armed struggle" and began learning how to use hand grenades and small-bore revolvers. One version has it that he received some military training in Cuba. Whatever the truth, he rose rapidly in the guerrilla hierarchy as the movement expanded. In 1972, he was confident enough of his leadership abilities to form the Tamil New Tigers which he renamed as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 1976, appointing himself as chairman of the organisation's central commitee and commander-in-chief of its military wing.

As a ruthless guerrilla fighter dedicated to spilling "the last drop of blood" for Eelam, Prabakaran's name first hit the headlines in 1975 when he assassinated Jaffna mayor Alfred Duraiappa. He also personally led the group that ambushed a military convoy in 1983, killing 13 soldiers and triggering off the 1983 Colombo riots. Says Tilakar of LTTE, a delegate to the Thimpu talks: "He is always intensely alert. This has helped him in our fights against the Sri Lankan army. He has an uncanny hunch about impending military attacks, helping him escape numerous attempts to capture him."

Prabakaran is the chief architect of the highly-disciplined and well-entrenched military set-up of the LTTE that has been

Prabakaran is already a legend in his lifetime, a larger-than-life figure whose military exploits have turned him into something of a folk hero.

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elled on Fidel Castro's original guer- movement. It is a tightly-controlled nisation that has managed to keep its egy and movements secret through c executions of alleged informers. All members keep a vial of cyanide on person in case they are captured and red. However, Prabakaran's war nst TELO has been seen as part of his ing leadership ambitions. Says V. kumar, convenor of the Eelam Revo- nary Organisation: "Ultimately, rship is something which will have conferred on you by the people. It is ight to think that your status will go you artificially build an aura around self." Other militant groups have ised his recent penchant to issue uctions to his men in the battlefield the safety of his Tamil Nadu hideouts there are strong rumours that his ary authority is beginning to be ioned by his district commanders. ut in terms of discipline, Prabakaran always set a personal example. He 't drink or smoke, tea or coffee are taboo and he is very strict about field training and exercise. There is considerable mystery, however, about the source of LTTE's seemingly limitless funds. The Sri Lankan Government believes he is being funded by the communist bloc which he denies vehemently. But in the current conflagration, Prabakaran's destiny is linked inextricably with the Eelam struggle and the legend can only grow larger.

Dark-skinned, with close-cropped hair, a bushy moustache and a disarming smile on his thick lips, Prabakaran looks the antithesis of the legendary dreaded terrorist that he is supposed to be. He looks more like a prosperous and pleasant-mannered family man, which, incidentally, he also is. His wife Madivadani has just given birth to their second child, Dwaraka, a week-old last fortnight. Prabakaran is not normally accessible to the media. Last fortnight, however, he made an exception for INDIA TODAY when he agreed to speak to Assistant Editor PRABHU CHAWLA and Madras Correspondent S.H. VENKATRAMANI in the LTTE's Indira Nagar office in south Madras for an interview. Excerpts:

SHYAM TEKWANI

Q. *What, in your view, will be the next chapter of the Sri Lankan problem?*

A. Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene (JRJ) will come to the negotiating table only if he has been able to gain some military advantage. Till then, he will only be continuing the military option.

Q. *Don't you think it is possible for the Sri Lankan Government with all its resources to ultimately militarily crush your movement?*

A. JRJ may think he can find a military solution to the ethnic problem. But he can only succeed in bringing about genocide on a large scale. We have with us young boys who are willing to die one after another till we are able to achieve our objective.

Q. *How do you estimate* LTTE'S *strength vis-a-vis the Sri Lankan Army?*

A. I cannot reveal any military secrets, but we have the capability to send the army out. I can assure you that LTTE is capable of mobilising enough support to defeat the Sri Lankan army.

Q. *Do you have a specific time frame for achieving an independent Tamil state of Eelam?*

A. I can't say specifically when we will attain Eelam. But we will certainly attain it. It will also to a certain extent depend on the international situation, the economic pressures that Colombo faces and will face because of our armed struggle.Once his foreign supporters realise that JRJ is not capable of holding the country together they will desert him.His guns, bombs and tanks have not been able to deter us from launching a sustained offensive aginst his regime.

Q. *But don't you think you can negotiate an honourable settlement with the Sri Lankan Government?*

A. We have crossed the stage of being able to visualise a solution within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. We have come to a point of no return with regard to the Eelam ideal.

Q. *What is the geographical territory you want to liberate as Eelam?*

A. Eelam was already existing. There was a distinct Tamil homeland. We are now trying only to retrieve that.

Q. *Have you yourself been on the field?*

A. Yes, I have taken part in a number of military operations. In fact, in our group, all of us have to.

Q. *What was your first important military operation?*

A. My first major military encounter was in 1975 when I shot and killed the former mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiappa. Subsequently I have taken part in a number of military actions of our group; I was very much there in the Nilaveli operations, and I led the ambush on the military convoy that killed 13 soldiers in Tinneveli in 1983.

Q. *Can you tell us how many people you have personally killed in the course*

"I can't say when we will attain Eelam. But we will certainly attain it. We have crossed the stage to visualise a political solution."

V. PRABAKARAN
commander-in-chief, LTTE

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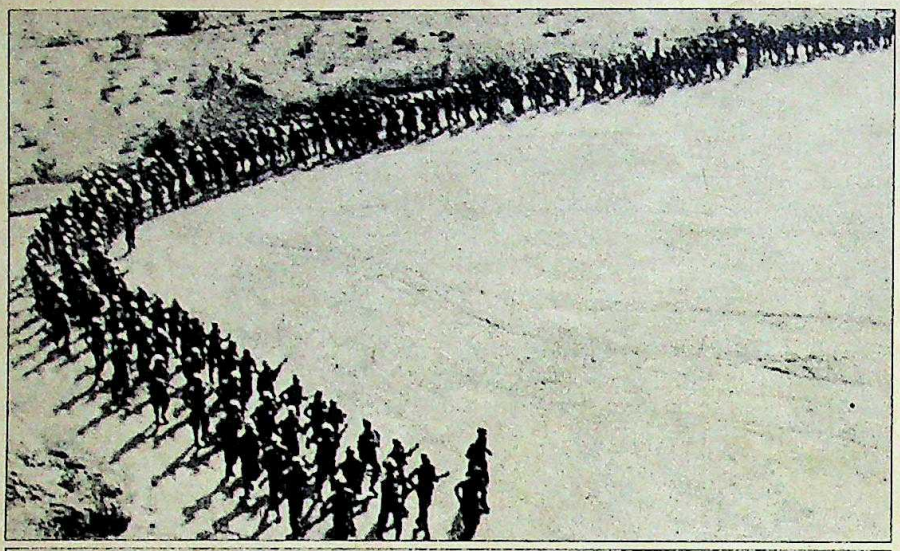

"I can assure you that LTTE is capable of mobilising enough support to defeat the Sri Lankan army."

of military struggle?

A. I cannot tell you that, but I have been in a number of our military actions. I can operate everything from a pistol to a rocket-ranger.

Q. *What were the reasons for your waging a war on* TELO? *Don't you think disunity among the militants can only weaken your movement?*

A. In our struggle we have to adopt a unified approach. Any disunity among us will be a weakness for the entire Tamil movement. But it is precisely this disunity that was developing. In my opinion, there must only be one dominant militant group to lead the struggle. And it is we Tigers who were able to foil the Sri Lankan Army's offensives in many cases. And it is very dangerous for the Sri Lankan Army to deal with a single unified movement. It is a single unified Tiger movement now.

Q. *But couldn't you have brought about unity by discussions?*

A. How could we discuss anything with the other groups when they were themselves hopelessly disunited within?

Q. *Is eliminating the other groups the only way to a unified approach?*

A. We did not wipe out any movement. We only taught TELO a lesson. TELO was killing our LTTE leaders, and if we had not tackled them the Tiger movement would have gradually ceased to exist. You will appreciate that even when we had problems with the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, we were very patient. Even in the case of TELO, though around 100 militants were killed, we only took into custody over 400 TELO fighters and seized their arms and ammunition. The only principle was that these people need not wield arms if they cannot fight the real enemy. While our cadres were really keeping the Sri Lankan Army at bay, these other groups were indulging in antisocial activities. And Jaffna people said it was good for us to take total charge of the liberation movement.

Q. *What do you say to Jayewardene calling you terrorists?*

A. We are not terrorists. We are the representatives of people who want to get out of the clutches of state terrorism.

Q. *What is your reply to Jayewardene's allegation that you are getting arms from communist countries?*

A. If I was getting arms from communist countries, I would have given you an interview in Tamil Eelam.

Q. *What political set-up do you visualise for Tamil Eelam?*

A. It would be a socialist state of Tamil Eelam. And there would be a single political party supported by the people. I am opposed to the multi-party democracy. It is through the one-party rule that we can develop the Eelam faster. In a socialist set up people's needs are more important.

Q. *Would you have parliamentary democracy?*

A. No, it would be a people's democracy, a model similar to that of Yugoslavia where people elect a single party.

Q. *What kind of foreign policy would you like to follow?*

A. We will definitely like to be closer to the socialist block because these are the ones who are helping us now.

Q. *Do you go to Jaffna these days?*

A. My movements are a secret. But all my cadres are my trusted lieutenants. They keep in touch with me.

Q. LTTE *has the reputation of having a strict code of conduct...?*

A. We do impose a moral code. For example, we do allow our members to marry, but we wouldn't allow loose morals. We don't allow our members to drink and they generally don't smoke. We ensure a life within social norms.

Q. *Jayewardene accuses you of launching your military struggle from Indian soil. How do you react to that?*

A. Our struggle is taking place in Eelam. We are conducting the war there. And when necessity arises we will go there. We have no desire to fight from here. We are here to carry on an international political campaign and not to launch a military struggle.

Q. *Can you name some of the countries which are helping Jayawardene?*

A. Racist and authoritarian governments like South Africa, Pakistan, and Israel, and of course the SAS mercenaries.

Q. *What is your equation with the Government of India now?*

A. The Government of India is sympathetic to our cause. Our being allowed to stay here also shows the magnanimity of the Indian Government. India has been good enough to give refuge to all our exiled political leaders.

Q. *What is your response to the Government of India's mediatory efforts?*

A. We fully support the Government of India's peace initiatives. We support India's role fully.

Q. *But India wants a solution within the frame-work of a united Sri Lanka. Whereas you are bent on Eelam. Doesn't that mean you are at cross purposes with India?*

A. We are representing the political aspirations of our people. We don't think the Government of India will go against the aspirations of our people. India's support is important to us. But we also have a right to self-determination.

Q. *What will you do if Rajiv asks you to get out because he doesn't take kindly to terrorism?*

A. We don't think Rajiv will ask us to pack our bags. But then if we are asked to go we will have to go. Our homeland is always waiting for us with open arms. But we are convinced that he has full sympathies with the Tamil people.

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LANKA

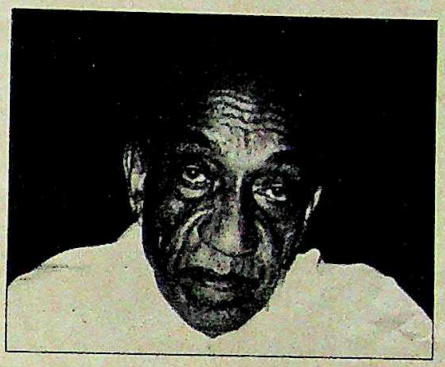
neasy Calm

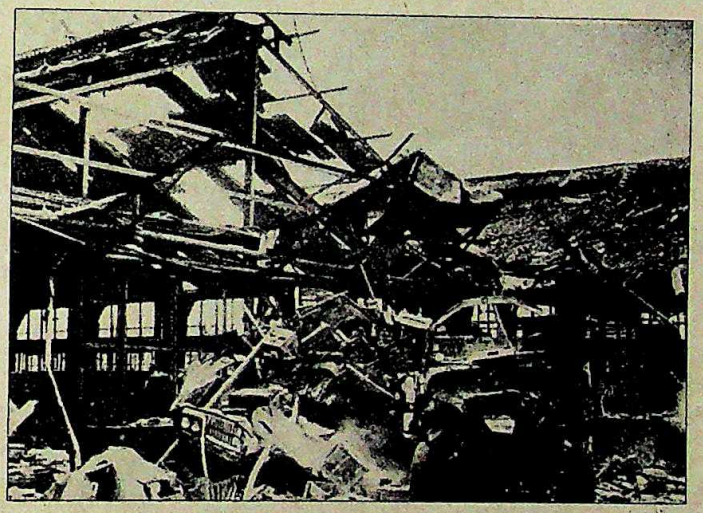
SUDDEN silence has descended on Colombo after five weeks of bombings—bombs in passenger planombs in the Telegraph Office, in s, in shops and in the railyards. And urse, bomb scares almost everywhere nd schoolchildren, office employees, hoppers streaming out into the street nic at the first whiff of a rumour. t least for the duration, the silence is uring though nobody is taking any ces. Army officers are now giving es to the newly-recruited personnel Ministry of Commercial and Indusecurity, itself a recent creation and a of the times. While the apparent to the routine diurnal round is me, a painful truth has gone home. mbo is not London, and is not Belfast. The citi- the predominantly Sine metropolis are not to the luxury of a distant r', nor can the military gists claim the compar- success of a cordon aire between the bloody, t north and east and st of the country.

peration Short-Shrift', -hour operation which into the fifth day, is still ocus of intense debate g the Colombo intelli- a that has lately pro- a growing number of air strategists. That symptomatic of the deeper social ational crisis the so-called 'ethnic ct' has produced. Like foreign policy, ry affairs have become a new, deing concern of a once insular elite did not believe either subject de- much attention in their island se.

routine turnaround of troops in the rn peninsula was the stated objec- 'Operation Short-Shrift', a needcocky choice of code-name, as it out to be. The only safe route in t of Jaffna Fort is by air or sea. So the airstrip and the Karainagar Naval s well as their perimeters had to be d. The Government says this was Yet two facts stand out. First, the e on attack aircraft and helicopter ips. Secondly, the failure of the e motorised column moving up Elephant Pass, the point of entry into the peninsula, to advance more than a few miles.

More significant was the non-military need for the operation and its timing. The bombs in Colombo had done more than kill and maim innocent civilians. It had battered popular morale and seriously damaged the Sri Lankan Government's credibility. A show of force was necessary. Besides, it has always been National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali's consistent position that the Government must negotiate a political settlement, but only "from a position of strength".





Bombed-out factory in Colombo; and (top) Jayewardene: confronting reality

The Chidambaram mission had returned to Delhi and reported a modest advance in the protracted and tortuous India-sponsored negotiations. Surprisingly, there had been greater progress on the far more sensitive issue of land settlement than on law-and-order powers for the proposed councils. And law and order or "internal security" is Athulathmudali's subject, while land policy comes within the purview of Irrigation and Lands Minister Gamini Dissanayke, the other "most likely to succeed" aspirant for presidential office after Prime Minister Premadasa. "It is only my negotiating stance. Nobody puts all his cards on the table especially before people who always ask for more. I am ever ready for reasonable compromise," Athulathmudali told INDIA TODAY.

Scores of left-wing Sinhalese youth have been detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) only to further alienate opposition and radical Sinhalese opinion and earn stinging indictments from Amnesty International and other human rights organisations. The militarisation process has been accompanied by the brutalising of a once fairly tolerant and humane society.

All appeals to western governments for money, arms and moral support have gone unheeded. Finance Minister Ronnie De Mel who has to worry about aid-cuts, a slump in tea, rubber and coconut prices, and rising debt-servicing costs, is an unrelenting critic of soaring defence spending. "Sri Lanka is not militarily important to the US. It is neither Pakistan nor the Philippines. Those who expect US military aid are living in a fool's paradise," he told Parliament last fortnight.

Whether it was the international reaction to the bombing and strafing of Jaffna or Delhi's tough warning or the bombs in Colombo which influenced opinion, the mood is once more for "peace". President Junius Jayewardene responded quickly to a proposal by the opposition People's Party for a resumption of the all-party talks adjourned in late 1984. The Communist Party, a member of the alliance, has supported the move but asked for "preliminary" steps. These include a withdrawal of the compulsory (paid) leave order on 300 Tamil employees in state corporations, a halt to arbitrary arrests and a guarantee that those detained under the PTA would be tried in three months or released (the draconian law permits detention for 18 months without trial).

But in the context of the ethnic conflict, Jayewardene seems to have gauged the popular pulse. He held four meetings spread over three days with Indian High Commissioner Mani Dixit in Colombo last fortnight and has promised to respond quickly to India's request for a new package of "concrete" proposals. Till then, the silence that has enveloped Colombo will continue to be an uneasy one.

—MERVYN DE SILVA in Colombo

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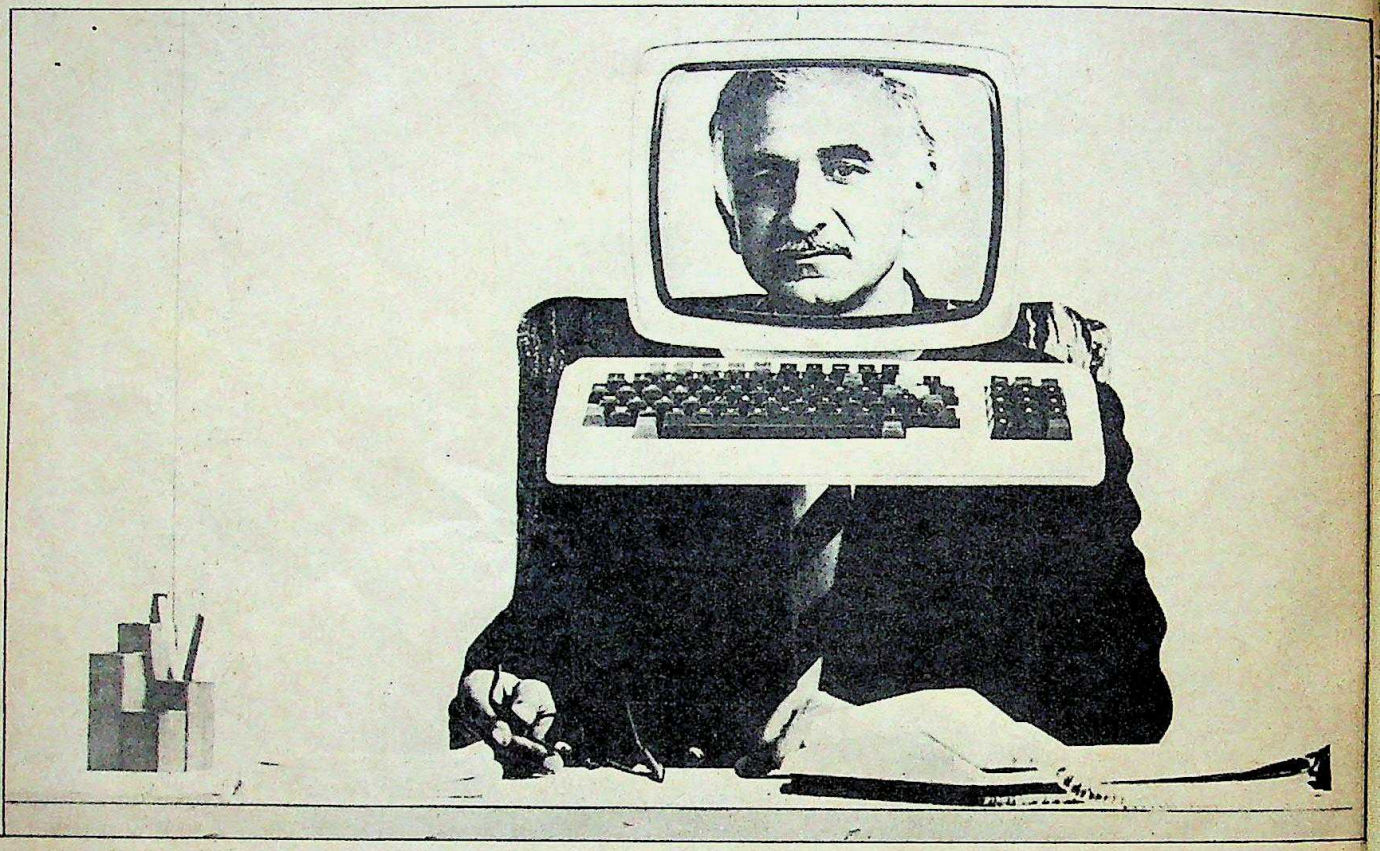
Why today's top-managers must have a head for computers.



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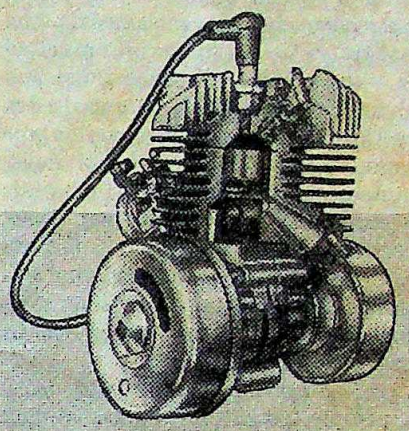

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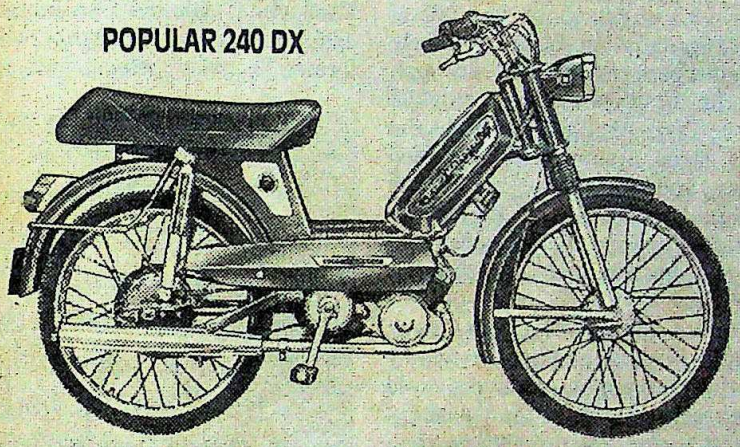

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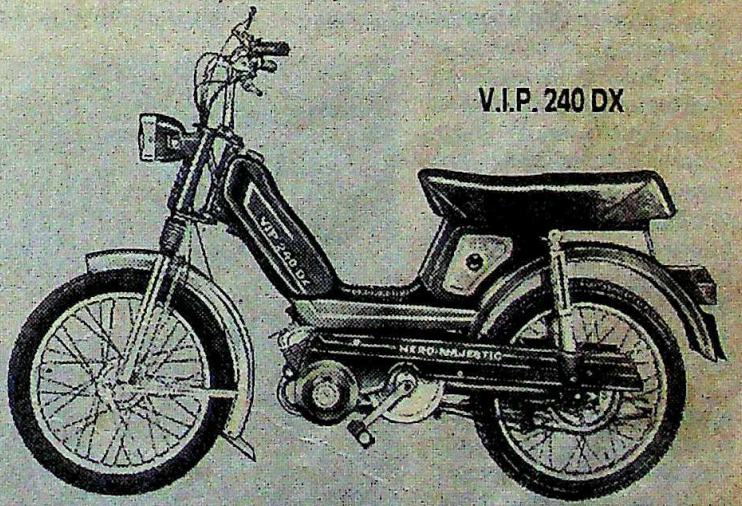

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FARRUKH DHONDY

Mischievous Content

ASIAN fascists given labour cash"—ran the bold headline in London's mass-circulated eveninger, *The Standard*. For the benefit of nonplussed local readers, the paper explained that the "fascists" belonged to the UK branch of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Labour Party councillors were accused in the Afro-Caribbean-Asian magazine programme—*The Bandung File*—of indiscriminate funding running to thousands of pounds. The weekly current affairs programme linked the VHP to the RSS harking back to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and implicated it for stepping up a vicious campaign of riots in India over the past decade.

Indian viewers could be pardoned if they felt that establishing the RSS-VHP link was not exactly rivetting investigative journalism. What the programme proved was that "fascists" were being funded by the deceased Greater London Council (GLC). In its heyday the GLC has, of course, been slated for its prodigal munificence, funding a melange of obscure Asian and Afro-Caribbean organisations, besides lending sturdy support to gay and lesbian causes. Its former overlord, the imperishable and politically ambitious Ken Livingstone, appeared quite bewildered on camera, perhaps shuddering at the thought of having showered his largesse to rapacious Asian Mussolinis. With appropriate contriteness, Livingstone admitted that the fundings were a "mistake" and he and his advisers didn't have much of a clue about these shadowy and largely unknown Asian organisations.

At one stage, the VHP had approached the Independent Broadcasting Authority about the film and threatened to seek an injunction. However, the programme went ahead. VHP organisers seemed apoplectic when documentary montage of Indira Gandhi's funeral were shown with the organisation being squarely blamed for communal riots in India. In a press statement, they stated: "After viewing the programme ... a wave of outrage and anger has swept through the entire Hindu society. This is a callous attempt to malign a section of the community who are constantly working for better relationship with different faiths and races." Although not every UK-based Hindu was smouldering in a towering rage over a programme that revealed very little which was pathbreaking news except to highlight the GLC funding, there seemed to be considerable resentment that it was so one-sided. Said one official: "Does it not look ridiculous, you talk of Asian fascists and what you see are elderly Hindu ladies performing *puja*?" Although one of the series' producers, erstwhile Trotskyite Tariq Ali, had stated that the VHP was given a chance to refute the allegations and that they had declined the invitation, the officials of the Hindu organisation insisted that the offer was withdrawn by Channel-4 at the last minute.

It did seem odd, however, that instead of opting for a robust investigative style by which the programme producers could have squarely confronted the VHP about its "fascist tendencies" or unsparing bigotry or its alleged incendiary role as provocateurs in communal riots in India, they had approached the organisation stating that the programme would focus on Hindus in the UK and how they had adapted themselves socially and culturally to life in Britain.

The organisation now says that it will work hard to limit the "damage" done to them. The VHP came to Britain 17 years ago, has a modest membership of 4,000 families and has branches in Bolton, Birmingham, Leicester, Northampton, Hounslow, Wembley, Croydon, Newham, Ilford, Manchester and Southampton.

Although Ali is the series' producer and overall responsibility for the programme lay with Farrukh Dhondy, a Pune-born Parsi who is Channel-4's commissioning editor in charge of ethnic programmes. A former "activist" who helped organis

The programme focused on the alleged incendiary role of the VHP when the producers had, in fact, stated that they would portray how Hindus in UK had adapted themselves socially to life in Britain.

Children at VHP function in Newham

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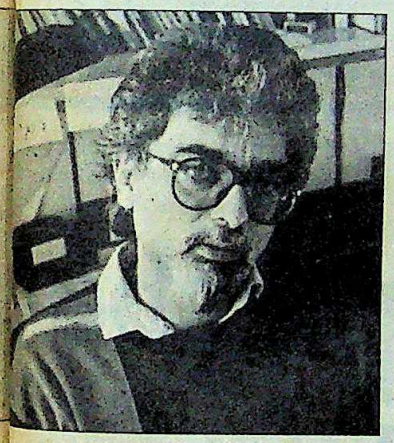
ladeshi squats during the '70s, dy was not limiting his activities to *andung File*—he was busy creating a r rumpus elsewhere with his four- "sociological thriller" on BBC-2, *The of the Ghetto*.

hetto tells the tale of a white Robin who bludgeons boarding houses for en Bengali families to squat whilst hing wits with a serpentine Bangla- businessman. It has been variously ibed as a sort of east-enders with ns (although Bengalis have very to do with turbans) or a white knight rown ghetto. Local press critics have d up its "authenticity" and Dhondy newest darling of this usually une-bor ureous lot.

hetto is produced by Stephen Gilbert

Dhondy: creating a rumpus



who has gained a measure of notoriety when the BBC banned his play when one of its props showed a penis pickling in a jar. It is stylishly directed by Roy Battersby (formerly of the Workers Revolutionary Party), splattered with pieces of hard-edged dialogue and jazzed up by hard-driving music—guitars wailing out *Lonesome Man Blues*—rather than Rabindra Sangeet for London's squalid Bricklane Bengalis. Says Dhondy: "When there is a vacuum of power, all manner of indiscriminate forces like businessmen, adventurers, opportunists, do-gooders, rush in to fill it and subsequently fight each other." The principal adversarial roles are played with a degree of tautness—by Tim Roth as the anarchist white leader of the local squatocracy and Zia Mohyeddin, superb as the supple and mawky intriguer.

ROTH'S Mathew is straight out of Bombay's commercial films: champion of dispossessed Asians, he utilises his fist better than his brains—a white Amitabh Bachchan from *Deewar* set in the fetid purlieus of London's East End, inherited by Bengalis from the Jews and the Huguenots.

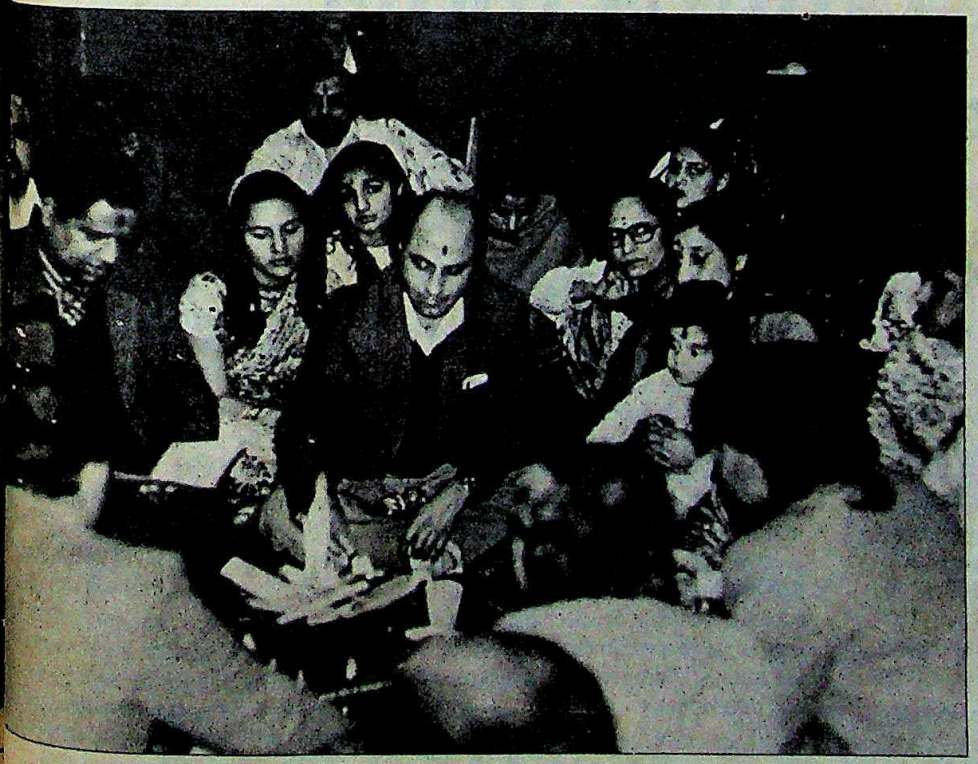
But after an impressive start, the rest of the series is so cumbrous that even the nimble editing, ingenious camerawork and the voluptuous bluesy music cannot camouflage its defects which are pretty easy to come by. The sardonic humour gives way to some wooden, turgid dialogue. Many of the supporting characters look and sound phony despite Dhondy's best efforts to weave in sociological home truths—rebellion in Islamic schools, loopy Asian businessmen laundering cash in a racket in illegal immigrants and almost predictably, the villainous GLC and labour councils. Dhondy very emphatically says that he is against the "gerrymandering betrayals" of the working class and labour movement by the Labour Party.

As a commissioning editor, Dhondy had scrapped minority programmes like *Eastern Eye* and *Black on Black* for their uninspiring content. He would like programmes such as *The Bandung File* to be "mischief" all the way. The one on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad certainly got up to it, though perhaps not with entirely happy results. *Ghetto* too got into "mischief" in a way Dhondy might not have expected: praised by English critics, but fiercely lambasted by many hurt and upset East End Bengalis. The Federation of Bangladeshi Youth Organisations (FBYO) sent letters to Britain's ethnic press in which it challenged *Ghetto*'s pretensions to realism. Mincing no words, it bluntly said: "The Bengali speech in the film, as an example, was ludicrous in its non-resemblance to any comprehensible variation of the language spoken in greater Bengal."

The FBYO went on to accuse Dhondy for "persistently" kicking the backs "he rode on to get where he is". It concluded that this was hardly surprising "since the film, far from posing a challenge to the racist inclinations of the media, actually reinforces them. Such loyalty, of course, needs to be adequately rewarded". Dhondy had indeed received congratulatory thumps-on-the-back from the English press for *Ghetto*'s so-called abrasive realism. But east London's Bengalis say the series is not set in the East End: it is dreamed up in some hallucinatory Ruritania. Despite the carping in some quarters over *Ghetto* or *The Bandung File* however, reviews by and large have been laudatory and full of praise. And it seems quite unlikely that Dhondy has said goodbye to airing more programmes brimming over with "mischief" content.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

Havan during Makar Sankranti



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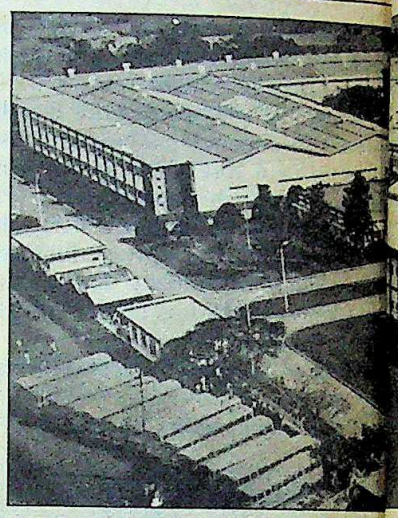

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In fact, Philips India has introduced mor firsts than any other company in the industr

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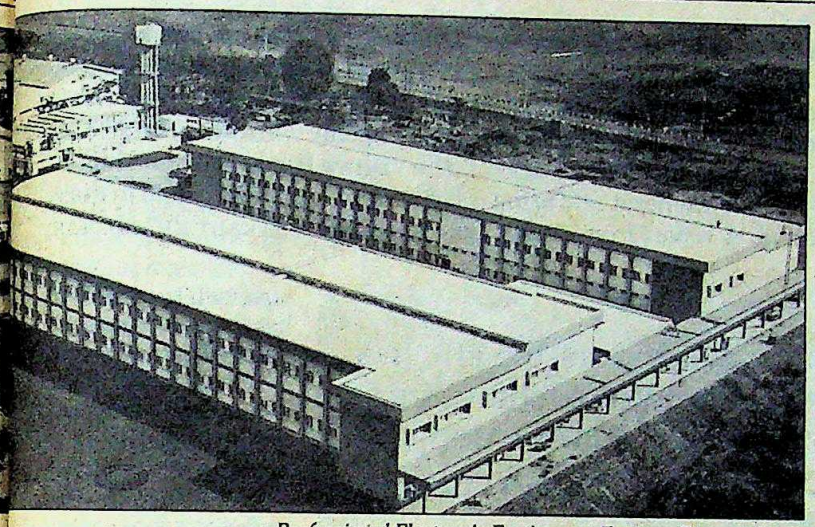

Professional Electronic Equipment Factory, Pimpri, Pune.

Today, the commitments of the Company are wide-ranging: in terms of its investments in people, technologies, plant and machinery, tool rooms and R&D.

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tners in Progress

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RAJASTHAN

Conversion Convulsions

The Meherats form a unique community of Rajput Muslims. Scattered along various districts in Udaipur and Ajmer they claim direct descent from the family of Prithviraj Chauhan. For nearly 500 years—since they were converted to Islam—the community has been a shining example of the oft-repeated slogan 'Unity in Diversity'. They worship in the Islamic way but they also pray to Hindu gods and goddesses and they intermarry openly with other Hindu Rajput clans. But this Shangrila of religious tolerance is now undergoing an upheaval. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has launched a massive and well-organised drive to reconvert the Meherat and bring them back into the Hindu fold in mass ceremonies. This has led to new tensions and hatred. A report from Senior Correspondent SREEKANT KHANDEKAR:

ONE EVENING last fortnight, darkness fell on village Shekhawas, on the northern tip of Udaipur district, in a way it never had. Birds chirped as they settled down for the night, but for furlongs around, their sounds were drowned out by two loudspeakers which blared Marwari bhajans and folk songs.

> **Over the last five years, the VHP has been bringing the Meherat into the Hindu fold. 40,000 Meherat, Muslims have reconverted.**

Men scurried about in the hamlet called Baba Ram Deoji Ki Badiya, laying durries and installing a generator which lit up eight dimly-glowing bulbs—a rarity in the village. As several hundred villagers gathered, the workers erected a tiny podium on which was placed a portrait of Prithviraj Chauhan.

The banners were revealing: 'Unity in Diversity', 'Conversions are a plot to divide the Nation', 'Declare with pride we are Hindus'. And the one that dominated the stage read: Vishwa Hindu Parishad Pariwartan Samaroha (VHP reconversion ceremony).

There was an inordinate delay in the arrival of the main speakers but the audience of about 500 did not complain. The music was frequently interrupted by announcements that counselled the villagers to remain patient. Finally at 10.30, when office-bearers of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) arrived, the generator failed, plunging the assembly into darkness. But only briefly was this humble machine to halt the majestic progress of an ancient religion in central Rajasthan.

The will of the determined VHP is directed at an extraordinary community which lives largely in Ajmer district but spills into Udaipur, Pali and Bhilwara. The roughly three-lakh-strong Meherat take pride in being descendants of Prithviraj Chauhan. There are various versions of when and how they left Hinduism for Islam. Some say this happened 700 years ago, while others claim that mass conversions took place barely 300 years ago.

Local history has it that faced with a boycott by other Rajput clans, many of them returned to the Hindu fold within a few decades and they are now called the Rawat Rajputs. Th

Meherat conversions in Shekhawas

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erat, the Kathat and the Cheeta, ever, stayed on but only just about. Cheeta take Islam seriously. But the erat, who include the sub-group at, present the strange picture of a munity that is confused about its ry. Their dilemma came through in 971 and 1981 census when most of declared their religion to be herat", not Islam and certainly not luism.

Until quite recently, the Meherat cele- ed Muslim as well as Hindu festivals. ing in their dress gave any evidence eir religious practices: al- all the men wore dhotis and as while women stuck to the tional dress common to all. true that the males were mcised, the dead were bur- nd marriage was by *nikaah*. ew of them wore beards or d mosques or knew their ous texts. They prayed in- stead to saints Tejaji and Baba Ram Deoji. Even if they saw the contradictions, it did not bother them.

But easily the most striking feature was the remarkable communal harmony that prevailed, untouched by the religious fanaticism that ruled elsewhere in the country. For instance, Rawat and Meherat Rajputs, with different religious attitudes, intermarried frequently, deciding individually on the *nikaah* or the *agni saakshi*. Sometimes, brothers within a single family professed different religions but no tensions arose.

Symbols of the new frenetic religious activity are the more than 50 temples and mosques that have sprung up over the past five years.

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIYAR

But things have been changing dramatically. Over the last five years, almost unnoticed, the VHP has been carrying out its plan of bringing the Meherat into the Hindu fold. Going by VHP figures, an incredible 40,000 Meherat have been brought back into the Hindu fold. The Ajmer police, however, put the number at 10,000 and the truth lies somewhere in between these exaggerated and underplayed extremes. It is, in any case, the most ambitious attempt to extend the boundaries of Hinduism in recent times.

This is not the first time that an effort has been made to draw them to Hinduism. In the late '40s and early '50s, the Arya Samaj, assisted by the former ruler of Jodhpur, made a concerted effort, but it soon petered out. The VHP appeared on the scene in the late '70s. According to Uma Shankar Sharma, a *pracharak* of the RSS who is spearheading the VHP's work in the area, the impetus for "pariwartan" came from the Meenakshipuram conversions. Says Sharma: "We believe that the Meherat are basically Hindus who have strayed now observe some objectionable practices. It is our duty to correct this."

BUT at what cost? Last year, a man was killed in a fight between supporters of Islam and Hinduism in a village in Pali district over whether an old lady should be buried or cremated. And early this year, in another village, prohibitory orders were enforced because the two communities came close to blows over the rights on a village well. These may well be early indicators of future tensions.

Says Shafi Mohammad, headmaster of a Roopnagar school and secretary of the Rajasthan Cheeta Meherat (Kathat) Sabha: "The VHP's drive is compelling people to desert the middle-of-the-road path. It is giving rise to polarisation within the community. People within the community are too close to indulge in rioting but outsiders can ultimately provoke them. The whole area is sadly turning into a heap of gunpowder."

According to Ram Singh, a VHP worker of Surajpura village in Ajmer district, the process of persuasion has taken several months and it involves *kirtans* and meetings in which the history of the Meherat is narrated. Says Ram Singh: "We find that the Meherat are more willing to come to Hinduism than they were five years ago. But there is also greater tension than before."

ollection, Haridwar

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Before conversion, villagers are made to sign a joint letter addressed to the VHP which invariably says that the villagers want to give up practices associated with Islam at a ceremony in which they will swear to adhere to "pure Kshatriya religion". The letter always ends with a request to the VHP to make arrangements and screen films on Prithviraj Chauhan and Baba Ram Deoji. A letter of request of this kind is the VHP's way of ensuring that the conversion ceremony is seen as purely voluntary.

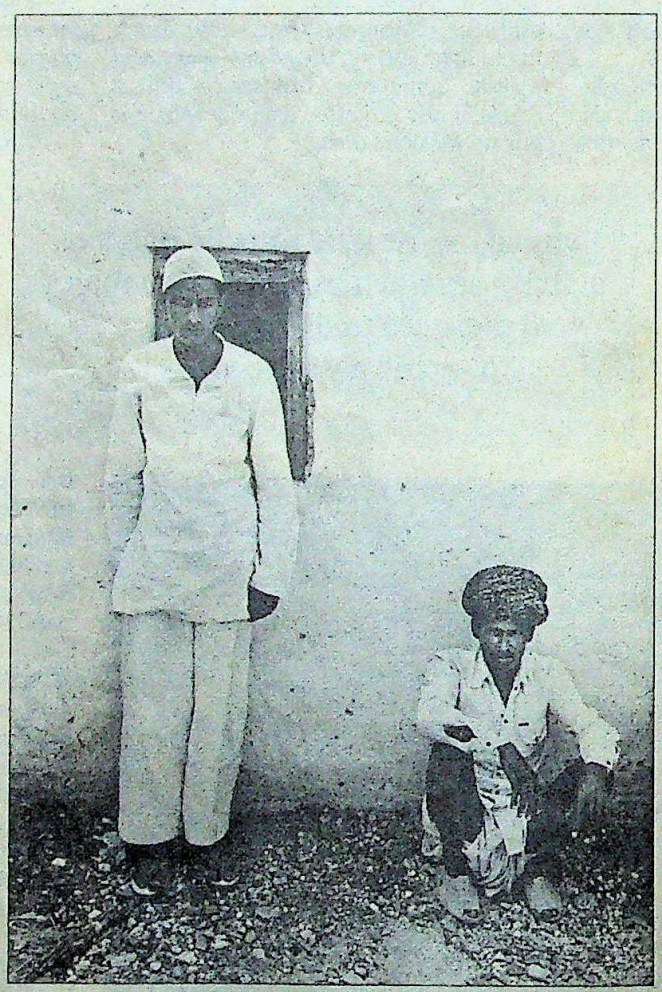
The key to the ceremony, it would seem, is these films, since the Meherat revere the two personages. In between reels of the films, speeches are made and an important one made by the Rawat Rajput Sabha is that so long as the fresh converts strictly follow Hindu traditions, give up circumcision, *nikaah*, visiting mosques and eating halal meat and burial, they will be accepted as brothers. This speech is particularly vital because the converts need to be assured that they will be accepted in Hinduism's intricate caste and subcaste heirarchy. Indeed, the VHP has been working among leaders of the Rajput subgroups, persuading them to accept the new Hindus.

The actual conversion involves a 30-minute-long *havan* in which *shlokas* to Lord Ganesh are recited along with the Gayatri Mantra. The men are given new towels and the women blouse pieces, and a sacred thread is tied around the men's wrists. It ends with a VHP worker asking: "*Hum kaun hain* (Who are we)?" And the villagers replying in chorus: "*Hum Hindu hain* (We are Hindus)."

The activities of the VHP have gone beyond just ceremony. The organisation runs about 30 balwadis, three small ayurvedic dispensaries, and two small hostels for boys at Masuda and Beawar. Symbols of the new frenetic religious activity are the more than 50 temples and mosques that have sprung up in this area over the past five years. This, in a region where for decades these places have been in neglect and ruin.

The VHP's aggressive work has had an adverse reaction too. It has forced the Meherat to closely question their mixed religious beliefs. Their search for religious identity has also driven thousands of them to Islam.

This has come as a boon to Muslim religious organisations which found it hard in the past to gain a foothold in this region. Organisations like the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind and the Jamaat-e-Islami have now turned active, some because they want to spread the message of Islam, others because they see an excellent opportunity to make a political base for themselves. As Shafi Mohammad smiles and says: "The VHP has helped us unwittingly."



Shafi (left) and Sultan, Meherat muslims from Roopnagar: social tensions

Predictably, allegations about the inflow of foreign funds are made and just as quickly denied. What is true is that these Muslim organisations do send their representatives to the area more often now than before. More importantly, several dozen Maulvis have moved into mosques from various parts of the country. The villagers raise contributions to both build mosques and to maintain the Maulvis, and the rest is made up by these organisations. Neither the Hindus nor the Muslims are bothered normally to seek the district administration's permission for such construction.

In Suhawa village, for instance, a mosque is being constructed three years after the VHP held a conversion ceremony there. Supervising the building of it, Amanullah says that he and his elder brother, who is the Maulvi, moved to the village about two years ago. It is indicative of the open-mindedness in the community that the mason working on the mosque is Uday Singh who embraced Hinduism just three years ago. He sees no conflict and grins: "It has fallen on the shoulders of the Meherat to bear the responsibility of both religions." By way of testimony stands the house of Imanuddin nearby. On the walls are emblazoned not only the Islamic auspicious number 786 and the star and crescent, but also a Hindu swastika.

Superintendent of Police for Ajmer district J.P. Mishra finds nothing alarming about the activities of these religious organisations. He says: "If people voluntarily want to accept a particular religion, what can we do? As long as these organisations work overtly and covertly, and do not preach hatred, there is nothing to worry about."

Mishra may not want to admit it, but there can be no doubt that social tensions are gradually rising. For instance, the relationship between villagers of Muslim-dominated Roopnagar and neighbouring Kolpura where many conversions took place have been frozen into polite formality.

Five years, after all, is just a fraction of a moment in the life of a religion. What the future holds will be decided by religious organisations, many of which are known to have used local conflicts to introduce a religious bias. And from there to violence is but a short step. The Meherat have displayed refreshing sanity so far, but if the current pattern of affairs continues, it cannot be taken for granted forever.

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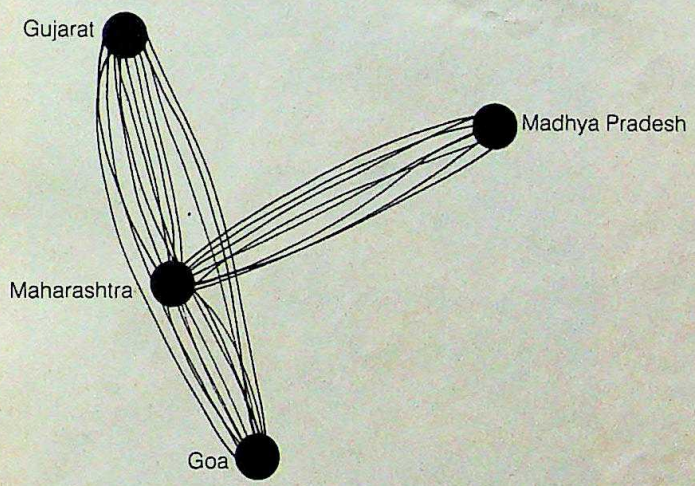

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City View

THE NEW LANDSCAPE
by CHARLES CORREA
The Book Society of India, Bombay
Price: Rs 65; Pages: 135

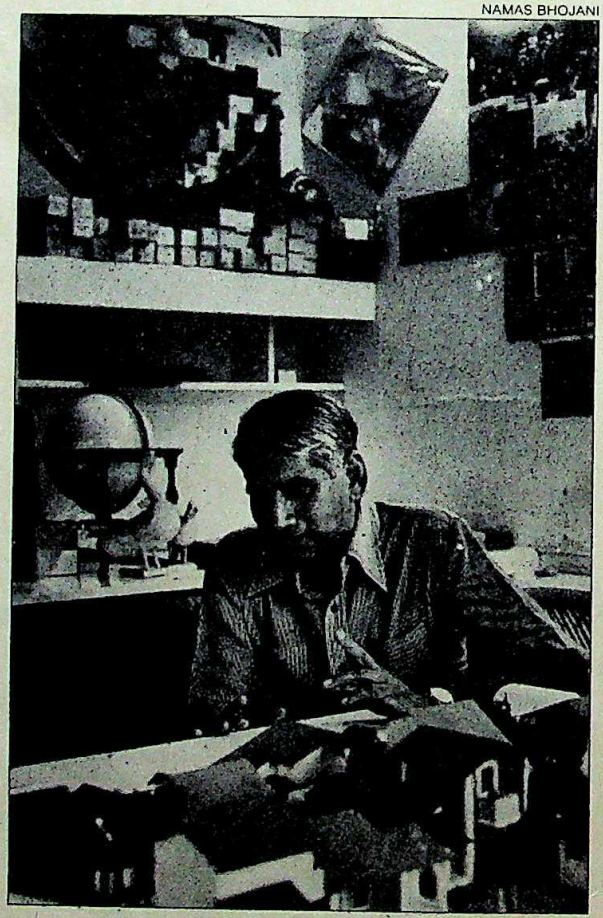
CHARLES Correa is known, both here and abroad, mainly as an architect. But his book shows that his heart lies in city planning. *The New Landscape* is an impassioned plea to abandon grandiose concepts of planning based on preconceptions of what cities ought to look like, which are borrowed from the industrialised countries of the "north", and to design not just cities but homes that meet the needs and suit the pockets of the people who will live in them. The message of the book is thus intensely human. In fact, this lucidly-written and brilliantly-illustrated book is suffused with a concern for human beings and the quality of their lives.

At the core of the author's thesis lies the conviction that each civilisation, each society, has already evolved not only the architecture, but also the patterns of urban development that most closely suit its climate, topography, economic activity, family relations and social habits. Thus the first necessary requirement in a town planner is humility. He must not only discard most of his "western" preconceptions (and this means most of what he has studied in schools of planning and architecture), but must study how people actually lived and still live in the traditional parts of his society. Above all, he must study how they designed their houses, how they built them, with what they built them, and how closely they grouped them.

The author's views on this subject bear the strong impress of the thinking of the late Constantinos Doxiadis, founder of the Institute of Ekistics in Athens, and perhaps the greatest town planner of our times. Like him, Correa believes that cities cannot, in the final analysis, be planned. They grow organically out of the needs of the people, and of those who are drawn to them. Since these needs are social—inasmuch as they are born of man's relationship with other men—cities become the personification of the societies that have built them.

From this there emerges a profoundly different concept of the function of the town planner. This is not to police the growth of a city but to guide it, not to deny people the right to build a home, open a shop or set up a factory, but to suggest when they may do so to their own greater advantage. Such a town planner will plan for small decentralised communities, not vast centralised cities; he will seek to shift employment where people live, and not concentrate it in specified "business" or industrial locations, forcing people to travel to them. In sum, wherever possible, he will allow natural growth to proceed unhindered.

NAMAS BHOJANI



Correa: human concerns

The author concedes, albeit implicitly, that the modern city cannot be a carbon copy of the cities of antiquity. Three major changes have upset the delicate balances between town and country which existed before: the industrial revolution, the revolution in transport and the revolution in health. Each of these has put limits to natural, unplanned growth, that must be reorganised. The first has created hazardous processes, materials and wastes that make it necessary to separate the living areas from the factories. The second has made it possible to travel 50 km by a suburban train in the same time as it took people of ancient Athens to walk or ride 3 km to work. This has expanded the physical limits of the city and laid the foundations of the megapoli of 15 and 20 million inhabitants that are springing up everywhere. And the third has created a rate of urban population growth that was never known before.

Despite this, the author argues, the essence of the planners' task has not changed because the needs and aspirations of the people who live in, and move to, cities have not changed. The challenge before him is to understand these and to ensure their fulfilment in the changed circumstances in which city growth is taking place today.

While there is a conceptual framework underlying Correa's book, his concern is not to elaborate on this. Instead, he has chosen to give a host of specific examples, leaving the reader to draw the general lessons implicit in them. In this he is aided by a remarkable choice of photographs and illustrations. From these as much as from his spare and direct text, there emerge some of his basic prescriptions for planners.

Lastly, it is necessary to note what Correa's book does not do. *The New Landscape* does not try to tackle the central problem that third world governments face—which is how to make shelter affordable to the poor. Roughly half the cost of a home is accounted for by land. Another half of the balance is attributable to the provision of services. Bringing these within the reach of the poor is possible but not easy. In fact, in scores of projects throughout the world, these costs have been brought down or are being brought down through the use of new technologies, simple materials and new methods of financing. Correa's book offers a valuable insight into how the problem of urbanisation and shelter can be tackled, but it does not provide a complete answer.

—PREM SHANKER JHA

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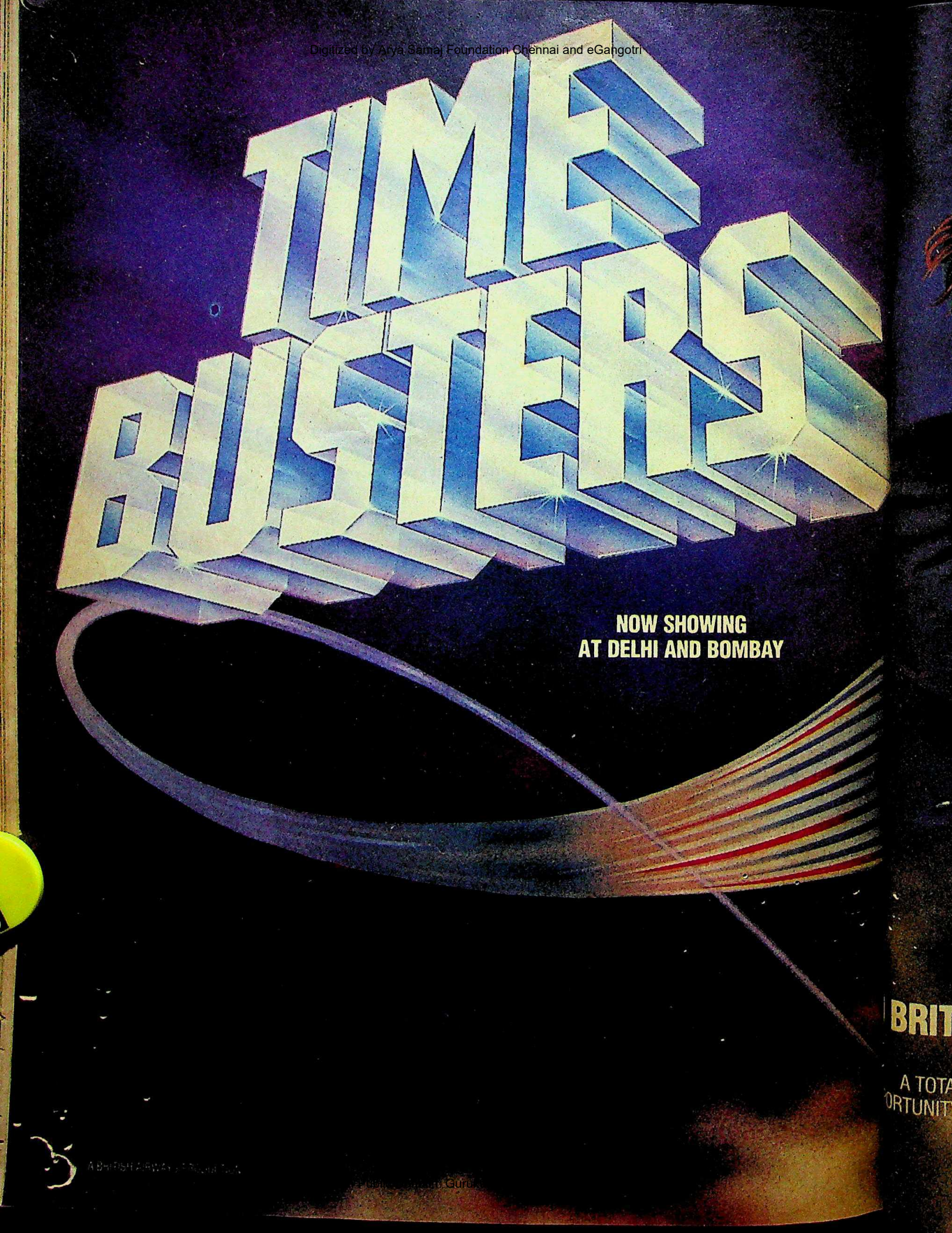

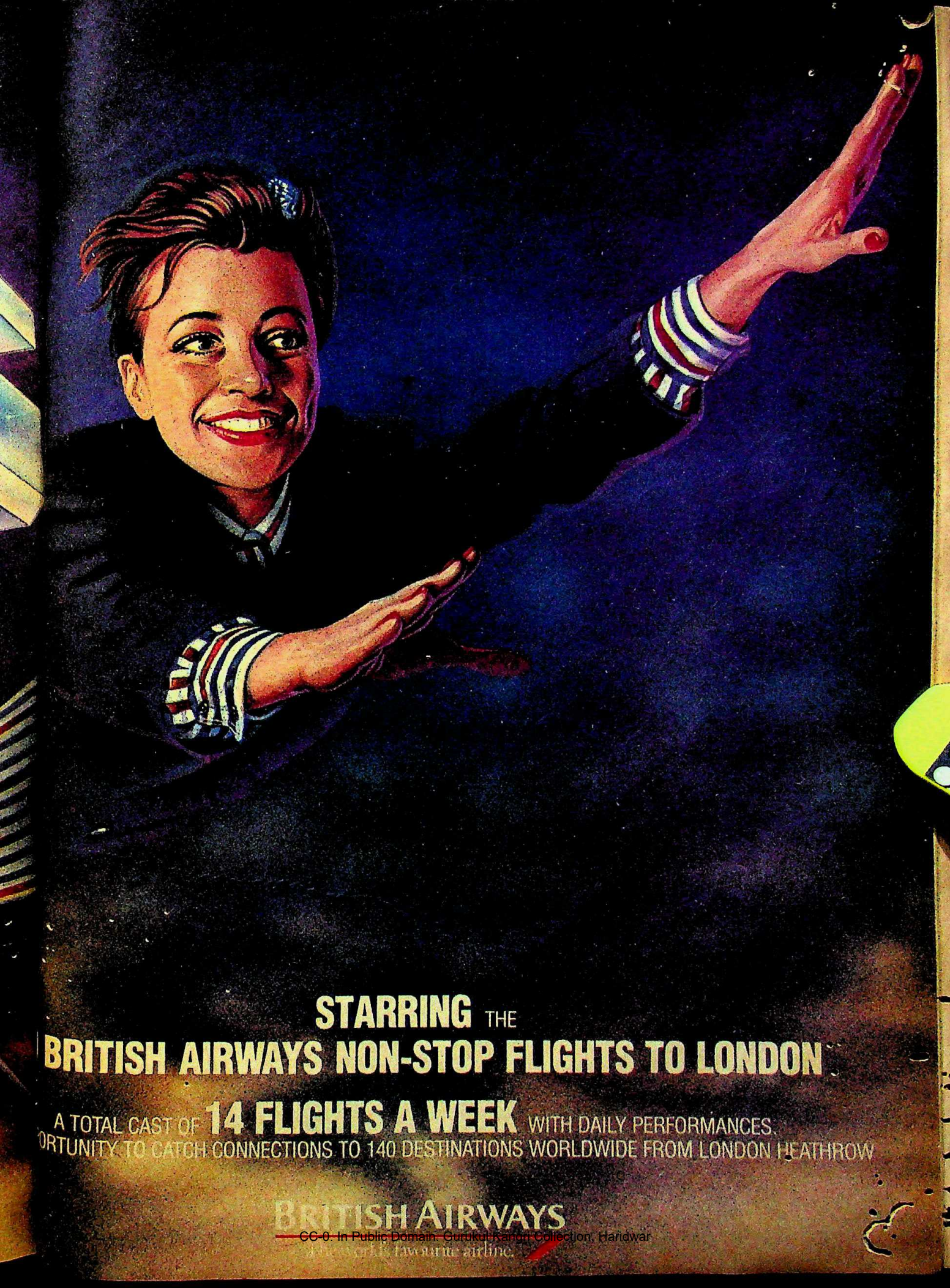

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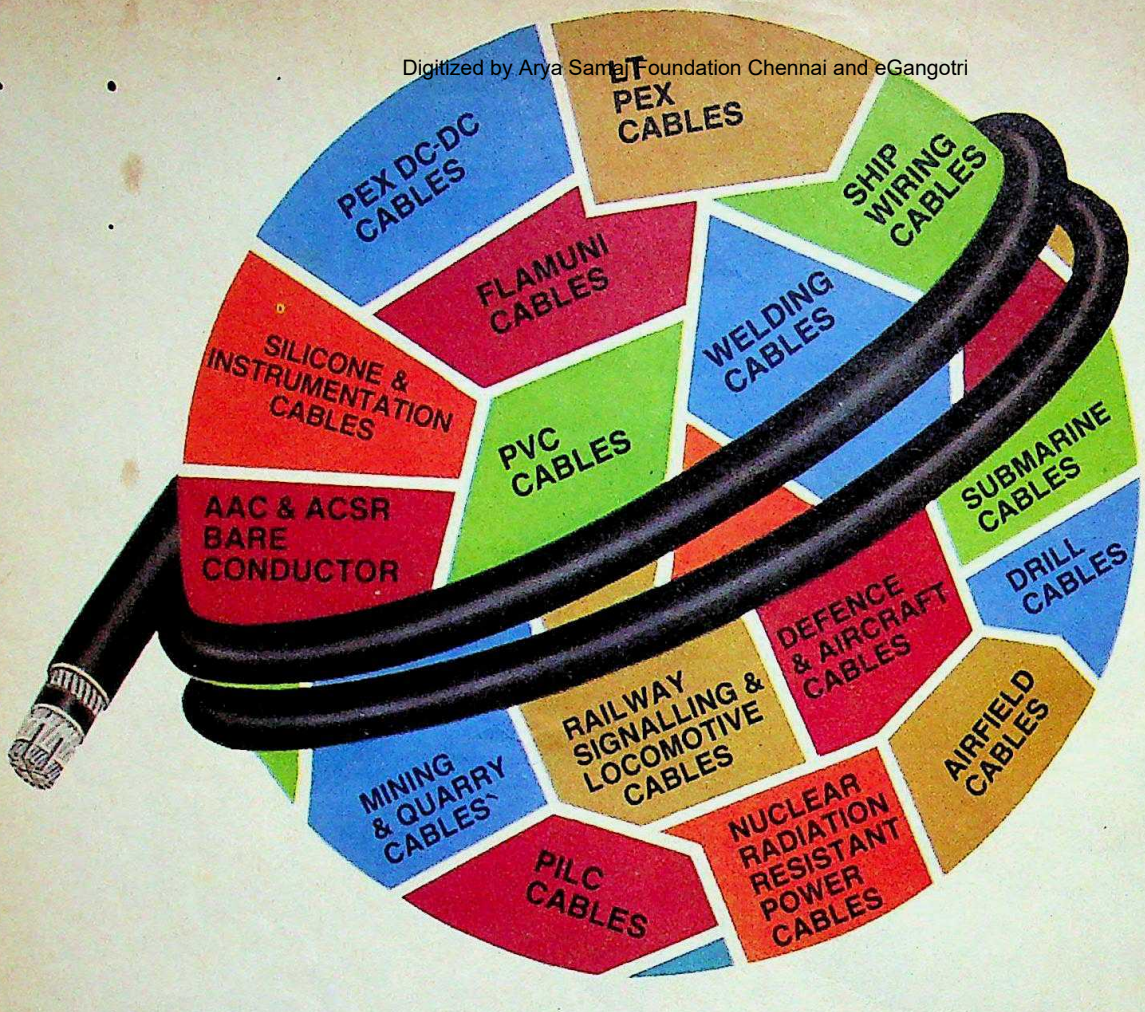

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TAGORE

Copyright Duel

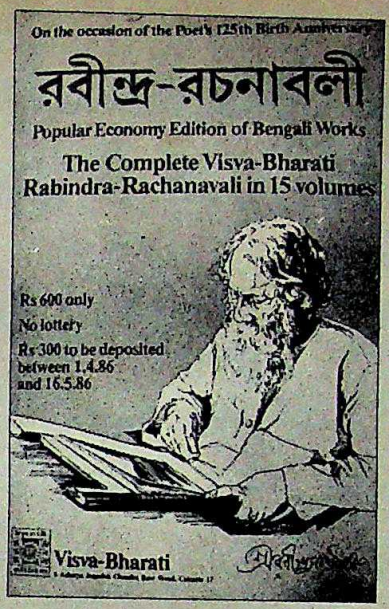
NOBEL laureate Rabindranath Tagore's 125th birth anniversary saw the bard's fans, starting with West Bengal's Marxist rulers, vie with one another in paying him homage. But the glittering functions organised in memory of the man only underscored a vital point—the lamentable lack of effort at popularising his written works. And critics point the accusing finger at Visva Bharati University, the sole copyright holder of his works, for the lapse.

Ironically, the university which has not even bothered to ensure that all of Tagore's works are available in print, is now lobbying to secure an extension of its sole copyright status which expires on December 31, 1991. The only concession made for the anniversary celebrations was the belated announcement that reprints of its 15-volume *Rabindra Rachanabali* (collected works), would be available for Rs 600, payable in advance. At the same time, its better produced and much-more-sought-after 29-volume *Rachanabali* has as many as 10 volumes out of print. The university is also not allowing private publishers to bring out any commemorative books incorporating material from Tagore's writings.

"There is absolutely no justification for an extension of the copyright period considering that Tagore's books, including textbooks are in short supply," raged Dadal Bose of Ananda Publishers, Calcutta's largest private publishing house. As he pointed out: "Visva Bharati has done nothing to ensure that Tagore enjoys more popular readership." He is particularly incensed that the university rejected their proposal to print 100 select poems to be chosen by Sahitya Akademi winner Sunil Ganguly.

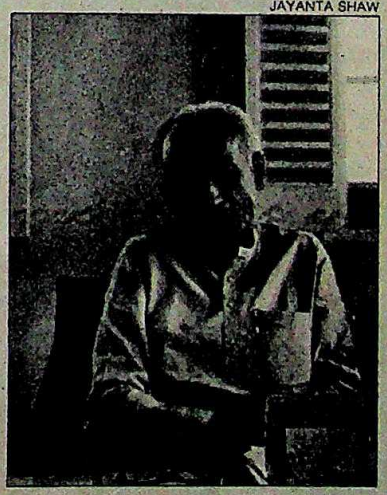
Earlier, the university had turned down a proposal by Ananda Publishers for bringing out the scripts of three Satyajit Ray films based on Tagore's novels—*Ghare Baire*, *Teen Kanya* and *Charulata*. Bose also claims that they are holding onto the copyrights of many important Tagore works without publishing them. A controversial biography of the poet by Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay *Rabindra Jiban Katha*, was released only after two years of bitter wrangling.

The most devastating criticism of the university is that its publications are not always the most authentic or complete.



Tagore's birth anniversary underscored the lack of effort at popularising his written works. Critics point the accusing finger at Viswa Bharati University.

JAYANTA SHAW



Visva Bharati's Bhaumik

A prominent scholar and member of the university's publications committee says: "The so-called complete works being produced is not actually complete and does not contain significant portions of his political writings, lyrics and correspondence."

On the other hand, the state Government's edition of the collected works is a re-edited version containing all the material put together after Tagore's death in 1941. To top it all, the government edition costs just Rs 360 for 16 volumes compared to the university's Rs 600. Not surprisingly, all 50,000 copies being published by the Government have been booked in advance.

But all such allegations are dismissed by the university as the outpourings of private publishers out to make a fast buck. Said Visva Bharati's Publications Director J. Bhaumik: "We are interested in retaining the copyright after the statutory period not just for financial reasons. We are concerned about maintaining the purity of Rabindranath's works." He avers that private publishers, in their zeal to make money, cannot, be relied upon to bring out correct editions. "I am not saying that they will not bring out good editions but given the poor standard of publishing in this country, there is no guarantee," he adds.

The university is now frenetically lobbying for an extension of its copyright by invoking a UNESCO proposal for special copyright status to authors of national status. "Countries like Denmark, Brazil, Algeria, the GDR and Norway have already acted upon the UNESCO proposal and extended the copyright of their national authors," says Bhaumik. The only hitch with the UNESCO proposal is that the copyright, if extended, would have to be vested with the Government.

This might be difficult to accomplish since a special bill would have to be passed by Parliament. "Such a move would make a mockery of the Copyright Act. India cannot do it being a signatory to the Berne Convention of Copyrights," contended Bose. And reports that the university's influential Vice-Chancellor Professor Nemai Sadhan Bose is lobbying, has dismayed private publishers who have vowed to go to court if the university succeeds. The wrangling is because Tagore is perhaps one of the most lucrative of authors.

Visva Bharati's sales amounted to Rs 68 lakh in 1984-'85. In the same year, Tagore's 12 novels have sold about 1.14 million copies, making him by far the highest-selling Indian author. His collected works has sold over four lakh copies and demand remains unfulfilled. The Government's 50,000 copies was lapped up in a few weeks. That is, of course, the real reason why Visva Bharati's dog-in-the-manger attitude is causing such literary heartburn.

—INDRANIL BANERJIE

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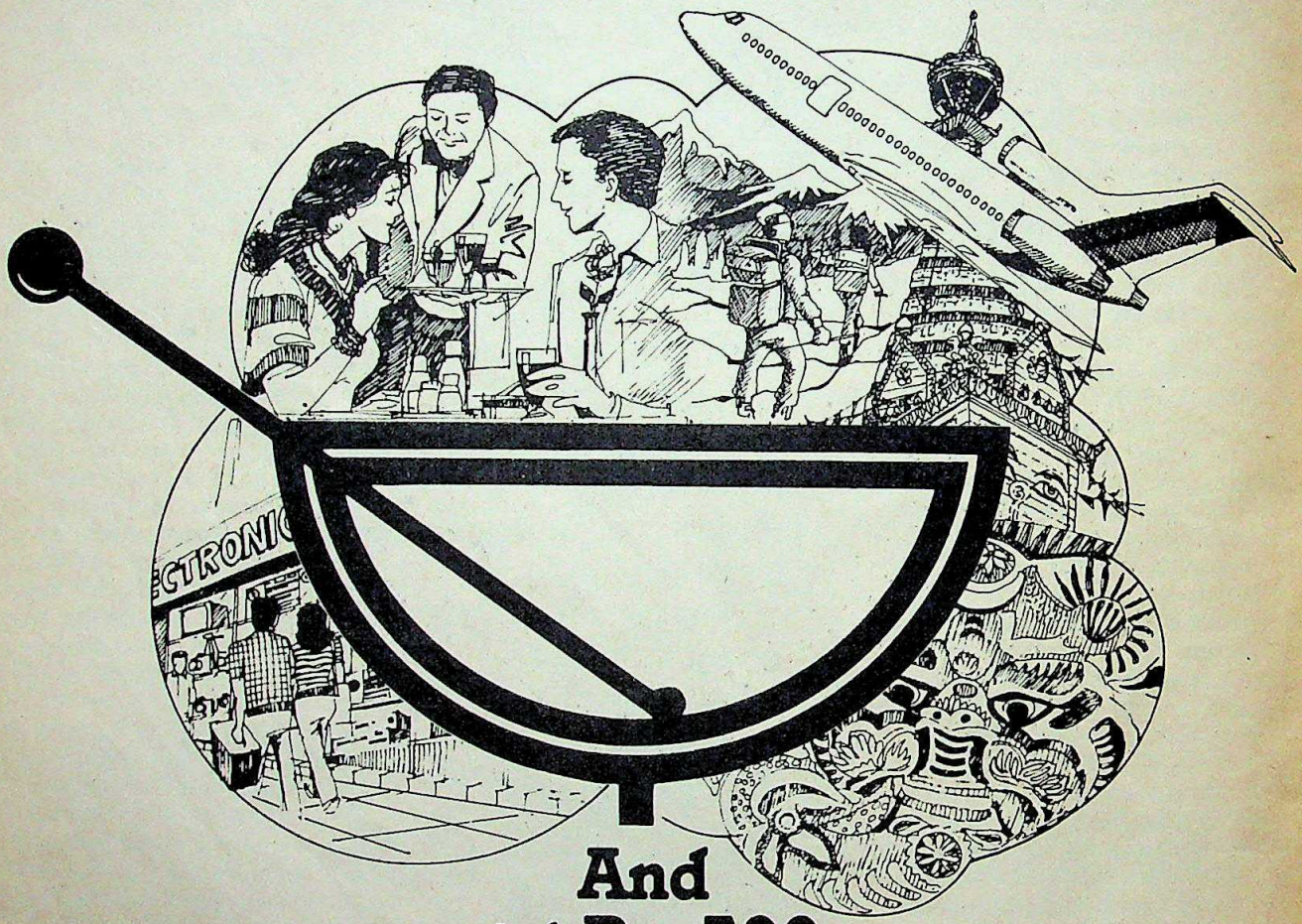

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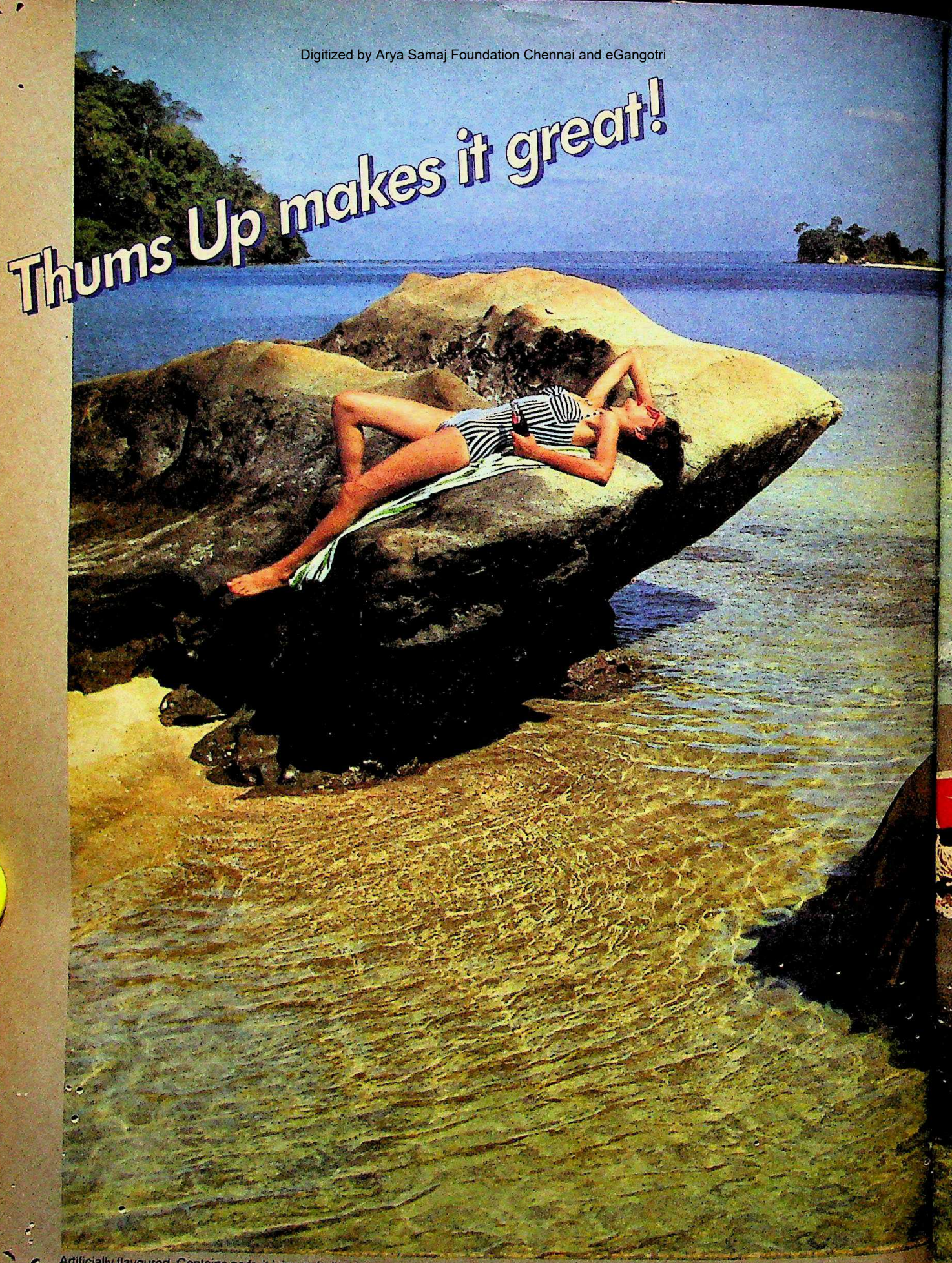

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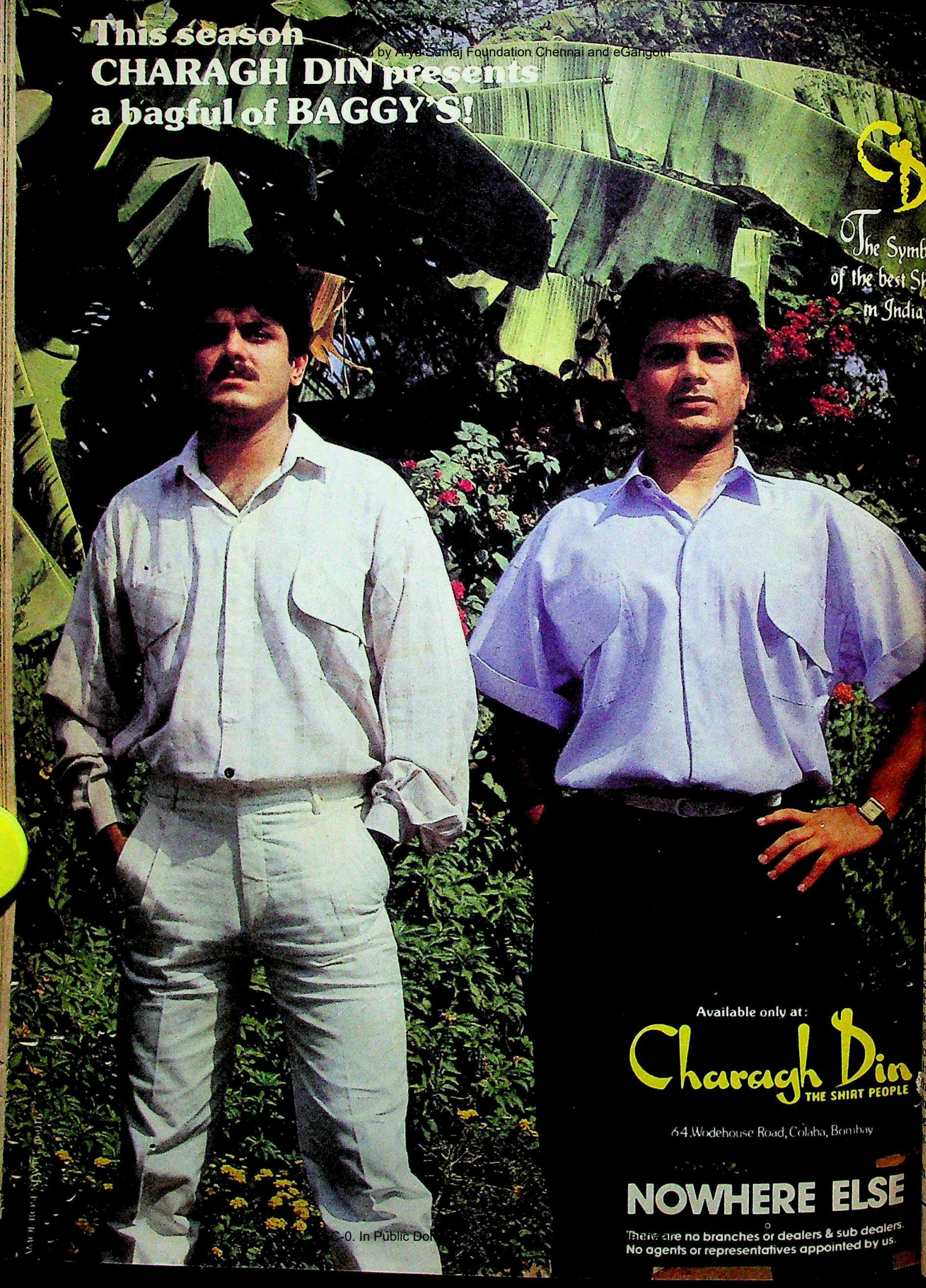

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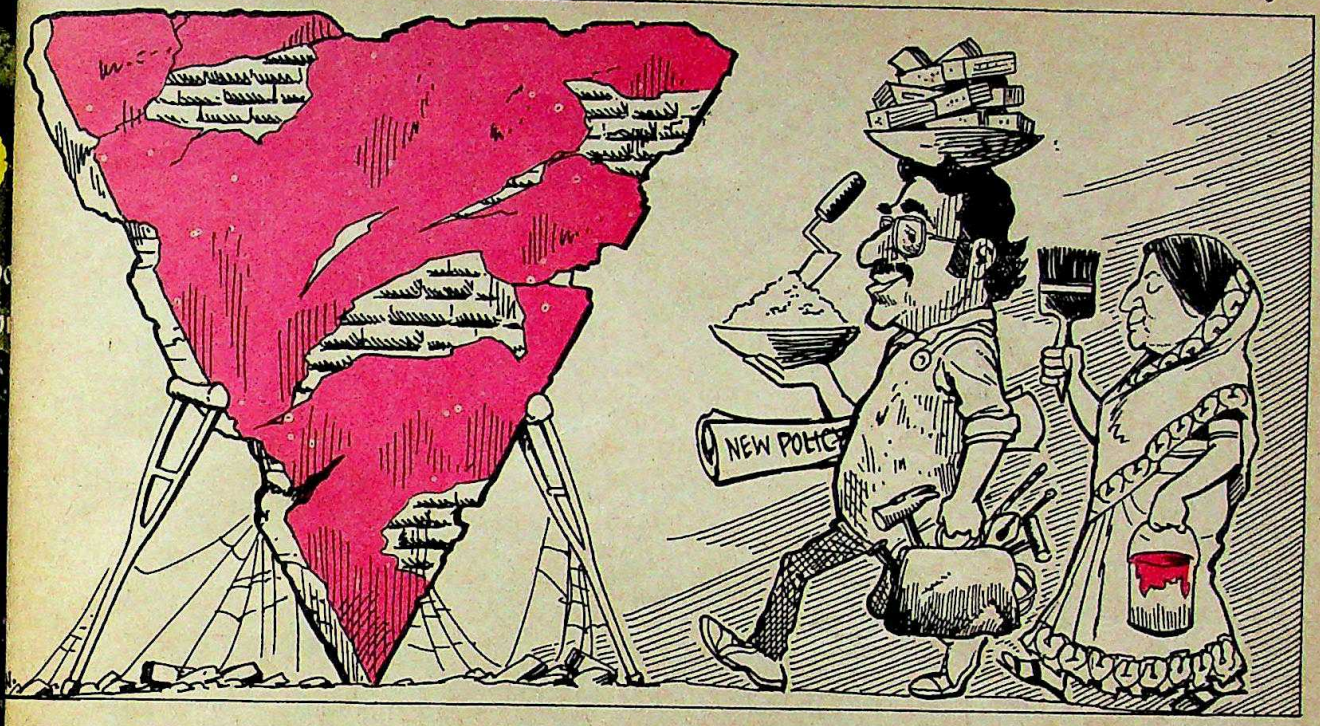

AMILY PLANNING

A Giant Leap

FOR OVER eight months now, the Department of Family Welfare in the Union Ministry of Health has been witness to steadily mounting excitement as work on a new family planning strategy gathered pace. Last fortnight, the final nuts and bolts of the policy, which will give the programme a quantum jump, were finally put into place and proudly exhibited to an approving Rajiv Gandhi at a three-hour audio-visual presentation in the Committee Room of the Parliament Annexe.

The stage was thus set for a radically restructured campaign to be launched on September 1, aiming to achieve targets in three years that were originally meant to be reached by 2001! With almost vaulting ambition, the new policy seeks to halve the population growth rate in the next three years, and to halve the infant mortality rate as well. Couples accepting family planning will go up in giant leaps from the present 35 per cent to 60 per cent by August 31, 1989. At that level, family planning experts say, the population will grow at no more than 1 per cent annually, against the 2.2 per cent that has been the rate for the last quarter century.

These goals are to be achieved through the phenomenal task of creating a 2 million-strong corps of women volunteers, in addition to the million family planning staff that already exist, preparing a computerised register of all eligible couples in the country (much like an electoral roll), involving people from all walks of life in a manner that has never been attempted, and offering a whole new range of generous incentives.

With vaulting ambition, the new policy seeks to halve the population growth rate in the next three years, and to halve the infant mortality rate too.

If the aims are ambitious, so has been the effort. Conscious that the family planning programme had reached a plateau, Rajiv Gandhi set out the strategy soon after he took over last year: the programme had to be so recast that it became a people's movement rather than a government programme imposed on a reluctant populace. That, the prime minister said, was the only way to drastically bring down the birth rate, which has stagnated at 3.3 per cent after 1979.

Following this, in March 1985, Arun Singh, then Gandhi's parliamentary secretary, summoned three market research agencies—MARG, MRAS and Mode—and commissioned them to do a study of attitudes to family planning. Five states—Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar (the Hindi belt, where the programme has been slack) and Maharashtra (a representative case)—were parcelled out and a record 32,000 respondents interviewed. Singh's brief to the agencies was simple: don't ask us for any directions or data, find out and tell us what is holding up the programme.

After Singh became a minister, K. Krishna Kumar, 47, the deputy minister of health and family welfare, took over the baton. The research findings established that there were good socio-economic-cum-cultural reasons why large families were preferred, and that the main drawbacks of the family planning programme were under-utilisation of the infrastructure and the poor quality of services. But the good news was that the cumulative impact of the 35-year-old programme had prepared it for lift-off.

Also, a good base had been laid by last year's performance, which recorded a new high of 19 million acceptors, 20

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per cent over 1984-85 and 40 per cent over the previous high of 1976-77. Particularly impressive was the growth in the four Hindi-belt states. This established that the climate in the country had become favourable for a massive thrust on the population front.

The new policy also incorporated the cumulative wisdom of all the 125-odd studies carried out by the Department of Family Welfare ever since family planning was made part of government policy in 1951. Says Kumar, who called three national-level seminars on family planning before hammering out the new policy: "The policy reflects the broadest possible consensus of expert opinion in the country on family planning." Adds Union Minister for Health Mohsina Kidwai: "Ensuring people's participation in the family planning programme is the main thrust of the new policy."

Specifically, the most important new steps proposed are:

► Shifting the accent from sterilisations to spacing children. No target has been set but the number of couples practising preventive methods at the end of the campaign will be far in excess of the 14.5 million couples target for the seventh plan.

► Preparing an eligible couples register, pretty much like an electoral roll, which will be displayed at all 83,000 health sub-centres and also given to the million workers in the family planning programme as their 'medicentre catchment area'.

► Setting up popular FP committees in every one of the thousands of blocks and panchayats in the country, with the participation of officials, non-officials and opinion-makers.

► Creating a women's corps of 2 million volunteers, with each volunteer being assigned 60 couples to work with, modelled on the neighbourhood health worker scheme in China. The volunteers, all of them acceptors, will have the incentive that the best among them will be given regular government jobs in the programme.

► Establishing the two-child norm by providing more incentives for couples limiting families to two children. These will include an 'honoured citizen' status entitling them to extra benefits, an old age pension for the needy, low-premium insurance policies and a national lottery. To counter the preference for sons, long-term bonds maturing at the time of marriage will be given free to those with two daughters.

► Using the skills of four lakh practitioners of Indian systems of medicines for the programme.

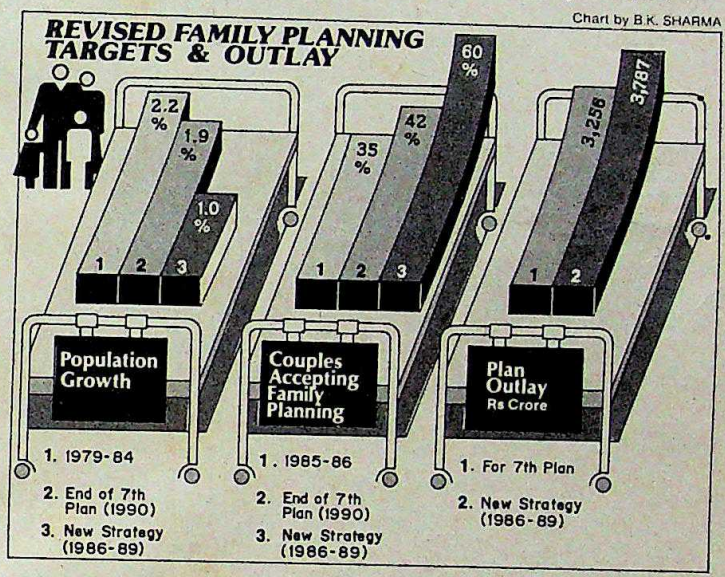
► Involving the organised industrial sector (which has 25 million employees) by making it obligatory for all industrial units to provide incentives and family planning services to employees.

► Involving the corporate sector by giving tax incentives not only for activities directly related to the programme (like running a medicentre) but also for linked activities, like employing adolescent girls in areas where child marriages are common.

► Involving the country's 35,000 cooperatives (with a membership of 120 million) by creating FP cells in all apex cooperatives.

► Making FP motivation part of the curriculum for the country's 50,000 medical students.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



THE POLICY also recognises that the programme cannot succeed until it tackles the social realities which have a bearing on the size of the family, for instance the low status of women in society. Thus, the new strategy outlines various action plans for delaying marriages and raising the female literacy rate. For the former it suggests removing the lacunae in the Child Marriages Act and giving incentives for keeping girls in schools; for the latter, it suggests a linkage with the Department of Education's crash programme to increase female literacy in nine backward states.

Similarly, it also pays great importance to reducing infant mortality through universal immunisation, promotion of breast feeding and oral rehydration therapy. Again, the woman volunteer will not only preach family planning to her target couples; she will also propagate the entire range of government policies with a bearing on the health and status of the woman and her child.

The new policy also attempts to tie up with the Government's ambitious anti-poverty programmes, since poverty and high fertility feed on each other. The 'honoured citizen' card, for instance, will entitle holders to extra benefits under the anti-poverty programmes. Says Kumar: "We expect that people with small families will rise faster above the poverty line."

The working of the family planning departments will be streamlined. The eligibility couple register will be computerised; the National Informatics Centre has assured the ministry that this can be done. Avenues for promotion will be opened up for FP workers. Programme management will be improved at all levels.

The policy will mean an additional expenditure of Rs 531 crore more than the Rs 3,256 crore sanctioned for family planning in the seventh plan. Though the Government is yet to formally adopt the new policy, work has already begun to establish the inter-ministry and inter-department linkages that will be necessary. Rajiv is taking a personal interest in working out the details: apart from sitting through the three-hour presentation, he also held an hour-long meeting to identify the linkages necessary. Says Kumar: "Once the campaign gets under way, the next 36 months will be like 36 waves for us. Even if we do not achieve all our targets we will go far beyond the seventh plan goals." And there are few who will grudge Kidwai and Kumar the accolades if the new strategy does eventually mark a giant leap for the programme.

—AJAY KUMAR

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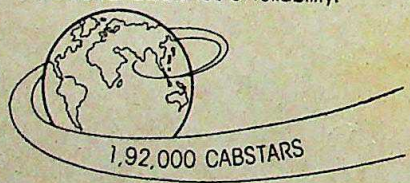

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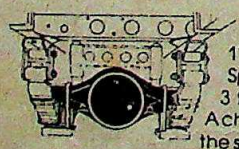

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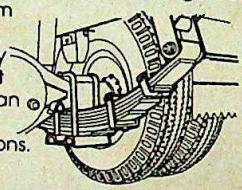

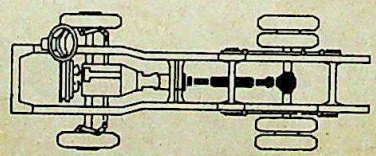

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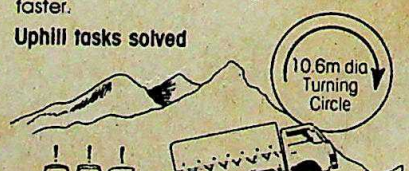

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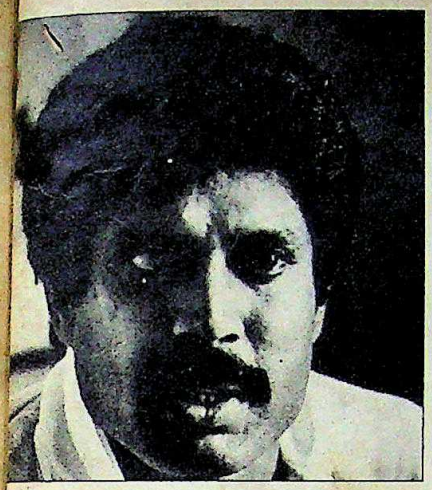
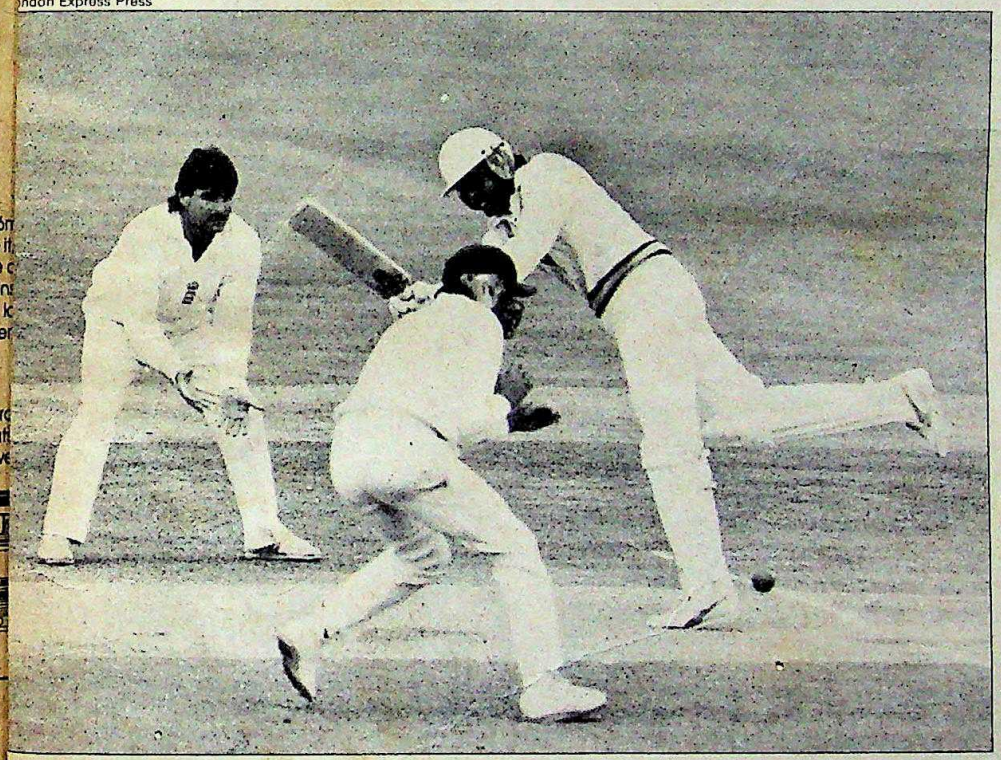


ndon Express Press

Kapil (left) and Vengsarkar en route to his century: setting the pace



spinners in the game today. With Kapil back among the wickets in a user-friendly climate and Sharma showing new-found aggression, the much-maligned Indian attack was suddenly seen firing away on all cylinders.

Till the Test win, however, it had been a dismal tour for the Indians, saddled with the first half of the English summer for the second consecutive time due to the ineptness of the Indian cricket board. Rain had robbed 40 per cent of the playing time in the run-up matches against the counties and apart from highly professional performances in the two one-day internationals, there were no signs of visible enthusiasm for the Indian visitors.

In fact, the spotlight in the first month of the tour was hogged by off-the-field events as Indians had numerous complaints about loony gate keepers, obstinate "old ladies" and insensitive officials. Some of the "incidents" seem trifling, but team members felt that they were too numerous and were representative of the general lackadaisical attitude of the hosts. Amongst them:

► Raj Singh, the popular and articulate manager of the team, was made to stand around and wait for 20 minutes at Old Trafford for his team's complimentary tickets while officials nearby pretended to be busy.

► Vice-captain Ravi Shastri was turned away from the Texaco (one-day) Trophy post-match cocktail party by a mulish usher because he did not have a printed invitation. In fact. no one had been issued invitations. The entire team boycotted the reception.

► At various county matches Indians were refused "second helpings" of deserts by crotchety "old ladies" guarding the ice cream as though they were the crown jewels. The south Indian members of the team—inveterate coffee drinkers—were consistently refused coffee since only tea was being served. Things improved only after Singh threatened to order hampers from the team's hotel.

► Sunil Gavaskar—now on his eighth visit to Britain—was stopped outside Lord's by another of these over-zealous commissars who seem to spring up all the time in these important cricketing venues without the foggiest notion of who the players are.

These series of events were reminiscent of a graver incident involving Gavaskar four years ago at The Oval. Fielding at silly point to Ian Botham, he took a crunching blow on his ankle, fracturing it in the process. He was rushed to the hospital by Singh with no other English official. At the hospital, Singh had to ring the hospital superintendent for having an X-ray done on Gavaskar and threaten to call the press before action was forthcoming.

ALTHOUGH the incidents clearly irritated the Indian team, Raj Singh, prudent as ever, played them down, attributing them to "mismanagement" and "lack of detail". Unlike in India, there is no liaison officer between the team and the county officials. The Test and County Cricket Board (TCCB) has to be contacted for every trifling need.

After the TCCB's attention was drawn to the matter, things improved dramatically. Said a player with a chuckle: "Even *naans* and Indian *curries* were served at Lord's, perhaps for the first time." Explains Singh: "We have a young team. A happy team and a very healthy one. Some of the boys work hard and work up an appetite. So if they want second helpings, why deny it to them?"

The Indian win will not only mean that crotchety county hosts will take the team more seriously, but also that cricket pundits will need to reassess a side they had dismissed as having "depth in batting" and a "competent one-day side", but lacking the ability to bowl England out twice. Especially for players like Phil Edmonds, the Indian win might have had a strangulating effect. In his new book with Simon Barnes, Edmonds predicted a cakewalk win over India after the catastrophic West Indian tour. The last over when India won and which Edmonds bowled, was rich in irony as Kapil cut, drove and pulled him for three fours and a six. The TCCB, in its own way, is pleased at India's fine win at Lord's, since at both Headingley and Edgbaston sell-out crowds are expected.

—RAMESH CHANDRAN

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TIMES OF INDIA

Changing Face

THE *TIMES*, they'r a finally changin.' Six months after speculation about changes in the top hierarchy of the multi-edition *The Times of India*, arguably India's leading newspaper, began circulating in journalistic circles, rumours turned into fact last fortnight. From July 1, Arun Shourie, 45, will take over as the paper's executive editor in charge of all news coverage. The formal announcement came only late last week after Shourie was called to Bombay, though Ashok Jain, chairman of the Bennett Coleman and Company, the paper's owner, and his son, Samir, had been talking to Shourie for several months. Said Ashok Jain: "We are happy Arun Shourie has joined us. There are only two winners of the Magsaysay award for journalism in India—Shourie and R.K. Laxman—and we are proud to have both of them with us."

Shourie's was not the only decision taken in a fortnight that was marked by much commuting of the company's top brass between Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta; even the fate of Girilal Jain, the paper's editor since October 1977, was finally decided. Jain, who should have retired on July 26, 1983, but was on a three-year extension, will finally leave the paper at the end of the year. With these twin decisions, the stage has been set for the drastic, if gradual, overhaul of the paper that the slim and soft-spoken Samir Jain, 32, has been advocating for over a year in the face of stiff resistance from the paper's editors including Girilal Jain.

For the *Times*, this prolonged tussle has been debilitating. Two senior journalists, Delhi resident editor Inder Malhotra and senior assistant editor Prem Shankar Jha, quit in the last two months as word spread that Samir Jain was looking for outside talent. Malhotra did not disclose his reasons for leaving but an insider revealed that he put in his papers two days after Samir Jain circulated his first note on January 30 saying, among other things: "The job of an editor is not just writing fiery columns or editorials." Jha, on the contrary, made it clear that he was quitting because he was opposed to the policy of bringing in outsiders.

Though Girilal Jain does not agree with Jha's stand, he showed what he thought of Shourie's appointment by reproducing, on the day after it was finally decided to take him on, an extract on the paper's edit page from a recent article in the British magazine *Spectator* in which Paul Johnson had argued that while proprietors were free to hire editors, all other appointments were the sole prerogative of the editor. Shourie was first contacted by the owners, though Girilal Jain admitted that he "was a party to the final decision".

Girilal jain (left); Shourie and Samir

Arun Shourie's appointment, with Girilal Jain's concurrence, marks the beginning of the changes proposed by *The Times of India*'s heir, Samir Jain.

After the appointment letter to Shourie was issued, Ashok Jain said: "We want to expand our organisation and Shourie's appointment is an important step in that direction." Samir Jain, who believes that people in the company should not talk to each other through the press, could not be reached for his comment. Shourie was contacted but did not wish to say anything.

But Girilal Jain, who has long been wrestling with the dilemma posed by Samir Jain's proposed changes, said: "I knew that change was necessary but what I questioned was whether it was practical. Besides, I am an old-fashioned editor who believes in the primacy of the editorial page. But my relationship with the Jains has never been strictly employer-employee so I could not even say 'no' to them. I have been wanting to quit but finally agreed to stay on to give the Jains some breathing time to introduce the changes."

Girilal Jain and other senior members of the *Times* staff in Delhi, including special correspondents and assistant editors, who submitted a memorandum against the changes proposed by Samir Jain to Ashok Jain, were upset not so much by what Samir Jain has been advocating, as by the act of intervention of the management in the running of the paper. Said Girilal Jain: "We have had a most non-interfering management. When Samir suddenly started calling the shots, many of us found it difficult to adjust."

The specifics of what Shourie will do have not been made public though Shourie met Ashok Jain, Samir Jain and Ram Tarneja, the managing director, first in Delhi and then in Bombay. The crucial questions still begging for an answer were: Would Girilal Jain's authority be reduced only to the editorial page? Or would a separate executive editor (views) be hired as was done by Samir Jain in the *Navbharat Times*? What happens when Girilal Jain goes? Girilal Jain says categorically: "As long as I am there, I am the boss," but also has no hesitation in admitting that even though he may be going only by the end of the year, mentally he has already quit.

All that is certain is that the Rs 80-crore Times of India group will continue to face turbulence till such time as the changes are accepted down the line. With Shourie in charge, readers of the "old lady of Bori Bunder", as the paper is often rightly described, are in for a jolt or two. And, most important, with brother-in-law Suman Dubey slated to take over as editor of the *Indian Express* from the same date, news coverage in two of the country's leading newspapers will come to take precedence over comment. The face of Indian newspapers is finally changing: exit the thinker-editor, and enter the hands-on editor.

—AJAY KUMAR

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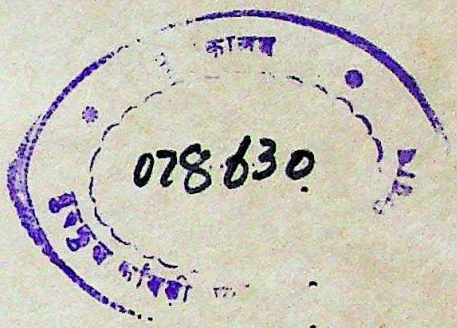

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